

# Twists & Turns

*By Michelle Pichette*

The dock was dark and dank. Constance drew her cloak more tightly around herself as she shivered. The dock was shrouded too, in mists that smelled of deep seas and danced with a life of their own. Constance wasn't accustomed to surroundings such as these, nor did she wish to become so. More than anything, she wished for a warm, dry, safe bed. Soon, she told herself. He would come soon and then her wish would come true.

"Constance," his voice came to her from the dark. She turned to the sound and he seemed to materialize from the swirling mists. Constance smiled at him and rushed into his arms, into his embrace, melting into his passionate kiss.

"Lerin, I've been so afraid out here, alone in the dark," Constance pouted, then pushed Lerin from her. "You beast! You're late!"

Lerin smiled, his pretty dark brown eyes seeming to sparkle in the dim light. "My dear Constance, I know you're tired of having to meet this way, but I think that's over with now."

Constance shook her head, turning from him. "How can it be? Our Houses despise each other. If any of the elders found out about us, about our love... The Saints know what they would do to us, Lerin."

His hands clasped her shoulders gently. "The Saints aren't against us, not all of them anyway." He drew his hands from her, then something came down over her head, around her neck, something heavy coming to rest on her chest. She looked down and lifted the heavy golden medallion, her eyes growing wide as she saw what it was. She turned to Lerin, surprised beyond words for a moment. Finally, she found her tongue.

"The Medallion of Saint Celeste. Lerin... How?" Lerin's smile grew.

"My House's support of the church has its advantages. I was able to get close, I was able to take it tonight with no one the wiser. We have power now, Constance, the power of the people's protector. No more hiding, Love. They have to listen to us now. When they know we have this, they have to listen."

Constance looked up at his handsome face and into his beautiful brown eyes, lifting a hand to

stroke his cheek. He loved her truly. She knew it without a doubt. He brushed back her hair, plainly confident that he'd just made her the happiest woman in the world. He had, she silently agreed. As she quickly lifted her other hand and drove the dagger in it through his heart, she knew his look of utter surprise was quite sincere. "They will, Lerin. They will listen to me," she sneered as he slid to the dock. His look of disbelief never left his face, even in death.

Constance stepped away from him, not even bothering to look at Lerin where he lay on the dark dock as she drew the Medallion over her head then tucked it safely into the bodice of her dress.

Lerin had served his purpose, stupid lovesick fool, and she had other things on her mind. Her father had always looked past her to her brothers, never considering her when it came to issues in their House. She was his eldest, but he treated her just like any other ornament that beautified his holdings. The older she got, the more it rankled on Constance. Her father was the Elder of their House and that honor should have gone onto her when his day was done. Now she would bring down his house and all the others, then she would pick up the pieces and control them as she pleased.

She moved swift and silent, along the waterfront to an area that most respectable people avoided like plague marks. Constance was soon at the gangplank of a stout vessel that flew the colors of a distant House it did not serve. The guard never moved as she swept past him, knowing better than to deny her access to this ship. The crew, those that were awake at this late hour, stopped talking as she walked to the Captain's cabin and entered without knocking.

A man had been pacing in its confines, but he came to a halt as she entered, looking to her expectantly. "Did you get it?" he asked, greed shining in his eyes.

Constance drew out the Medallion, avarice plain on her pretty features, she was sure. "Of course."

The man rushed to her and scooped her up in his arms, swinging her around and laughing raucously. He was a real man, not one of those pale, milk fed sheep that posed as men among the Houses. "You are a marvel, Connie dear," he said, kissing her as she deserved to be kissed, with passion and enthusiasm, as if she were the center of the universe. She was the center of his, of that she had no doubt.

With her knowledge of the Houses and their trading and shipping schedules and her superior planning abilities, she made him more wealthy and powerful than most men of his profession managed in twice his years. In turn, he gave her the respect that she deserved, as well as satisfying her every desire.

As her Captain settled her back down, she looked up at him and said, "And when the underclass finds out that the Houses have lost the Medallion of their most revered Saint, there will be chaos. The Houses will be thrown into turmoil and civil war, which will weaken the King. He'll use all his resources to find it, and while they are scattered, we will attack and seize power. The Medallion will cement our claim when the King is dead and then the great King Rolland Kreth and his queen, Constance, will take the throne." she told him as he put her back on the ground.

"King Kreth. Aye, that does have a ring to it, don't it though?" the Captain said with a wide, bright grin. "How long do you suppose it'll take to start? The revolution and all?" "Soon, I'd imagine. After all, how long can the Houses hide the loss?" Constance asked in return, then kissed her handsome Captain. She would have her power. The world would bow to her. Everyone would know her name. Of that, Constance had no doubt.