

Faran, the Iron Heart. It was a name that set one's mind to wondering. Did he pride himself on disallowing any woman to touch his cold hard heart? Did he woo ladies into love trysts with promises of treasure and pleasure only to tragically desert them?

For certes, he was unlike anyone Leanora had ever known. He approached life fearlessly, as if he dared anyone to cross his path, his mood, or the territory he called his own. And his generous mouth was an unbidden fascination. It could accommodate a childlike smile, tempering all the fierceness he worked so hard to portray. Or it could accommodate a reassuring smile, making her believe everything in her troubled world would be all right.

He was handsome to be sure—with a rock hard body, thoughts of which occupied her mind much too often. And his mind was also intriguing. Developed equal to his form, it was a quality Leanora truly admired. Knowledge could be a powerful weapon, and Faran appeared well armed.

To her benefit, he seemed preoccupied with the present and not with prying into her past. Nor did he threaten to rule her future. He treated her differently, he treated her like...a friend. The idea stunned her. Life had never afforded her the opportunity to know or cherish another person in such a manner. Another new experience.

Then a spark of yearning for more than mere friendship flickered inside of her. *You can never trust a man*, she chastised, *you can only believe in yourself*. Unyielding logic cooled this ember of need, but not before it claimed the barren part of her never before touched by warmth or light.