

Dragonmen Book 1

Mate Hunt

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## Chapter One

With a spectacular flip through the air, Jorjah Eprion landed behind his opponent and slammed his foot into the back of the soldier's knee, knocking him to the floor.

"Match." The deep voice of the trainer rang through the arena. "Nice move, my prince."

Jory gave the fallen man the traditional final bow before helping up his defeated adversary.

The other soldiers looked at him with varying expressions of respect and amusement. They were always fascinated when he took them down with his shorter body and slighter frame. The very things that made him work harder.

Outside of the arena he was the fashionable Prince Jorjah, youngest son of the High Galactic King. Inside the arena he was just another soldier fighting. His men didn't take it easy on him, and those of his honor guard wore his personal emblem of three interlocking dragons with pride.

Luckily Jory's half Talivvian blood made most injuries heal within minutes, giving him a fearsome reputation among his men. They saw him as a man blessed by the gods. Jory saw it as a convenient way to not hobble from the arena after a sound thrashing.

Jory bid his men goodbye and hit the showers. After bathing and redressing into nicer clothes, he left the arena wing and was entering the great hall when the voice of his boyfriend stopped him in his tracks.

"Why do you waste your time training like a common foot soldier?" Peter's voice was thick with disapproval. "You could do so much more with your life. With our life."

Jorjah turned to examine his lover. Over the past few months he'd become less and less enamored of the pretty dark-haired man. It was time to face facts. Peter was a self-centered, annoying prick.

"And what is it you think I should spend my time doing?" He considered himself an easy-going man, but his lover was quickly depleting his famous patience.

Peter smiled.

He used to find that smile charming.

"You could start by picking up the reins of leadership and become your brother's right hand man. You know your father adores you and would give you any position in the government you wanted."

Jory gave a shudder of distaste. Just the idea of a life trapped in politics was enough to make him want to slit his wrists. Unfortunately, they would heal right back. At twenty-three Jory still didn't know what he wanted to do when he grew up and he wasn't in any hurry to figure it out.

"Detrius does just fine with the help of my other siblings. He doesn't need my assistance and besides I have no interest in politics."

"You lack ambition, Jorjah. You split your days between playing with your swords and meeting with your tailor."

Jory decided now wasn't the moment to mention the fortune he'd diverted from his father's funds to build hospitals for poverty stricken cities. Or the complex pirating system he coordinated to thwart his uncle's slave trade. His father wasn't a bad man; he just didn't understand that some people needed the freedom to control their own lives. As a father the man was a loving, kind patriarch who cared for his children, especially Jorjah. But as a Galactic King his father was dictatorial and ruthless.

"I'm not political," he said mildly, "and I like to look good. What do you think of this shirt?" He held out a sleeve so Peter could feel the texture.

Jory learned over the years that the public expected beautiful people to act a certain way and they rarely looked beneath the surface.

A fact he used to good effect.

After all if he spent all morning sequestered with his tailor he couldn't possibly be spending the afternoon plotting the interception of his uncle's slaver ships or the freedom of a certain planetary colony that ran afoul of his second cousin Leon.

Peter rolled his eyes. His usual response when Jory started going on about his clothes.

“Beautiful clothing can’t hide a damaged character.” A disapproving voice said behind him.

“Captain Transen.” Jory turned, giving his father’s Captain of the Guard a respectful nod. He felt guilty over the rush of relief he felt in getting out of another argument with his lover.

“What can I do for you?”

He knew it was a mistake to ask. The older man’s cool grey eyes looked him over neither approving nor disapproving just cold. It was close, but he avoided shivering like a teenager caught in an illicit act.

“Your father’s looking for you, my prince.”

Jory shrugged. It wasn’t like he was hard to find. Avoiding his father was a fine combination of luck and being unavailable in plain sight. Unfortunately, it looked like his luck just evaporated.

He flashed the captain his best smile. Mother always said try charm first. Of course it was followed by ‘if that doesn’t work kick them in the balls’.

Mother was a brilliant source of insight. Some days he missed her so much it hurt.

“What does father want?”

Those glacial eyes warmed briefly. The captain wasn’t a bad man he just had a difficult job keeping an entire planet of soldiers in check. It was rare that father used him as messenger boy. Of course Jorah usually charmed the little messenger boys into forgetting they found him.

That wasn’t possible with the captain, which was probably why he was here doing a task way below his position.

“Come with me. He wants to break the news himself.”

“This would be a good time to talk to him about a greater leadership role.” Peter said in a low voice. Had his boyfriend always been so oily or was he just now seeing his true colors? Disgust with his lover and a little guilt over his father putting Transen on the spot, had Jorah following with only a brief nod to Peter.

Yep, that relationship was over.

They were halfway through the palace, walking side by side, when the captain spoke again.

“You could do much better than him, my Prince.”

Jorah almost broke stride. He’d always thought the captain didn’t approve of his relationships with men, now he had to rethink that maybe it wasn’t men but his particular choices.

Jory sighed. “I know. No sex is good enough to put up with that amount of manipulation.”

For the first time in his memory Jory saw the captain laugh. Not a smirk or a half-smile but a full out ring-the-halls laugh. A meaty hand slapped Jory on the back moving him forward a few paces.

“Now I *know* you’ve become a man.” The captain declared. The pride in Transen’s voice warmed Jory through. It was rare that the older man ever declared his personal feelings.

They reached the dining hall. At his entrance the guards leapt to attention, backs going straight, knees locking into proper position.

He could feel all eyes tracking his every movement as he made his way over to the royal table.

“My son.” High Galactic King Rufeus Eprion waved from his seat at the head table, his usual collection of political sycophants surrounded him on both sides along with an amazing assortment of breakfast foods on the table before him. Pastries, eggs and bits of the finest meats littered the surface.

At well over six feet the king dominated the room. It wasn’t just his body that overshadowed the other men at the table, it was his presence. It was one of the reasons his men followed him damn near anywhere with a smile on their faces and pride in their hearts.

“Leave us. I need a moment alone with my boy.” He barked, his jade eyes never leaving his son.

Jory stood still under his father’s scrutiny as the nobles fled. He always felt less in his father’s gaze. At barely five feet nine inches with a sleek build he was a more masculine version of his mother and, unlike his half brothers and sisters,

resembled his father little. When they were all together it was like being the only greyhound in a room full of pitbulls. He never doubted they could rip him apart in a feeding frenzy.

The king took a bite from the flaky pastry in his hand, his dark eyes watching his son like a bird of prey.

“What’s so important you sent the captain to find me?” He wasn’t going to play the king’s waiting game. Father was up to something he could feel it in his bones.

“Sit down and have a bite.” The king waved at the bounty before him.

Unsettled, Jory grabbed a roll to nibble and sank into the padded seat across from his father; the better to watch his opponent. It didn’t help that he had to look up at the man. He knew his mother had always been disappointed that he hadn’t gained his father’s height but genetics could be an evil bitch.

He could see from the look in his father’s eyes that the king was plotting.

Sipping coffee from the cup a servant thoughtfully placed at his elbow, Jorah waited.

It didn’t take long.

“I’m sending you to Dragait. They’re having a mating festival. It will be a good opportunity for you to form an alliance.”

Jory set his cup of coffee down with a thud. “You can’t just send me off to find a husband, father, I have responsibilities.” There had to be something that required his immediate attention.

Wait a minute did he say Dragait? Jorah adored dragons. For years he’d dreamed of the flying beasts but never had the chance to travel to their world. Normally the thought of going to a planet of dragon shifters would excite him. It was the circumstances that sent chills down his spine.

The king’s green eyes went flat. “I can do whatever the hell I want or hadn’t you heard I am the head of this family.”

Jory put his palms over his eyes trying to rub away the tension headache he could feel building inside. Maybe if he tried hard enough he could turn back time and find a way to escape this meeting. He had other abilities why not that one? Of course flying would be great too then he could get the hell out of here.

Hopelessly he lifted his head and watched his father gloat. “I thought you decided I was useless politically?”

“Hah.” The king rubbed his hands together. “But that was before I learned there’s an entire group of noblemen who go to this mating thing every year to search for mates. The dragon men would be powerful allies if I could get you married to one.”

“I’m not some primped up prima donna waiting to catch the perfect husband. Why can’t I just keep living like I have?”

The king laughed. “Jorah, even if you don’t meet your mate I expect better things from you. Your mother wanted you to be happy and I don’t see that happening in the confining walls of this kingdom. I want you to go out and explore the possibilities. You need to find your place in the universe, my son. And if it takes sending you to a dragon world and kicking you out of the nest, than I will.”

Jory piled food on his plate searching for an exit route in his head. Who knew his father could put his love of men to political use? Snagging a piece of ham with a vicious stab of his knife he sorted through ideas in his head and came up blank. It was his goal in life to be a political liability, apparently there was no end to the ways he was failing in his personal life.

“My place in the universe is to be prettied up and married off to some rich, titled bastard who’s going to want me to fetch his slippers and rub his hairy feet? Pardon me if I don’t just jump at that offer.”

Subtle he wasn’t. He shoved a bite of eggs into his mouth and glared at his father.

The king leaned forward, propping his chin on one elegant hand. Bejeweled fingers flashed at Jory from across the table. “Son, I hate to be the one to tell you, since you’re obviously in denial, but you’re already a pretty, pretty man. A fact I put down to your beautiful mother, may the gods bless her soul. Do you know how many royal women I have denied a political marriage for you?” In one of his famous shifts of emotion, Jory’s father slammed his hand down on the table. “I have always had your best interests at heart.”

Jory sighed. "I know father." It was true. While his siblings were placed in convenient marriages, and slipped into tidy slots he had escaped that same fate. For some reason, his father really loved him above all others.

"But I'm only twenty-three. I'm not ready to settle down yet. And there's Peter to think of." Wow that came out way whinier than it sounded in his head.

The king reached across the table and grabbed Jory's wrist. "I just want you to be happy and find someone to love, like I loved your mother. You may be young but it's time for you to look for your other half. I've seen your dissatisfaction lately. Peter isn't the one for you. I know you aren't bonded in your heart and I think you need something, if not someone new. Besides, I've heard rumors that Detrius is looking to get rid of you."

"Detrius?" Confusion filled Jory. "Why does he want me dead?" Although he wasn't close to his eldest brother due to their twenty year age gap, he thought the man held him in some affection or at least not active dislike.

"There are some here who think you would make a better ruler after my demise."

Jory laughed. "First of all you're going to live for a long, long time, secondly I would make a horrible king. I hate politics."

His father smiled. "I know baby boy. But not everyone thinks that way. They look at your abilities, your looks, your sweet nature and think you'd make an excellent pawn on their way to power. I know you're stronger than that but your brother has heard the rumors and despite five siblings between you and throne that doesn't stop the plotting. If you relocate to another planet the rumors will stop because you'll be settled elsewhere starting a new life of your own. That's why I'm banishing you."

"B-banishing me." Jory's voice broke along with bits of his heart. This was worse than he thought. His father's love would be the death of him. "So you're just throwing me out into the big bad dragon world."

"Don't be an idiot." The king growled. "I'll provide you with food, lodging and enough money to buy a few planets if you have your eye on them."

He leaned over to make eye contact with his son. "Don't disappoint me Jory. There's intelligence that your brother wants you dead. If you have a mate you'll have another level of protection on top of what I can provide. Your brother might be able to turn some of my guards since not all of them support your choices but I'll protect you as best as I can."

"Why does Detrius care if I prefer men? Doesn't that leave the throne better available for him? One less sibling nipping at his heels. He even has two heirs of his own."

His father's face was stone serious. "There's no reasoning with blind hatred. My guess is that he's jealous your mother was the only woman I ever loved and that you're more popular than him. Your other brothers and sisters are little competition but you're beautiful, intelligent and our people adore you. If I don't send you away, my son, I fear you won't outlive the week."

Jory nodded, the food churning in his stomach. There wasn't a way out of it. He couldn't deny the man sitting across from him with sadness and love in his eyes. "Very well father, if you think it best I will take my leave in the morning. But if I don't find anyone..."

The king laughed. "The mating festival lasts one month. If there are no prospects in that time we will pursue other places. I will see you mated before I die Jorlah. I want to know that you are being watched over."

Jory blinked back tears. It was moments like this when he realized how very old his father was. He always saw his father as this overpowering force but eventually everyone aged and everyone died.

Holding out his hand until Jory took it, the king gave him a smile. "I just want you to promise that even when you find a mate you'll accept a contract to breed. You still want children don't you?"

Jory nodded. It was one of his greatest dreams to have a family of his own. "I swore on mother's death bed that I wouldn't let the line die with me. I'm assuming we're talking artificial creation?"

"Of course. I know of your dislike of women." His father gave him a sly smile.

"I don't dislike them." Jory protested, "I'm just not interested in them sexually."

"A fact we will always disagree on." The king said, his good humor restored, now that he had his way.

Eating the rest of his breakfast Jory decided the trip wouldn't be so horrible. He would go to a planet where a group of men attracted to other men would converge. If nothing else he could have a great orgy. He was quiet, not sexless. Lowering his eyes so father didn't see his expression, he said. "Well father I assume your secretary already made my travel plans so I better decide what to take."

The king nodded. "Calli made all the arrangements in your mother's maiden name. I assumed you didn't want everyone to know who you are."

Jory nodded. "Makes sense."

"Your beautiful looks will fade eventually, my son but money lasts forever. If all it takes is money to get you your perfect mate you let me know and I'll give you whatever you need." The older man leaned forward, his father's loving gaze transforming into the cold gaze of the galactic king. "Just remember if anyone harms you they'll answer to me."

Jory swallowed convulsively. Sometimes he forgot that beneath that loving gaze was one of the most ruthless bastards in the universe. "Yes father. But just so we're clear. If you need to buy me my mate, I don't want him."

The two men finished their breakfast in perfect accord.

After their shared meal they parted with a hug, Jory to get ready for his trip, his father to do whatever scary galactic kings did.

## Chapter Two

The space station looked like every other space station he'd ever seen; utilitarian and dull. An enormous blue banner was the only spot of color in the otherwise dreary building. In white letters against a blue background were the words "Meet your mate at our mate hunt."

Jorah looked at the sign wondering what exactly a mate hunt entailed. Was that the mating festival his father spoke of or an entirely different event? He was nervous about this mating festival. Jory was confident enough to know was attractive enough but he not so foolish that he didn't know his greatest lure to past lovers was his family and wealth. Here on this planet he purposely didn't have that as a backup. He was on his own.

His gaze was pulled from the sign as three dark-haired men, wearing nothing more than silver loin cloths and strategic tattoos, slinked by. Oiled muscles, shimmering with power, flexed as they prowled across the airport, giving flashes of muscular butt cheeks with every step.

"Fuck me." Jory whispered watching the fine specimens walk by.

Visions of lying in bed with three gorgeous studs flashed through his head in brilliant detail. The second man in the trio turned and licked his lips in Jory's direction.

Jory looked behind him to see if the man was looking at someone else. He turned back to see the same man crooking his finger in his direction.

Really he didn't need an engraved invitation and father did say he should explore his place in the universe. What better way than with three gorgeous men? He could imagine a lot of exploring.

He only made it one step before a motion to his left caught his eye. A man sat at a table by the walkway sipping something blue out of a crystal glass.

"Mmm."

Maybe Peter was right.

He was a fickle bastard.

Of course that was still no reason to burn all his beautiful clothing in a bonfire, in the middle of his bedroom.

Fucker.

Moisture pooled in Jory's mouth as he checked out the handsome stranger. Long, long legs stretched out under the table into the empty space across from him. Brown leather pants faithfully showed off a pair of muscular legs and a tight white shirt gave mouth-watering testimony to a fine set of muscles. The man's hair was deep black, trimmed short, but still long enough to get a proper grip in a moment of passion and didn't his hands just twitch at that thought.

A power stronger than Jory felt able to resist, pulled him to the other man.

Everything else faded as he walked forward, Jory didn't stop until he was standing above tall, dark and soon-to-be-his.

"Good afternoon."

When the man's green eyes looked up to him Jory almost broke and ran from a belated onset of nerves, but the same compulsion that sent him over there wouldn't let him leave. He wanted this man with an unnatural passion. His natural reticence vanished under the waves of desire infusing his body.

"Good afternoon." The man's voice was rich, deep and settled into Jory's balls, the need spiraled out of control.

"Forgive me but I have to taste you." That was all he said before he leaned over and took the man's mouth with his own.

Divine.

The stranger's flavor exploded over Jory's tongue. He was sweet with a touch of masculine salt that hinted at sweaty pleasures in a future Jory desired to explore.

More, he wanted more.



Rough whiskers scraped his face as the kiss went on. Two large hands grabbed Jory's ass pulling him closer until he sat on the man's lap. When they finally broke apart Jory was straddling the other man's hips.

From the hardness pressed against his own he knew he wasn't alone in his desire.

For a long time they just stared at each other, breaths coming in gasps as they tried to regain their composure. Jory shifted to rise, but was held down by a firm grip.

"Don't go." The words were rough with need, the gaze certain.

That deserved another kiss. Jory's heart was pounding when they finally separated again. "I'm not going. I'm just getting off your lap before I come in my pants like a teenage boy."

Nipping the strong thick neck earned him a satisfying growl. The sound vibrated beneath his lips making them tingle along with every other part of his body.

Jory forced his mouth away from the man's skin. "Name?" He panted. Full sentences were beyond him as his brain power went south.

"Val. What's yours?"

"Jorlah," he squeaked out as Val took a responding nip at his throat. Need pulsed through his body like a jolt of electricity. "Stop."

"No." The larger man growled.

"I'm going to cream my pants. You have to stop."

Laughter looked good on him. Jory admired the other man's handsome looks a moment before reluctantly sliding off the gorgeous creature's lap and settling across from him.

On his own chair.

An adorable pout crossed Val's face.

"You didn't have to sit so far away."

"Yes I did, unless you want me to suck you off in a room full of strangers and possibly get arrested on my first day here."

The green eyes across from him darkened. They were more emerald than his father's jade eyes, more translucent and sparkling like a bit of trapped sunlight lurked inside.

"Want to get a room?" Val asked tilting his head to the right.

Jory's eyes followed his motion and caught sight of the rows of small resting rooms dotting both sides of the space station. Used to accommodate travelers catching sleep between flights, they always included the important items for a successful hookup. Clean sheets, lube and protection gel.

"Oh yeah. I would love to get a room with you." Jory purred, sliding a foot along the inside of Val's thigh. His bold new approach was working out really, really well.

Jory let out a squeak when the larger man snatched him from his chair and all but dragged him across the terminal. He didn't have a chance to reconsider his decision as Val headed for the closest room, gave the scanner a quick swipe of his identicard and tossed Jory inside, slamming him against the wall.

"Sorry baby." Before he could get his bearings, a large contrite man with guilty green eyes wrapped his arms around him. "I didn't mean to be so rough."

"Roughness has its place, darlin." Jory said with a wicked grin. "I like a man with a firm hand as long as it's only in the bedroom."

Besides even a concussion would only last a few seconds.

For a long moment they just stared at each other as they both fought to regain their composure. Everything else faded in the background, as Jory's gaze was devoured by Mr. Tall, Green-eyed and Soon-to-be-his.

Still staring at Jorlah, Val stripped off his shirt exposing drool-inducing cut abs and a strong wide chest.

Yumm.

As he continued to stare at the gorgeous flesh appearing before his eyes Jory could feel his body hardening. Mesmerized by the flexing muscles, he didn't even blink until a large calloused hand tilted his head up to meet Val's heat-filled gaze.

"Are you okay with this? I presumed a lot on a kiss."

"N-no you didn't presume." Jory was quick to reassure. "I was just busy watching your beautiful body exposed."

Strong hands lifted Jory off his feet and placed him on the bed with the same care you'd give to a piece of spun glass from his father's private collection.

"You are the most beautiful man I've ever seen." Val said, his voice filled with wonder.

Jory blushed. He could feel the heat rising on his cheeks. He couldn't remember the last time he blushed. He felt like such a dork in front of such manly perfection. He was glad Val found him attractive but he'd rather be handsome than beautiful. Of course he'd also like about five more inches of height but he'd had to settle with what the gods and goddesses gave him.

"Glad you approve." Jory forced out. He'd never felt this level of craving for another person in his life and found it difficult to concentrate on their conversation. Jory felt the insane urge to pounce on Val and rub himself all over the other man until he was marked with Jory's scent.

Val's deep voice rumbled even deeper, sending a shiver of excitement down Jory's spine and settling in his dick. "You're way overdressed for this party, gorgeous. As a gentleman it's only polite to take care of that problem for you."

"Never let it be said that you aren't a gentleman." Jory smiled but his voice was huskier than normal and took away some of the nonchalant he was hoping for.

Lifting Jory's foot, Val's nimble fingers soon divested him of his boots, socks, pants and shirt. In the blink of an eye he was lying on the bed in only his silk boxers.

"Nice." One rough finger slid across the material snagging on the fine fabric. For once Jory didn't care about the state of his clothes he just wanted them out of the way so there was no barriers between him and those fabulous hands.

"Such a beautiful temptation. Now let me see what I've unwrapped."

Jory let out a squeak as Val ripped the boxers off, tossing them behind him onto the floor.

"I *had* planned on wearing those again."

It was difficult to sound stern as Val's hands stroked his body and scrambled his brains. Val laughed and claimed Jory's lips, preventing any further scolding.

"Mmm." Jory hummed into the kiss. He gripped the other man's hair feeling the midnight silk slide between his fingers.

He couldn't get enough.

Jory gave a low growl when Val pulled back.

"I have to remove the rest of my clothes, beautiful."

Jory gave a heavy sigh. "Hurry."

He was flattered by the speed with which Val stripped off his remaining clothing. The stunning man who captured his attention fully clothed was a different animal stripped naked. With yards of golden skin stretched over hardened muscles and a feral gleam in his eyes, Val was like a wild animal preparing to claim his mate.

"I need to be inside you." Val groaned, running his hands over Jory's body.

"Yes...please...now." Jory panted. Really it was amazing he could form words between gasps. An overload of sensation short-circuited his brain. In a haze of need he felt long clever fingers, slicked and searching, enter his hole. Val must have grabbed some lube from the dispenser on the wall while Jory was distracted.

Val's movements were strong and sure, his long fingers confidently pegging Jory's gland with a sure, knowing touch. Jory relaxed his body and let the larger man take control.

"Keep that up and I'm going to come." He said between moans.

"Not without me." Val's voice was hard and commanding cutting through the cloud of desire enfolding Jory.

He watched through passion-glazed eyes as Val took a moment to take care of the necessities. He didn't bother telling the man he was immune to disease as his body would kill anything that tried to attack it. Jory couldn't even get a cold. But now was not the time to discuss his abilities not when the most gorgeous man he'd ever seen was lifting Jory's legs and sliding into him in one smooth movement.

"Oh. Yes." Deep. Hard. Everything Jory needed at that moment was in this fabulous man.

For the next few minutes there was no other noise in the room except the sounds of moans, grunts and the slap of flesh against flesh.

Brilliant green eyes shone down at him with lust. The intensity of the moment shook Jory to the core. Although he had many affairs in his short life he'd never felt a moment of connection like this one.

Val grabbed Jory's cock, sliding up and down his shaft with rough calloused fingers. Intense sensation pulsed through Jorjah's body. It only took a few pumps before he gave it up. Clamping down hard he heard Val grunt his release. Then, while he was still riding the wave of his orgasm, Val's teeth pierced his shoulder in a sharp stab of pain.

"Ouch."

"Shh, baby." Val whispered, licking the spot where he bit and sending a soothing sensation down Jory's spine.

Val took a deep breath and vaulted off the bed. While Jory was still blinking from the suddenness of everything, Val returned with a warm cloth. Using a gentle touch, Val's wiped the come off of Jory's stomach and hole.

"Sleep baby, take a nap. We can talk later."

Talk. Talk about what?

He didn't get a chance to ask because the big man wrapped himself around Jory like a big muscular teddy bear and promptly fell asleep.

A few moments later Jory joined him.

\* \* \*

Duke Valer Klarian woke slowly, the warmth at his side moved slightly, alerting him to the fact that he wasn't alone. Jorjah.

Staying at the space port to unwind before heading home turned out to be the best idea ever. As a duke of the northern provinces it was his duty to find a suitable mate. He didn't know how suitable Jorjah was, but the man was definitely his mate. His dragon DNA recognized him as soon as he'd entered the terminal. If the pretty blond had followed the triplets his dragon would've taken over and hunted him down. He was glad that Jorjah changed his mind because he didn't want their first interaction to be him, in dragon form, slaughtering others who dared to touch what was his.

It was important to make a good first impression.

Now, after tasting his lover, Val knew that he'd need a gentler touch with this man. Although Jory's approach to him was bold he had a feeling it wasn't the normal behavior of the slim man cradled in his arms. Jory was obviously not a fighter, not even one callous marred his beautiful hands. His mate's looks, manner and clothing spoke of a man used to the finer things in life. Not the type of man that usually appealed to Val but he was finding that with his mate nothing was what he was expecting. But after the best sex in his life, Val was willing to give this soft-spoken, fabulous smelling man anything he wanted as long as Jory stayed by his side.

Val unwound himself from Jory's arms careful not to disrupt his bed partner but he wanted a better look.

By the gods the man was glorious. As the richest man on the planet Val was used to having beautiful things around him. None of his previous lovers came close to the eye-catching looks of this one. But as stunning as Jorjah was physically, it was his eyes that caught and held Val's attention. They were blue-silver, like a dragon scale. Somewhere in this young man's background there was some blood that wasn't entirely human, a fact that made Jorjah even more desirable. Val loved the exotic.

And he found him first.

A low chuckle escaped his lips when he imagined the look in his rival's eyes. King Raiston was going to have dragon kits when he got a look at Val's mate.

The king had an eye for blonds and was currently seeking a mate of his own. Val slid a finger across the smaller man's shoulder feeling for the mark he left behind. A frown crossed his face as nothing but smooth skin met his fingertips.

*Where in the dragon fire was his mark?*

Val sat up pinning Jory onto the bed searching for the mating mark he pegged him with during their hot sex bout.

"Wha-What's wrong?" One bleary silvery-blue eye peeked up at him.

"You're not marked?"

The eyes cleared as Jory sat up. "What do you mean marked?"

"I marked you with my teeth when we had sex. It's not there."

Jory shrugged, the blond not looking the least surprised. "I healed."

"No one heals that quickly."

Val's lover met his eyes, serious as death. "I do. I'm a fast healer."

Huh. The mate hunt rules prevented him from asking further questions. Nothing personal could be discussed until the mating bond was formed. It prevented prejudice against certain classes.

"I'm going to have to find a new way to mark you." Val said.

There was no way he was letting this beauty enter the kingdom unattached, not with the mating hunt in full swing. He'd be grabbed before he took a step outside the port.

Thinking rapidly the duke snapped off his left armband, it bore an impression of his house and rank and would mark Jory as his to anyone who looked. Val wrapped it around Jory's left arm and the technology inside the band adjusted to his mate's smaller size before clicking into place. Embedded with a family identi-chip, the band would only disengage with the duke's fingerprints. Anyone looking at the band would know he was the property of the duke. Wise men would steer clear of his lover.

Satisfied, Val lay down and wrapped his lover back in his arms.

Jory gave a chuckle. "Am I tagged appropriately now?"

"Yes."

Val didn't mention that in forty-eight hours his DNA would merge with Jory's and his mark would appear on the younger man's back. Once the mark appeared the mating was official. The duke hoped that whatever healing ability Jory had didn't expel their mating bond. But even if it did nothing would save the young beauty from being his.

Because once a Dragonkin found his mate, it was for eternity.

Val's eyes gleamed as he looked at the arm band. Few would dare try and take his beautiful man away. Technically Jory was available two days after his first encounter to find another mate. When two men bit the same potential mate they had to wait and see whose mark was chosen by the god, Borl, the matcher of dragon mates. The stronger match would win. This wasn't Val's first attempt at finding a mate but this was the first time he knew the man was his. Until now he'd decided he wasn't matchable. One look at Jorah and he changed his mind.

This man was the one.

## Chapter Three

After cleaning up and redressing, the pair went outside the port to a hoverlimo Val had standing by.

“Who are you?” Jory asked once he was settled in the car and looking around his luxurious surroundings. With his father’s wealth at his fingertips Jory knew an owned limo when he saw one. This wasn’t some rented town car. And the driver was obviously an employee by the familiar grin he gave his lover and the fact that Val called him by name.

“Ah, ah, ah.” Val wagged his finger at him. “You’re not allowed to ask that.” The gorgeous man sprawled on the seat beside him spreading his long legs in the roomy vehicle. Looking at those thick muscular thighs and the fabulous package in between had Jory’s mouth watering.

“Now is a good time to tell you the mate hunt rules.”

“Hmmm.” Jory completely forgot what they were talking about as his mind filled with lust.

In one graceful movement he slid to his knees and started untying the laces on Val’s soft leather pants.

“Oh fuck, honey. We really should talk.”

“Uh-huh.” Like any man would take talking over getting a blow job. “You go ahead and talk and I’ll pretend I’m listening.”

He freed Val’s prick from its confines pleased when it sprang out from the loosened pants like it was lunging for his mouth. Leaning forward, Jory licked the tip savoring the flavor of a new lover on his tongue.

A strangled moan from above told him he was on the right track. His strong, tough lover enjoyed a gentle touch. Relaxing his throat Jory swallowed Val completely, letting his muscles surround his lover.

“Damn. Shit. Coming.”

To Jory’s surprise Val lost complete control and came down his throat within seconds. Pulling off he glared up at the gorgeous man. “You’re going to have to work on your stamina love. I barely got a chance to taste you.”

Val blushed. “It might take a lot of practice, baby.” One large hand grabbed his arm and pulled him back to the seat. “That was incredible.” A goofy smile crossed his lover’s face as he retied his pants.

Jory smiled back pleased to see how much he’d relaxed his lover. As soon as they left the space port he could feel the tension rising in Val, though he didn’t know why.

Once his pants were back in order Val pulled Jory into his arms and kissed him silly.

“I like the taste of us together.” Val said his eyes dark and serious.

“Me too.” Jory said laying his head on the other man’s chest. Cradled in his lover’s arms, Jory felt a moment’s peace. He’d already found one man he liked at this mating ceremony. He didn’t know if Val was interested in being his permanent mate but the man obviously had some interest in him if he wanted to claim him in some manner. Jory brushed a hand over the armband. Maybe this entire thing would be easier than he thought.

\* \* \*

King Raiston Dragonspawn looked over the crowd, depression digging deep. From his balcony he used his enhanced dragon sight to watch the incoming people register for the mate hunt. No marriages were official outside the hunt because that was when Borl’s power was the strongest and a true mating could occur. Since he was young Rai dreamed of finding his mate, the one created to be his perfect other half. Unfortunately at thirty-five and ten mate hunts later he was running out of hope.

So far no one had pulled his dragon from its slumber. When was it going to be his turn to find a mate?

“I haven’t seen one decent mate yet.” His brother Lewn proclaimed in a bored voice.

“Hush.” Raiston looked around to see if anyone heard his younger sibling. “Someone will hear you.”

“Good, then they won’t come back next year and waste our time.” The prince’s tossed his head barely disrupting his perfectly arranged curls. Raiston would’ve teased him about it but he caught sight of his greatest rival both politically and socially.

Duke Klarian.

As the duke came close to the registration table he could see Val had someone tucked in his arms.

Val found a mate?

“The gods are laughing at us.” Said Lewn.

The brothers leaned forward on the balcony to get a better look.

Rai was startled when he saw the expression on the duke’s face. Looking at Val was like looking at another person. Gone was the cold look of superiority, stamped on the man’s features since birth and the disdainful curl of his lip, completely absent. Instead the duke looked down at the man in his arm with open adoration, a sappy smile on the usually hard face.

Damn, the duke was hooked through the balls. An arm around the man beside him was an unprecedented level of public affection. Previous lovers of the duke had complained loudly that the man would barely look at them in front of others.

There was no doubt in Rai’s mind that the duke thought he found his mate.

“Fuck me, he’s gorgeous.” His brother’s comment drew the king’s attention to the man tucked tightly to the duke’s side.

His brain short-circuited and his cock hardened as he watched the duke’s companion slink quietly beside the larger man with feral grace. Tawny hair in a zillion colors of gold and cream covered an elegantly formed head. High cheekbones and a narrow chin gave the young man a sweet winsome quality that made Rai want to lick him all over to check and see if he was as sugary as he looked.

Inside his dragon woke up with a roar.

*Mate.*

“I’m so screwed.” It was one thing to oppose a man politically, it was another to try and steal the man’s mate. But in all of his mate hunts he had never felt this level of desire for another person. Until today he was even considering trying out women.

Rai turned to the servant waiting at his side. “Bring my Zellyn.” He commanded.

The servant scurried off.

“Rai, what are you doing?” Lewn asked.

“Getting my mate.”

His brother looked from the king to the duke. “Oh please tell me you aren’t doing what I think you are? You aren’t going to try and steal the duke’s mate.”

“I’m not going to try.” He said with satisfaction. “I’m going to succeed.”

There was a moment of silence from his brother which was rare enough that Rai knew he was stunned. “What do you need me to do?”

Rai smiled. Sometimes it was great to have family.

\* \* \*

Val and Jory were only a few people from the long registration table, finally. Bored with waiting in line Jory watched the people around him for entertainment. All types were there for the festival. Men, women, and creatures he’d never even heard of, crowded the massive hall.

“Wow. I didn’t realize there would be so much variety.” Jory said his eyes wide as he took in the crowds.

“What did you expect?”

Jory shrugged. "The way my father talked about it I thought it was a bunch of guys trying to find mates. I didn't realize there would be women and other beings too."

"Everyone wants a mate." Val said. His voice was so serious that Jory looked up. But the other man was looking out over the crowds so he couldn't see his expression.

Turning his attention back to the crowd, Jory was surprised at how many people were staring back at him. He was used to it at home because of his family and connections. However, here no one knew him.

"Why are they all staring?"

Val laughed. "Because..."

"Good afternoon, Val."

A tall red-headed man approached. The man's skin was a smooth creamy caramel a striking contrast with his dark red hair. The look worked well for the man.

"Good afternoon, Z." Val sounded a little wary and the grip on Jory's hand tightened a bit. Not painful but definitely tighter.

"Prince Lewn wishes to speak with you."

"Tell the prince I'm busy." Val said in a hard tone.

Z gave a wry smile. "Sorry Val, but he said it was important. If you like I can watch your boy for you."

Val looked at the red-head for so long that he started to shift in his place. "Watch him very carefully, Z. If harm comes to him I won't be responsible for my actions." There was a low growl in his voice that made Z stand up straight.

"I promise I will take care of him."

"See that you do."

Before Jory could offer his opinion of being able to take care of himself, Val's mouth swooped down and covered his in a kiss so carnal he almost exploded right there in front of everyone.

When the other man released him, Jory was still gasping for breath, his heart hammering against his chest.

Val turned on Z. "Knowing Lewn this will take a while. Once he's registered take Jory to his room and see that he gets whatever he needs."

He pulled some paper objects from his pocket and handed them towards Z who shook his head. "It'll add to my value to be seen with him." Was his obscure reply.

Jory's lover didn't seem to find this odd because Val nodded and with a sweet kiss to Jory's cheek walked away.

"Wow, I'm Zellyn but everyone just calls me Z." The friendly red-head said holding out his hand.

Jory shook hands. "I'm Joriah but everyone calls me Jory." He didn't share his other names.

"Nice to meet you, Jory. I've never seen Val so interested in someone before." The other man said with a smile.

"Val's a very sweet man."

Z hooted with laughter. Until then, Jory never really understood what people meant when they used that expression.

"Val isn't a sweet guy. He's known as one of the coldest bastards in the kingdom."

Anger tore through Jory, hot and unexpected. "I'd appreciate it if you didn't talk about my friend like that."

Z held up his hands. "Sorry. I didn't realize you were so hooked on him."

Only extensive practice in controlling his emotions made it possible for Jory to bottle his rage. Sighing he felt the angry tide recede. "Neither did I."

Before either man could say anything more, it was Jory's turn to step up to the registration table.

"First name." The man who spoke was one of three people checking people in. He was an older gentleman with peppered hair and an abrupt manner with the build and posture of a lifetime soldier.

"Joriah."

The man looked up when Joriah spoke and stared.

When it went on for more than a moment Jory turned to Z. "Is he all right?"

Z laughed. "Frest, I think you need to finish registering Jory here. Val was most intent on getting him signed up for the hunt."

Frest shook his head. "Sorry." A light flush covered his tanned cheeks. As if just registering what Z said his eyes widened. "You prefer men?"

Jory nodded.

There were some noises of disappointment in the line behind him but Jory pretended not to hear.

Frest handed him a yellow wrist band out of a pile of different colored bands. "Wear this at all times during the hunt." He turned his attention back to his monitor his skin flushing redder. "Do you have your code?"

"Code?"

"It should be in your paperwork."

"Oh." Jory reached into his pant's pocket and pulled out the folded sheet that his father's secretary had given him. "12235."

Frest nodded absently and punched in the code. "Ahh, here you are, Joriah. You're in the Silver Dragon Wing, room 602."

"Here is a list of rules for you to refer to but I'll tell you the main ones. A mate hunt participant must not share last names, personal information, titles or any information that might tell of their wealth or family position. That is in order to level the field so mates are chosen for compatibility and not money."

Jory nodded. It made sense.

"Participants are to make themselves available to other participants for the purpose of mating and conversation. This means no hiding in your room even if you think you've found the one. First time participants must have interactions with at least two different potential mates. You must learn their first name and registration number so that you can properly register your mating. At the end of the festival you will come for the official unveiling where you will remove your shirt. If you've mated there will be a mark that appears on your back within forty-eight hours but the last day is the official ceremony where all mates are recognized."

"What kind of mark?" Jory asked while his mind was racing with the thought that he had to have sex with another man besides Val. The thought was oddly unappealing.

"Something that represents your mate. If your mate is a dragonkin then it will be a picture of the dragon he transforms into, if not, then it will be something that represents his life. I have a tree on my back because my mate is a woodworker and she has a plumed pen because I come from a family of writers."

"Wow." Jory wondered if Val was dragonkin but remembering the fangs he kind of thought he must be. What kind of mark would he leave on his mate's back?

"Do you understand these rules?"

Jory nodded.

"Have you had intercourse with Val?"

He could feel the blush rising on his cheeks as he nodded his agreement.

"His registration number is 552." Z piped up. When Jory gave him a curious look he explained. "You keep the same number until you find your mate and Val and I tried mating last year but it didn't work out."

Jory waited for jealousy to hit but there was nothing. It wasn't like Z and Val were lovers now. He could tell when the two men met that they knew each other but there was none of the bond that lovers had in their greeting.

With a shrug Jory put on the yellow wristband. Looking around he saw different colors on different people.

"What do the colors stand for?"

Frest looked back up as if surprised he was still standing there. "Purple is for people who like the opposite sex, yellow is for people who like the same sex, green is for people who like both and orange is for people looking for more than one mate."



Jory laughed. "I doubt I can handle more than one mate. I think getting the one will be quite the experience." Though, if it meant spending more time with sexy Val, he was looking forward to it. Jory wondered vaguely who else he would have sex with and if the possessive Val would be angry with him for having sex with another guy.

The pair moved away from the table with Jory's list of rules. He noticed for the first time that Z was wearing a green wristband. "You're mate hunting too?"

Z nodded. "This is my fifth time. I think I've slept with most of the men and women on the planet but I keep hoping the next man or woman will be the one. Most people don't find their mate on their first hunt so don't be disappointed if it doesn't work out."

"I don't think I could handle going to five of these." Jory said tugging on the yellow rubbery band.

"Yeah, it's tough." Z agreed. "But the way Val was looking at you I have a feeling you'll do just fine. I've never seen him look at anyone that way before."

"Really." The thought that he might be special to the gorgeous man gave Jory a warm feeling. "I really like him. I think I could do worse for a mate."

Z gave him a friendly pat on the back. "Good luck with that."

They reached what looked like a hub in the castle. From the circle in the middle of the floor different colored lines led to a hallway in each direction.

"Following the silver line will take us to your wing. You got lucky. That wing is closest to the streets leading to the night clubs and has the best view of the dragon fields. You'll get to see them taking off."

"Can you shift into a dragon?"

Z shook his head. "My line isn't pure enough. I'm a mixed breed, my father was dragonkin but not my mother. Only purebred dragonkin can shift though I have enhanced sight and hearing.

A lot of the dragons on the dragon field are real dragons not dragonkin. Soldiers that pass the challenges and can't shift are offered the chance to train with natural dragons that the dragon breeders raise from egg.

"How can you tell the difference?" Jory asked fascinated with this look into the dragonkin culture.

"You can't while they're dragons but eventually they have to transform back. Most dragonkin can't hold the form more than a few hours."

"Huh."

The pair reached Jorjah's room. He opened the door and was pleased to see it was an average room. Done in luxurious furnishings, but just a room all the same.

"Wow."

"What?" Jory asked looking around but didn't see anything but his one piece of luggage sitting against the wall. It contained a scant amount of clothing and his pair of custom throwing knives. Once Z left he'd have to check and make sure his knives were undisturbed. He never travelled without a weapon of some kind. Father would never forgive him if he went around completely unprotected, it was a miracle he didn't send along a team of soldiers.

"Frest must've really liked you. This is the nicest guest room I've ever seen."

"Oh." Jory hoped it didn't mean that the registrar knew about him.

"Must be because Val accompanied you."

Jory nodded weakly. However, since his stuff was already there he had doubts that Frest had anything to do with his room choice.

"Is that all you've got?" Z asked nodding towards the case on the floor.

"Yeah. My ex-boyfriend burned most of my clothes."

"No shit?" Z's eyes were wide as he looked at Jory with new interest.

"No shit." Jory in turn was examining Z's beautiful jacket and well-fitting pants. "I don't suppose you know a good tailor."

“My uncle’s a tailor.” Z said with a smile that Jory realized was the other man’s usual expression. “He’s not famous or anything.” He said looking carefully at the quality of Jory’s clothing. “But he’ll make you good clothes for a decent price. And unlike the palace tailors he won’t be too busy to make you anything. He’s not the current fashion.” The last part he said in a lowered voice as if confiding a deep, dark secret.

“I’m sure we can work something out.” Jory said. “Really I just want to wear something that won’t make me look foolish. If your uncle can do the job I’d be happy to hire him.” He could always look for another tailor later when the need for basics wasn’t so great. Besides most of the ‘fashionable’ tailors Jory ever met were overrated.

“Great. I’ll call my uncle.” Z pulled a communicator from his pocket and walked to the other end of the room for privacy.

Jory walked over the balcony entrance and opened the doors. It took him a moment to realize what was wrong with the structure. There no rails on the balcony, just a long ledge. He considered it a safety hazard until he remembered that dragonkin probably used this room and didn’t want to have to hop over a railing to get in flight. Still as a non-dragon he thought he’d just stay off the balcony and admire the view from the closed windows. Jory didn’t have a fear of heights but he didn’t have a death wish either. His room was up six floors and it was a long fall for someone without wings.

There was a knock on the door.

Jory opened it to a female messenger. She giggled when she caught sight of him.

“Are you Joriah?”

He nodded.

“Message for you.”

“Thank you.” He accepted the paper she handed him but as he reached to give her a tip she ran off.

Shrugging he closed the door again and examined the paper.

“What’s up?” Z asked eyeing Jory’s note with interest.

“I don’t know yet.” Unfolding the note he read the scrawled words.

Jory,

I am unable to get away for the evening. Why don’t you  
have Z take you to the Dragonrider club.

Yours,

Val

“Dragonrider club?”

Z gave a laugh. “I’m surprised Val would choose that place but he probably wants to make sure you follow the contest rules and don’t stay hiding in your room.”

Z slapped him on the back. “You’re in luck though my uncle said he could fit you in if I get you over there now.”

“Great.” Jory let the questions and stress fade for a moment. He hoped Z’s uncle was as good as he said. It would be a boon if he was able to find a talented tailor to rebuild his wardrobe. “Let’s go.”

## Chapter Four

After a short hovercab ride the two men exited in front of a cream colored building that had the words Britson's in a bold scrawling gold script.

Movement out of the corner of his eye had Jory turning. For a second he thought he'd seen Brill, one of his brother's personal guards. Scanning the street he didn't see anyone.

*Must have imagined it.*

"Are you coming?" Z asked, impatience filling his voice as he held open the door.

"Yeah." Jory said after another fruitless search around. "I'm coming."

They entered to see a pretty girl sitting behind a large wooden desk. Her dress matched the creamy outside of the building and her hair was a rich honey gold.

She stood up when they entered the room. "Z, how nice to see you." She flashed a curious glance at Jory before giving Z a kiss on each cheek.

"Hey, Lila. We're going out to the Dragonrider Club later, you should come."

"I'd love to." She said with a smile. Jory saw a flash of a purple band adorning her wrist. Another mate hunt participant.

"I made an appointment with uncle for my friend Joriah. He needs a new wardrobe."

"I'll call back and let him know you're here." Lila pressed a few buttons on a comphone and spoke into the receiver. "He'll take you now." She told Joriah with a smile.

"I'll stay out here and chat with Lila." Z said sprawling his long body into a guest chair.

Nodding, Jory followed the girl through the doorway.

She led him to an enormous chamber with yards and yards of fabrics displayed on every available surface.

A sleek middle-aged man in a gorgeous grey suit stood in the center of the room.

"Good afternoon, Joriah, I'm Britson." The man greeted him with a well-modulated voice and a proper bow. "I hear you are in need of a new wardrobe."

"Yes, my ex-boyfriend burned all of my clothing."

The older man paled. "Incinerator?"

"Bonfire."

The tailor took out his tape measure. "Let's start with getting exact measurements. From there I can make you anything you need. I have a few things I can adjust to fit your build but an entire wardrobe will take a while."

"I understand."

He even suppressed his sigh. Go him.

"It's easier if you strip down to your underwear so I can take the most accurate measurements."

"I'm not wearing any underwear." He could feel the heat building on his cheeks as he confessed to the tailor. He should've changed before going out, but after his encounter with Val and trying to get registered if didn't occur to him to stop and put on some underwear.

Britson gave him a knowing smile. From a hidden drawer he pulled a pair of silk boxes from its paper wrapping. "You can wear these. I'll go get supplies from the other room while you get prepared."

The tailor left and Jory stripped down and put on the boxers. They were of high quality and felt decadently sinful against his bare skin. The memory of Val ripping off his underwear earlier today made the underwear a tighter fit.

Manners instilled by his mother had him folding his clothes and stacking them neatly on a guest chair.

A soft gasp had Jory turning around. Britson's eyes were on the armband wrapped around his upper arm.

"Oh, Val marked me to keep me safe from predators." Jory said. He hoped he sounded as casual as he wanted. Surrounded by a strange culture he wasn't sure of the purpose of the armband but Val had been determined.

"They get possessive around mate hunt season." Was all that Britson said before his measuring tape came into play.

A series of measurements later the tailor pronounced himself finished.

"Do you mind if I take some pictures? I will put them into my computer and then I can choose fabrics that match your coloring and body shape."

Jory shrugged. "Whatever works for you." It wasn't like it was a big deal. He wasn't exactly naked and he didn't think the tailor was the type to post it all over the galacticnet. Jory snickered, that would get him a phone call from father.

"Keep the underwear. My client won't miss them."

Laughing, Jory let the tailor take his picture.

Britson lifted Jory's clothing between his thumb and forefinger. After a long spaceport ride they weren't exactly fresh. "I'll have these burned."

"Might as well that's what happened to the rest of them."

Britson laughed. The look suited the man. "You'll have to tell me that story some time."

"Buy me a beer and you got yourself a date."

The tailor snickered. "Sadly that's the best offer I've had in a while."

"Stick around with me then. As an attractive gay man I'm a babe magnet."

Briton almost swallowed the pin he just put in his mouth. He took it out with a gasp. "Warn me next time before you make me laugh. Stand up straight so I can pin these and we'll see what I can do to attract a nice man for you." The man gave Jory's armband a considering look. "Though I have a feeling you won't have a problem with that."

After Britson ran a machine around the pants getting them just right, Jory slipped on the shirt handed to him. "May we both have good luck then." Luckily he was wearing his favorite pair of boots during the bonfire so they were saved.

Following his gaze, the tailor looked at Jory's footwear. "I'll put in an order with the cobbler."

"No." Jory yelled. "Those are my favorite boots."

"I'm sure they were nice once." Jory could hear Britson slip into his professional voice. He probably pulled it out when a customer made some "unfortunate" choice of clothing. "But I know a fabulous leatherworker who could make you an amazing pair of boots. You don't want to lessen your new wardrobe do you?"

Damn.

"I suppose yes is the wrong answer?"

Britson patted his shoulder consolingly. "We'll give them their own box for burial."

Jory sniffed. "I'll miss them."

Catching a glimpse in the mirror, he had to admit, Britson knew his stuff. The well-cut pants were dark blue and outlined his thighs. They were saved from being stodgy by the silver thread stitched along the seams. His top was heavy white silk with the same silver accents.

"There are few men who could pull that look off." Britson said, his eyes skimming the sleek form with professional pride. "I have just the jacket."

A dark caramel, ankle-length leather jacket with an interesting wavy pattern was slid up Jory's arms and across his shoulders. It fit like a dream.

"Perfect. What kind of leather is this?"

"Dragon."

At his appalled expression Britson was quick to reassure. "It's from a dragon shedding. They slide off their old coat when a new one is made every hundred years or so. That is from a first shedding which is why it's so supple."

"That must be really expensive." He started to take it off but a hand on his shoulder stopped him.

"I'll give you a good deal because I have a feeling you'll be the making of me." Britson said his eyes glowing with pride.

Jory didn't really need a good deal but it would look odd if he accepted the price without protest.

Britson turned him so he was forced to look at his reflection head on.

Jory always thought more about the quality of his clothes than how they looked on him. But looking in the mirror he was surprised at the man looking back. His gold hair glowed against the dragon skin jacket, his slim body looked taller than it actually was and his classical v-shape was traced by the well-tailored shirt like a faithful lover. Turning slightly he pushed aside the coat and saw the pants made his ass look even better.

“Damn, I look so good it’s almost false advertising.”

Britson laughed. “If I have my way you will always look good.” One large hand clapped him on the shoulder. “Much of my clientele are ugly people hoping for miracles. It is a true pleasure to dress someone who has so much to work from.”

Jory clasped the hand on his shoulder briefly. “Stop or you’ll make me cry and that will undermine my manliness.” He gave another critical glance in the mirror. “Do you know a good barber?”

“No.” Britson said in a horrified voice. “Don’t you dare. It’s stunning.”

Shrugging Jory turned away from his reflection. “If I find my mate I’ll have to cut most of it off anyway. It’s tradition.” Brushing back his hair he turned and shook Britson’s hand. “Thank you for the clothing. You are worth every penny and if I had to put that outfit on again tomorrow I was going to scream.”

“Have a good night out with Z but don’t let him steer you wrong. I’ll have some clothes sent to your room tomorrow and the rest by the end of this week.”

Jory nodded, gave him a short bow and left the room. So far he liked this planet.

## Chapter Five

Rounding the corner, Jory stopped. In front of him was an enormous neon sign with a man riding a dragon in full military regalia and high heels. "You've got to be kidding me?"

Z laughed. "Nope. The hottest men on the planet always come here. And during mating season they're some of the easiest men too. Sometimes even the king."

Damn. The last thing he wanted was to draw attention of a king. He wouldn't mind having more of Val though. Jory was kicking himself for not getting Val's number.

How did he let Z drag him along on a night out?

Oh yeah, mating hunt rules.

Jory followed Z up the front steps letting Lila take his arm so she didn't trip on the steps with her heels.

At the top of the stairs was the largest fucking bouncer he'd ever seen. Entranced by the sign he hadn't noticed the enormous man standing beside the line blocked off by velvet ropes.

"There's a line." The bodyguard said.

Z pulled on Jory's arm bringing him forward and forcing him away from Lila. "Have you met my friend Joriah?"

Blushing Jory looked up at the bodyguard and shrugged off his friend's hands.

This was so embarrassing.

"Sorry, I didn't see the line." He pointed to the sign with a smile. "I was distracted."

The guard was over six feet five inches, with the trademark dark hair and dark eyes of the planet. He figured Val's brilliant green eyes were a fluke.

"No problem beautiful you just go right in." The bouncer said in a deep, rumbling voice.

"How much is the fee?" Z asked.

"Two ducats."

Jory reached to pull out some coin.

"None for you beautiful."

The bouncer opened the door for him with a bow and a smile in a smooth choreographed movement.

Confused, Jory entered the bar. "I can't believe he didn't make us stand in line."

"Aww don't be a spoilsport." Z laughed. "I love bringing gorgeous people places. I always get in."

"Bitch." Jory said with a smile.

Lila giggled.

The interior of the nightclub was surprisingly classy. It was decorated with dark wood and had a high polished bar with the requisite mirror and a small dance floor. If the bartenders were extremely pretty men and most of the dancers were of the male persuasion all the better. He looked back at Lila.

"Oh don't bother with me. I love watching all the pretty, pretty men." Her eyes greedily scanned the vibrant crowd.

"Sometimes there are even men who like both." Z said with a leer flashing Lila his orange band.

Jory rolled his eyes and turned away. A place like this was bound to have at least one friendly soul to help him with his hunger, a hunger that was rising along with the hormone level of the club.

"I'll go get a table with Z. Get me a white wine, will you?" Lila said spying a table in the corner.

Z's eyes locked onto a pretty sleek man with liquid eyes. "I'll take an ale."

Shaking his head Jory went towards the bar.

The band was so loud that the walls vibrated.

Damn, Z was right he did need this.

Instinctively, his body started to flow with the music, lean muscles swinging to the beat as he traveled to the bar letting his worries flow away with the dance.

His mother's people were dancers and he felt his heritage deep in his bones. Closing his eyes Jory let the rhythm sink into his soul as he absently moved in the intricate dance steps he learned as a child. Some things a person never forgets.

When the dance ended Jory opened his eyes to applause. The dance floor was now clear with a ring of men surrounding it and clapping. Jory gave a quick bow before continuing on to the bar. Guess they didn't see much real dancing.

More than one hand reached out to touch him during his trek. None of them sent a tingle through him so Jory ignored them for the most part as he slid on a well-loved stool to wait his turn. His butt barely hit the bar stool before the bartender was there eating him up with his eyes.

The man was slim, sleek and had thick hoops through each ear. Smiling, the man flashed perfect white teeth and a dimple on one side. "You're quite the dancer."

Jory shrugged.

"What can I get you sweetheart?" The bartender said over the music. "Beer, wine, me?"

Jory laughed. At least some people didn't bother with the subtleties. Unfortunately the man wasn't his type. He liked his men taller, broader; more muscular. An image of Val flashed through his mind sending heat through his body.

"Um. A glass of white wine and two ales."

With a flash of hands the bartender presented the drinks. "Need me to have those delivered?"

"No I can do it."

He took up the tray and headed to the table where his friends were waiting.

"Yum, I love it when hot, sexy men bring me drinks." Lila teased her eyes sparkling.

Z ignored him, his eyes were riveted on a skinny black-haired man thrashing on the dance floor in what only the extremely generous could call a dance rhythm.

He took one sip of his drink. "You two have fun." He said before rushing through the crowds to the object of his desire.

"Obviously he has low standards." Lila said in a dry voice.

Jory tilted his head a little. "He's cute enough but I don't think I could mate with someone who had convulsions on the dance floor."

Lila's laughed until she cried.

"So tell me a little about you." Jory said when she calmed down enough to speak.

Lila shrugged. "I work for Britson and I'm looking for a mate. I have a boyfriend but he's not..." She bit her lip. "He's not the one."

This close up Jory could see her makeup covered a slight bruising around her eyes.

"He hits you, doesn't he?"

She nodded looking away. "Yeah. The only way I can escape him is if there is someone else. I'm not strong enough to get away from him on my own."

"Don't sell yourself short." Jory said. He tried to sound encouraging but he'd seen enough abuse to know that some people never made it away from their abusers. They had to make the decisions themselves, no one could make it for them. "You can do it. But it doesn't hurt to shop around a little."

Jory figured any hope he could give her would help.

"What about you?" Lila asked. "What's your story?"

"I'm the youngest of my family. My father sent me here to find a mate."

"Not enough prospects at home?"

Jory shrugged. "None that my father approved of."

"Ah." He could feel she wanted to ask him more but a gorgeous man with bulging muscles came up to the table and asked her to dance.

Jory nodded his encouragement. "Go ahead sweet. I'll keep the table warm."

Z came back with his uncoordinated boy toy.

“Hey Jory, this is Pov.”

“Hello.” Jory said with a polite smile.

“Wow, you’re gorgeous.” Pov said with what he probably thought was a flirtatious smile. It just made Jory queasy.

Z gave him a glare.

Jory drained his glass. “I’m going to go get another drink.”

He received a pout from Pov but Z looked more than a little relieved.

Jory made his way slowly through the crowds missing Val. It was strange to be in a sea of half-naked bodies and missing a man he just met. After working his way through the crowds he finally made it back to the bar and the welcoming smile of the bartender.

“Couldn’t stay away sweetie?” The man asked with a smile.

“Not if you can get me another ale.”

The drink was slid over with a wink. “Here you go baby. Just let me know if you need anything else.”

Smiling Jory gave him a good tip before turning to watch the men gyrate on the dance floor. It was almost like dancing.

Bless their little hearts for trying.

He spun his stool back, nudging a man who had moved closer to the bar and almost sliding off the stool.

“Oh, sorry.” He said to the newcomer.

“No problem beautiful.” Large hands settled him back on the stool. Jory’s dick filled so quickly he felt lightheaded.

Oh. Wow.

Shivers of desire racked his spine as deliciously calloused fingers slid down his arms. Looking up he met a pair of rich brown eyes circled in gold.

\* \* \*

King Raiston rubbed against the stunning man in his arms. Watching the man cross the room had awakened both his body and his dragon.

When he saw the man with Val he’d thought him attractive, but up this close he saw the man’s true appeal was in his silvery-blue eyes and honest smile.

*Mate.*

His dragon awakened, scenting the young man before him.

Only years of self-control prevented him from throwing the beauty against the bar and taking him where he stood.

Shimmering blond hair cut in skillful layers, surrounded a face sculpted by an extremely generous god. Full lips, high carved cheeks, a goddess kiss on his chin and eyes so dazzling, other people should wear sunglasses to protect them from the power of those orbs.

The god who designed this man was a god Val was determined to send a tribute to.

Maybe several.

“You can let go of me now,” said the beauty. His voice was smooth, musical and Rai felt an insatiable need to roll himself in the man’s essence. Never had a man or woman pulled at him so strongly.

“I’m not so sure I can.” He answered honestly. “My name’s Rai, what’s yours.” He knew who Joriah was because he had a servant interrogate the registrar but he didn’t let that show as guileless eyes looked up at him.

“Joriah.” The beautiful man gave a bright laugh. “You still have to let me go, sugar, because I need to get my beer.”

*Sugar*

He’d never had a pet name.

Surprisingly, from this man he liked it.



“I’ve got something better than a beer.”

A head spinning smile was sent towards him. “I just bet you do.”

Enchanted despite himself, the king heard himself offer. “I have a table, come have a drink with me.” He motioned to a table roped off on the balcony. It was his reserved spot. As part owner, a purchase he’d made as a youth, he always had a place to sit in the crowded nightclub; a place to scope out companionship for the evening.

A place to hunt for his future mate.

Until he ran into this delicious looking man who moved like a wet dream, looked like an angel and smelled like home.

“We don’t need to waste your fine table when I’m sure there is a nice dark place we can get better acquainted.”

Rai choked a little. Bold little man.

He slid his hand down the smaller man’s back resting it just above that fine ass. The clothes were as beautiful as the man. If Jory didn’t have money he had a keeper or Val. He wondered how long the pair knew each other. A low growl built in his chest at the thought of another man clothing Joriah. That was his job.

This man would be his to clothe, to feed, and to care for. Possessive thoughts clouded his mind until all he could think of was taking possession of the man before him. Leaning close, he lined his mouth up with Jory’s ear. “I know just the place my sweet. Follow me.”

“You got it.” Abandoning his beer, Jory slid off the stool. His brilliant eyes were wide and eager as his pink tongue swiped the last drop of beer across his bottom lip, enticing Rai in a hot daydream of all the things he wanted to do with that tongue.

The king moaned and broke a lifetime no public kissing rule. Wrapping one muscular arm around the other man’s waist he dove into the embrace like a starving man at a buffet table.

Who knew heaven was a sleek blond with the universe’s softest lips? His foggy brain couldn’t remember his objections to kissing before. Now he knew he could happily wallow in the taste of this man forever. When Jory opened his mouth the king took advantage and swept his tongue inside. The flavors of his mate exploded in his mouth as for the first time he felt absolutely complete.

That pulled him up sharp. He didn’t want to be so aggressive he scared the little man off. There was no way he was going to ruin this first encounter with his mate.

With a regretful smile he stepped back, gently breaking the other man’s sexy embrace.

His ego got a stroke when those pretty, pretty eyes blinked at him drugged with desire. “Why did you stop?”

“Come with me sweetheart.” He said using the low sexy tone that had melted lovers in the past.

The golden beauty laughed and slid that fine body against his. Still smiling, the king allowed the younger man to dance and flirt with him for a few minutes before slowly moving them both towards the back door. He saw Jory wave to Z and a couple of other people sitting at a table across the room and motioning to Rai.

The king gave Z an admonishing glare, daring him to speak.

Z simply smiled and blew a kiss to Joriah before turning back to the woman. He felt some of the tension in his mate ease.

“I didn’t want them to worry.” Jory said turning back to Rai.

“That was kind of you.”

With a nod to the bartender, Rai walked behind the bar and opened the door revealing a set of private stairs to the second floor. He went through pulling his fine man behind him. He could feel the bartender’s angry stare boring into his back. The other man’s flirting with Jory hadn’t gone unnoticed.

Too bad for him. Now he would never get the chance. After tonight, no one else would touch his man. He knew Val must’ve tried him first, but after having sex with Rai, Jory would fulfill the two person requirement and even if it took armed guards no one else would get an opportunity to touch his silvery blue-eyed mate.

Reaching the top floor, Rai maneuvered Jory through the labyrinthine hallway of doors before pulling a key card out of his pocket and unlocking his private suite.

He watched Jory take a quick look around.

“Handy.” Another brilliant smile was flashed at him. In that moment Rai knew if this man wasn’t his mate he would rather be alone for the rest of his life.

His dragon snarled its displeasure.

Pulling Jory close he gave him a deep hot kiss. The connection between their bodies brought him to full hardness. An attack of nerves had his setting the other man a fraction of an inch away. Did he really want to take his mate in a place where he’d taken so many others?

“If you’d like we can go some place nicer.”

Some place they could spend the night.

A look of caution entered those beautiful eyes. “No that’s all right darlin’, I’m sure we’ve got everything we need here and I think you have something for me.” Jory’s nimble fingers unfastened Rai’s pants, sliding them to his ankles and following them down.

The king’s cock wept with need, pre-cum glistening at the tip like a shining beacon. The proximity of the beautiful blond head to his dick threatened to make him come before there was even any contact.

“Suck me, beautiful.” Rai’s voice sounded gravelly to his ears.

A pink tongue licked across the throbbing head of his penis sending jolts of electricity to his balls. The king couldn’t hold back the deep moan or the convulsive tightening of his grip on Jory’s golden head.

Those wicked silver-blue eyes flashed at him right before Jory sucked harder and made Rai lose it completely.

By the time Jory let Rai’s spent cock slip from his mouth, he didn’t know what he was saying. All he knew is that he would damned sure do just about anything to make it happen again.

But someone was needing and he wouldn’t leave his man like that. With gentle force he pulled Jory back to his feet. “Strip baby. I want to see what’s underneath all these fine clothes.” Clothing he would provide in the future.

He got a wide smile for that as Jory stripped off his clothes with flattering speed.

Seeing all that silky skin exposed brought his body roaring back to hardness. Instinct had him covering the smaller man. He wrapped his body around Jory’s frame and his hand around his mate’s hard prick. The smell of his mate’s desire brought out his incisors and instinct had him sinking them into one slim shoulder.

“Fuck.” Jory screamed as he came, wetness pouring out over Rai’s hand.

The feel of his mate coming sent the king over the edge and he spurted all over his mate’s smooth back. The smell of spunk scented the air in wafts of testosterone filled clouds.

With a final growl the king retracted his teeth absently licking his mate’s shoulder.

Wild dragons couldn’t hold back the smile crossing his face. “You’re my mate now, sweet Joriah.”

To the king’s surprise Jory’s eyes flashed fury. “Your mate. We just met. How the hell could I be your mate?”

“Because you are, get used to it.”

Jory shook his head slowly backing away from the king. “But Val said I was his. You were supposed to be my second encounter not my mate.” Grabbing a towel by the sink the younger man cleaned off his skin.

Rai growled. “Tough, you’re mine adjust.”

The king winced as he heard himself talking to Jory but he just couldn’t stop himself. Nothing would stop him from claiming his mate even the very man he was fighting with.

Jory pulled on his clothes in short angry jerks and headed for the door.

Rai grabbed the younger man’s arm on the way out. “Give me your communicator.”

“Why?” Jory scowled.

“Because when we both calm down later I’ll call you and we can discuss our mating like civilized men.”

Jory pulled out a communicator that had Rai widening his eyes. It was a device so top of the line he didn’t even know they came out yet. “Nice.”

The beauty shrugged. “My father got it for me.”

Something hard and tight loosened in the king's chest. It was far easier to supplant a father who provided well for his son and offer to keep him in the style he was accustomed to, then to wean him from a well providing lover. With a lighter heart he entered his comcode while lifting Jory's from the communicator's memory. He knew that with his resources he should be able to track his lover from the machine's signal alone.

He gave Jory a gentle goodbye kiss and let him slip away. Now wasn't the time to press his suit. With a few well-placed calls the man wouldn't be able to leave the planet or even the city without a zillion alarms going off.

With a smile he straightened the room up and went out a back door returning to the palace with a jaunty step in his stride and a smile on his face.

## Chapter Six

Jory let out a sigh as the sound of the club faded behind him. Strangely, when Val mentioned being his mate earlier and he'd registered with the mate hunt it hadn't sounded so bad. It was the reality of Rai that made it a big, scary proposition. With the gorgeous, gentle Val he could imagine a nice calm life where he able to live well while wheedling intergalactic peace out of his father. But Rai struck him as the type who would accept no persuasion and do things in his own hardheaded way. He wasn't the type of man you wrapped around your finger.

Both men pulled him in different directions but maybe it was better to have no mate than to have one who wasn't your perfect match. Jory wondered if the matchmaking god ever matched those from different planets. He'd have to ask Frest.

And if part of his heart was still back there with Rai, he didn't have to acknowledge it. Or feel bad for having sex with someone so soon after Val. The fact that he was required by the mating hunt rules assayed some of his guilt but his usual policy of only seeing one man at a time was shattered. It didn't help that he found the other man amazingly sexy.

Strange, he didn't usually get attached to hookups. His father would have a stroke if he told him he was mating with some guy he picked up in a bar. The king wouldn't be surprised but it would be detrimental to the older man's health.

Laughing, Jory headed down the deserted street towards the castle. At least he thought it was towards the castle. Completely turned around by the curving roads and random signage, the streets were nothing like the familiar grid pattern of his home.

A shrill scream snapped Jory's attention away from his thoughts and to a side alley. Jeering shouts echoed against the stone buildings on either side.

"Look at it run."

"Stupid creature."

"Throw another rock at it."

A shiver of terror came out of nowhere rippling up his spine.

Not his emotion.

Jory ran towards the sounds. The metal on his boots rang out against the concrete as he approached. Turning the corner he saw three young boys throwing rocks at a small black creature hovering at the end of the alley. It screamed again as a rock sailed too close to its head.

"Stop that now." He shouted. His heart wrenching at the animal's pitiful cries.

The three boys turned around, all brown-haired, and grimy-faced with old, street-wise eyes. They showed no fear of an adult. Granted he wasn't that much bigger than the tallest of them, but they looked to only be in their early teens. Too young to have eyes that old.

One of the boys strutted forward, a smirk evident on his hardened features. "What are you going to do about it mister?"

Jory did a move that his instructor showed him ages ago. Stepping to the side and shifting his weight, Jory slipped under the kid's punch and flipped him face first into the brick wall. The teen shouted with surprise. When Jory flipped him over his thin face was white with terror and bits of red wall were stuck to his skin.

While the memory of his beating was still fresh, Jory laid down the law. "I'm going to let you leave but you take your little friends with you when you go. Am I understood?"

"Y-y-yes s-sir." The leader said in a shaking voice.

Jory stepped away from the kid and moved to the side so they could escape the alley.

All three of them started to sidle towards the alley opening. "That's an impressive move, sir." The oldest one said in respectful tones. "Me and my boys will be going now."

One of the other boys said in a loud whisper. "I didn't even see him move."

Jory looked at them with knowing eyes. "I'll be keeping an eye out for you three, don't make me have to talk to you again."

“No, sir.”

“Absolutely not.”

“You won’t see us.” The last was from the leader who fled the alley after his friends.

Jory watched to make sure they were completely gone before taking his eyes from the alley opening. It took a moment to adjust to the dim light and find the source of the screams.

Huddling in the shadows and trying to be as small as possible, Jory could almost hear it shivering. “Shhh. Come here sweetheart. I’m not gonna hurt you.” He kept his voice at the low crooning tone that he used on the palace children when they were upset.

A scraping sound came from the corner, like a sharpening stone across a blade.

Glowing gold eyes flared in the darkness as a small scaled creature came slowly out of the shadows.

A Dragon, it was a baby dragon.

Shit. What did he do now?

The small body was covered in shiny black scales. Its little ears perked up at the sound of his voice and its clawed feet tapped the pebbled ground as it crawled forward. A low purring noise rumbled from the long thin body. It reminded him of the Chinese dragons he saw on reference sites on ancient Earth.

In the dim light he could see dots of blood smearing the dark scales but at first look the wounds were superficial.

“Aww, poor baby they were hard on you weren’t they.” He let out a low whistle that always worked on dogs and horses. “Come here Precious, let Jory take care of you.”

Jory didn’t know how much the small dragon understood but it crawled cautiously up to him and sat down, curling its tail protectively around its small body. Wide golden eyes watched his every movement.

Kneeling down, Jory scooped up the tiny creature. Both of his hands spanned the creature’s entire body.

“Aren’t you a precious baby? We’ll find you a good home, yes, we will.” He crooned. The longer Jory held it the more it calmed down until it finally used its claws to climb up Jory’s chest and curl up on his shoulder. Wrapping its long tail around Jory’s neck for balance it settled its pointy head on Jory’s right shoulder hiding beneath his hair. The scales scraped his skin as the creature adjusted to his movement. He held still until the little dragon was settled not wanting to antagonize a creature lying that close to his jugular.

Good thing his leather jacket was thick or those claws would’ve sliced through his skin. As it was the roughness of the scales abraded the front of his neck.

“I can’t take care of a dragon, Precious.” Jory said stroking the ebony tail. He also couldn’t take a dragon home. It wouldn’t be right to bond with an obviously intelligent creature and then desert the little thing. Unless he was truly mated with either Rai or Val he would be leaving the planet at the end of the month.

The small creature gave a low purr sending vibrations down Jory’s spine. He laughed at the tickling sensation but didn’t bother to try and dislodge the dragon. Giving the creature a gentle pet he let it stay on his shoulder as he walked down the street.

He was bound to find someone who could tell him what to do with a traumatized little dragon.

Watching the signs as he walked, Jory hoped to find one that matched the few street names he had memorized.

After a few minutes he had to admit.

He was hopelessly lost. And the prickling on the back of his neck had more to do with the fact that he was being followed, then by the scales brushing against his nape. Trying to be subtle he stopped by a shop window and pretended to look at the wares inside while scoping out the street behind him. He was about to think he was mistaken when he saw the clear reflection of Brill, his brother’s enforcer, standing in the darkened doorway across the street. The empty street that felt calm and deserted a moment ago now felt ominous and filled with danger.

A sign for a pastry shop caught his eye the same time his stomach let out another rumble. The dragon growled back in agreement.

*Food.*

The word whispered across his mind. A thought not his.

“Yes, I agree.” It would also get them off the streets. Brill wouldn’t try anything in front of witnesses, that wasn’t his way.

Looking through the window, Jory saw a large bakery case with dozens of delicious looking pastries and stacks of little pink boxes. They reminded him of the pastries cook used to make him when he was a child. Memories of light, buttery, croissants, melting in his mouth and rich chocolate cupcakes served with warm hugs, from a soft padded woman filled his mind.

“Looks like a great place for a snack, Precious.” He muttered scratching behind the ears of his scaly companion. Jory was careful not to let his behavior show that he knew he was being watched.

Precious gave a chirp.

The small bell over the door chimed merrily as he entered.

“Can I help you?” Asked the dark-haired woman behind the counter. She had wide chubby cheeks and a generous smile that reminded him a little of his beloved cook. Her dimpled chin had a spot of white dust on it, maybe flour but possibly sugar.

Jory liked her immediately.

His greedy eyes examined the glass case. Chunky cookies, crusty fruit pies and colorfully iced cakes covered shelf after shelf.

Yummy.

“Good evening.” Jory responded as he hungrily took in his choices. “I saw your sign and decided we’d like a little snack. Do you happen to know if baby dragons can have sweets?”

He didn’t want to poison his new friend.

The woman’s glance went to Jory’s shoulder, her eyes widening. “I don’t think anything will poison a dragon...”

As if knowing it was the object of discussion, the little creature leapt off Jory’s shoulder and landed on the counter with a thud of scales and a scrabble of claws.

The baker made a squeak.

“It’s all right. It doesn’t mean any harm.”

At least he hoped it didn’t.

One long tongue darted out to snag a small white powdered cookie off a crystal plate.

“I guess we’re taking some cookies.” Jory said in a dry voice.

The lady laughed. “He seems harmless enough.”

Jory picked up the creatures back legs for a moment. “She.”

“What’s her name?”

He shrugged. “She’s not mine. I just rescued her from some kids. Right now I’m calling her Precious. I don’t know if I’m staying so I don’t want to become too attached to her. Is there a homeless dragon shelter?”

What else did people do with found pets?

The baker opened a pink box and slid a half dozen powdered cookies inside before scooting the platter away from the small beast. “You might try the dragon trainer Maurek, he’s my nephew. He keeps track of all the dragons in the kingdom. He’ll want to register her if nothing else. Blood lines are important. Though I can’t say I’ve ever seen a black dragon before.”

“Really?” Jory gave the creature a pat. Gold eyes blinked at him and gave a little purr. “I’ll look Maureck up tomorrow.”

“Congratulations on finding a dragon.” The woman’s smile said she meant the words. “Consider your treats on the house, as a gift.”

Jory returned the smile. “Thank you.”

He watched in amazement as the dragon headed to the next display and swallowed a small tart in one gulp before climbing back up Jory's arm and settling around his shoulders again. Her stomach swelled like a snake after eating its catch except her catch was the wild sugar monster.

"Want me to pack some more of those cookies up?"

Jory shook his head. "I'm not sure if she should be eating sugar. If you could wrap up some of those little mini cakes and is that lemon?" He asked pointing at a flaky pastry with something yellow oozing out.

"Lemon cream."

"Great I'll take that too."

Minutes later he was back on the streets with a fat pink box and a sugar coated dragon. Every few steps powder fell from the tiny paws like little drifts of sugary snow.

"Messy beast." Jory said in gentle tones, brushing his dark jacket with the back of his hand. "Let's sneak back to our room and hope nobody sees us."

## Chapter Seven

When Jory made it back to his room he was surprised to see Val waiting there, in his bed. The older man was asleep but it was obvious he tried to wait up for Jorjah. Despite his note Val must have hoped he'd return to his own room for the night.

Smelling the smoke and mustiness from the club on his skin, Jory set the dragon on a side chair.

"You be good and don't wake up Val." He told her.

*Good.*

The dragon's whispered agreement filtered through his mind.

"That's right be good."

Stripping quickly, Jory removed all his clothes and headed for the bathroom. A strong stream of hot water poured out of the spigot. Pleased that it wasn't a particle beam shower, Jory slid underneath the stream and let out a sigh as muscles bunched from tension released under the warm steamy water. Once he left the bakery he didn't see his brother's soldier again. He didn't know if he found that more reassuring or scary. If father was right he was in danger of assassination. The fact that Brill could've taken him in the streets without any witnesses and yet didn't, stood out in his mind.

"Can anyone join?"

Jory let out a startled scream.

"Sorry." Val said with a laugh. His large hands stroked Jory's skin sending soothing touches down his spine. "I didn't mean to scare you baby."

Jory's heartbeat settled down as he leaned against the taller man letting those fine hands stroke him.

"Oh, right there." Val dug in his fingers massaging the tension from Jory's back. "I thought you were still asleep."

"I was waiting for you." Val's voice was low and hot making Jory tingle in all the right places, until his lover sniffed his neck. "You've been with another man."

"Yes." Shame filled Jory's body making him lose his erection. How could he cheat on this wonderful man? An apology stuck in his throat. Before he could force it past his lips Val tilted his head back and gave him a hot kiss.

"Good. Then you've fulfilled your requirements. Was there intercourse?"

"No." Jory couldn't face Val. He hid his body and hid against the other man's chest. Part of him still longed for his handsome bar man but the rest of him yearned for the man holding him in his gentle embrace.

Val tilted up his chin forcing him to look him in the eyes. "But he bit you right? It doesn't count unless he bites you." The older man's eyes were wild. For the first time Jory spied the dragon lurking inside.

"Yes, he bit me."

The tension building in his lover vanished. "Good." He received a soft kiss, a mere brush of lips against lips. "It's the bite that matters. And registration. Did you get his registration number?"

Damn. Jory shook his head. "I forgot."

Val frowned. "You can cross check tomorrow. He'll register you and it will appear next to your name. What was his name?"

"Rai."

Val's fingers bit into his arms.

"Ouch."

Val jerked his hands away. "Sorry." He stepped forward and wrapped Jory back in his arms. "I didn't mean to hurt you. I just didn't expect that name. I'll add his name for you tomorrow, I know his code."

Jory looked up. "Did you have sex with him too?"

Val laughed. "No my jealous one. Rai and I have never had any sexual encounter but we grew up together and I know his code."



Jory let the rest of his stress drain away beneath Val's expert touch. Wrapped in the older man's arms he felt everything was good in the universe. Gone were the worries about mating, the only thing that mattered was the kind man with the hot body pressed against his. Maybe father was right he just needed to get away to find his forever mate.

"Turn and face the wall. I have to reclaim you."

Jory knew it was Val's dragon reclaiming his mate. He could see it lurking behind those sparkling green eyes.

Val licked the water off of Jory's neck sending shivers down his spine.

"Who else are you going to sex with?" Jory couldn't stop the stab of jealousy no matter how much he knew it wasn't fair.

"Oh, sweetheart." Val said kissing his cheek. "Only first timers need to have sex with more than one. I won't touch another but you until the god binds us."

Jory shared the one thing he was worried about. "But what if he doesn't?"

Val cupped the back of his head and turned Jory just enough to place a bone melting kiss on his lips. "He will. For the first time I know what it means to find your soul mate."

Ignoring the little voice in his head that told him there were so many ways this could go wrong, Jory let himself be persuaded by his large lover.

Val's long fingers traced Jory's hole until he thought he would go mad with anticipation.

"Please Val. Fuck me."

"Did you enjoy him?"

Jory nodded. Val might not like the answer but he wasn't going to start their relationship with lies.

"What did you do?"

"Sucked him off."

"And he let you leave?"

Jory's laugh broke when Val shoved his way inside in one motion.

"Ahhh." Only his instant healing prevented him from feeling pain.

"Sorry, Treasure." Val said his voice heavy with guilt. "I can't hold back."

Large hands pinned his hips as his lover plunged in and out of his hole. He barely felt the water dripping from above as his entire world shrank to the connection of flesh against flesh. It only took a few strokes with Val's cock hitting him in just the right way before Jory exploded against the tiles.

"Yeah, that's it. Just like that." A low groan signaled Val's release. Right before he let go, he plunged his teeth into Jory's shoulder making Jory's cock pulse out the remaining cream. He slowly pulled out and turned Jory around to press their lips together. "You are mine and no god or goddess will tear us apart."

His energy sapped from the events of the day, Jory let his lover pull him out of the shower and stayed still while Val turned off the water and dried him.

"Come on, Treasure. Off to bed. You've had a long day and there are events to attend tomorrow."

Jory let Val pull him into the next room. He glanced around for the dragon. "What did you do to Precious?"

"Who?" Val turned to look at him.

"The dragon."

"What dragon?"

"I found a baby dragon today. I was going to take her to someone named Maureck tomorrow to see if I can find her a home."

Val stopped and took Jory's face in his large hands. "You must've been dreaming. There's no such thing as a black dragon."

Jory jerked away from the other man's touch. "Yes there is." Looking around he saw the window was cracked open a bit. "Maybe she went out there." He opened the window further but didn't see anything in the darkness of the night.

“Come back to bed, Jorah. Maybe she’ll be here in the morning.” Jory looked back to see his lover standing with his hand out. He wasn’t convinced that Val really believed him but he was willing to let it go in the interest of peace.

He let the larger man pull him into his arms and settle him in bed. Snuggling down he let the exhaustion take him away.

## Chapter Eight

Something was scratching his skin. At his first twinge of awareness, Jory felt something hard settle on the middle of his stomach, and a low vibration rumble against his skin.

Memories of the day before filtered into his subconscious as he blinked awake. Never a man who woke easily it took Jory a moment to identify the scaly black creature curled on his stomach.

“Morning, Precious.”

Precious gave a sweet trill. Wide golden eyes stared at him as if willing him to wake up.

Looking over he found he was all alone in the big bed. A piece of paper lay on the pillow beside him.

My Treasure,  
Had to get some things done. I'll meet you for midday meal. Stay out of trouble.  
Yours,  
Val

Jory slid on his pants from the day before. “I’m going to call Britson and see if my clothes are on the way and then we’re going to talk to someone about how to find you a proper owner.”

Jory’s bedroom door swung open, Z striding in with easy familiarity carrying a tray of domes plates. “Jory you missed all the excitement last night. I heard the king came and grabbed some guy. It was on the daily gossip that he might have found his mate.” Z’s eyes were speculative as they settled on Jory’s blanket covered body.

Precious hissed, a splat of green viscous fluid flew through the air and landed on the carpet in front of Z. A sizzling sound filled the room along with smell of something burning, Jory leaned over to see a hole in the carpet.

“Ahh.” Z screamed. He set the tray down on the side table with a heavy thud.

“Sorry Z, I didn’t know she’d attack.”

Precious flew up, curling across Jory’s shoulder as he sat up in bed, a low vibrating hum rumbling from the small body. This time he knew she wasn’t purring she was warning.

Z’s face gained some of its former color as he stared at the black dragon in astonishment. “When did you get a fucking dragon?”

“When I left the bar yesterday, I found her in the alley.”

“You were supposed to get laid not pick up a pet.” Z said, his face alit with curiosity. “Wild dragons are insanely rare. How did you get your hands on one?”

Jory told him the story of their meeting. Z stood there with his jaw dropping open. “It’s fate. You were meant to be her dragon owner. I’ve never even heard of a black dragon. I wonder if she does flame?”

Jory shrugged. “She hasn’t so far.”

“On another topic, how was that man you were with last night? I didn’t get a good look at him, who was he?”

Jory blushed. “His name was Rai, he was amazing. But so is Val. I don’t know who I’d rather have as my mate. But I have a feeling it will be one of them.” Damn he hated it when his father was right. He might actually have found his mate.

Z’s eyes were hooded as he examined his friend. “Be careful Jory, dragonkin get a little possessive when mates are involved. During mating season we all go a little nuts.” Z gave him a wry smile.

“Yeah, in one moment Val said he was glad I finished my qualifications and in the next he wanted to hunt the guy down. How did your night go after I left? Was he the one?”

With a sigh Z settled in a guest chair. He lifted the dome off one dish and picked up a piece of toast. “No.” Z didn’t look up as he continued to pull apart the bread. “He wasn’t in the mate hunt he just wanted to go and dance.”

The two men locked gazes for a moment before bursting into laughter. Tears rolled down Z’s cheeks as he tried to catch his breath.

“He was so bad at it.” He giggled.

Jory laughed along with him. It had been a while since he'd let responsibilities go and just have a laugh with a friend. He drank down some juice to moisten his throat.

A chirp from Precious reminded him of his goals for the day.

"Shit. I have to call Britson. I was told that Maureck might be able to find Precious a good home?"

"Maureck would be a good one to see." Z said with a nod. "He's in charge of the dragon grounds. He'll be able to tell you what to do."

"Excellent. Val said he'd meet me for midday meal so I've got to get going."

"Don't forget to register your mating."

"Val said he'd do it. I think he's anxious to have it registered so I don't have sex with anyone else." Jory set Precious on the bed and turned to go towards the bathroom to brush his teeth.

"I've got duties to perform. I'll catch up with you later. Enjoy your meal."

"Thanks Z and thank you for bringing me breakfast."

"No problem. I wanted to hear your news."

Jory laughed and closed the door behind him.

Speaking of news. After making sure the door was secure, Jory pulled out his communicator and punched in the special code.

A series of beeps announced his connection. The front of the communicator slid open and Jory was looking into the face of his good friend Zar.

"Greetings, my prince." Zar said with his trademark smile. An intergalactic pirate, Zar was famous for hijacking slaver ships and relieving smugglers of their goods. What most people didn't know was that he worked for Jory

"Greetings, my pirate. Uncle is going to be smuggling goods in the Villio quarter next month. There will be three ships with various goods, some slaves, some cash and a large amount of jewels from the Marl galaxy. He is also stepping up security so you'll need to be careful."

"I like your new outfit," the pirate leered at Jory's naked chest.

Jory laughed. "I'm waiting for my clothes. They should arrive soon. And if you want some of this you'll have to wait in line. Right now I'm the prize between two dragonkin who both want me to be their mate."

"Pick carefully Joriah." Said Zar, his face uncharacteristically serious. "I'd hate for you to be bound to the wrong mate."

"I will, my friend. You watch out for pirates."

Zar laughed. "I will at that."

\* \* \*

Lila came soon after he hung up.

A quick glance around showed Precious was missing again. The window was propped open. If she didn't show up when it was time to go he'd have to go to the dragonkeeper later.

Lila gave him a wicked smile. "Don't let me interrupt. I believe you were only halfway to naked."

Jory smiled back until he saw her face. Careful makeup application hid a lot but he could see the new bruises beneath the powder.

Fury filled him at the thought of this delicate woman being beaten. "Who touched you?"

Lila's smile faded. "I don't know what you're talking about. Come look at your new clothes."

Jory placed his hands on Lila's shoulders, fury building when she flinched at his touch. "Tell me." He said in a gentler voice.

"I didn't have his food ready." She sobbed, her pretty hands twisting together. "He told me over and over that when he comes home he likes to have his food hot. But did I listen?" Her shiny hair bounced as she shook her head. "If I wasn't so stupid he wouldn't have to hurt me."

Her violet eyes were wide and sincere.

Jory burned, anger tearing up his insides. He lowered his eyes so she didn't see his expression when he asked, "What is your boyfriend's name?"

"Wesland. He's one of the king's soldiers." She whispered, her voice filled with fear. "But he always says he's sorry." Her hands shook as Jory carefully took them in his own and gave them a gentle squeeze.

She gave a broken laugh. "He said he was sorry and sent me a dozen of my favorite flowers, daylight roses."

"How nice." He hoped his voice had the right level of warmth. He didn't want to make her any more nervous. It took her a lot of courage to admit to the abuse. Jory knew her boyfriend's type.

"Are there any other injuries?"

Lila lifted her shirt to expose her stomach. Ugly marks crisscrossed her pale flesh. They looked like whip marks. Keeping his voice steady, Jory told her she needed to go see a healer. "Those could get infected."

Lila nodded. "Try on your clothes and send back any you don't like. Britson said he'd just bill you for the ones you kept."

"Will do." Jory kept his eyes averted so she couldn't see his rage. He escorted her out making sure she agreed to go see a healer, without alerting her to his level of anger. There was nothing he hated more than to see people bullied. With hands shaking with rage, Jory put on his new dragon hide pants, a blue mesh shirt made out of something metallic and a pair of buttery soft boots with steel tips that made his previous ones look like dumpster rejects. Before leaving his room he slid his knives into their custom sheathes and covered them with his long jacket.

It was time to give Wesland a visit.

He was confident his little dragon would find him when she was ready.

\* \* \*

It only took two stops for directions and three gentle rejections of dates to find the weapons training area.

He stopped the first soldier he found.

"I'm looking for Wesland."

The man gave Jory a curious glance but Jory offered no explanation. After a moment of silence he pointed towards a group of soldiers practicing maneuvers.

"The one in blue with the silver bracelet."

Jory gave him a nod. "Thanks."

As he got closer Jory saw why Lila liked the guy. Wesland was attractive in a kick your ass kind of way with long black hair, and a soldier's build. But handsomeness didn't cover the flash of cruelty that Jory saw in the other man's eyes when he slammed his fist into his opponent's face without warning.

Jory waited to see if the other man was going to get back up. When it looked like Wesland's opponent was down for the count, he approached.

"Are you Wesland?" Jory asked for form. He didn't want to pound the wrong person.

Glacial blue eyes look him up and down before sneering. "What's it to you?"

"This." Using the advantage of surprise, Jory slammed his fist in the other man's face watching with no emotion as the powerful body hit the ground with a resounding thud. There was no movement from the other warriors to protect their comrade.

Jory ignored them as he slammed the steel pointed toe of his new boots into the ribs of the bastard on the ground. The crunch gave him a bit of satisfaction as did the man's screams.

Before Wesland could move Jory whipped out his knives placing one to the man's neck; the other to his balls. With his smoothest tone, the one he used to deal with politicians, Jory laid down the law.

"If I ever find out that you've hurt that pretty girlfriend of yours again they'll never find where I buried all the pieces."

Jory felt the fear oozing from the man beneath his blade. The large body beneath him trembled. He let the trembling vibrate along his knife. "You'll remember that won't you Wes?"

"Y-y-yes."

"Good because Lila is a friend of mine and I look out for my friends."

Rage was still pulsing through Jorah even with the man cowering at his feet. It didn't stop the fact that his pretty friend lived in terror of this asshole. There was a soft thump and a tongue licked his cheek.

"Hello Precious."

*Who.*

"This is Wesland, he beat my friend Lila." Jory said in his calmest voice while inside he was still shaking with rage. "He didn't think she waited on him hand and foot enough. Do you think she'd still want him if I carved him into little pieces?"

Wesland shook beneath Jory's knife leaving a trail of blood behind.

"Careful. We'd hate it if you slit your own throat."

He wondered how long it would take for the other soldiers to step in. He was kind of surprised they didn't already. It proved to him that Lila wasn't the only one who Wesland was a jerk towards.

Wesland shivered as he saw the sleek black head appearing over Jory's shoulder. The dragon slid her cheek across Jory's like an affectionate cat.

"She spits acid." He told Wes with great enjoyment.

*Kill?*

"No, I don't think you should kill him. He just needs a lesson."

Wesland shook so much that Jory lifted the knife a bit so the man didn't slice his own neck.

"Is there a problem, my love?" Rai's hand rubbed Jory's back, his breath soft against his ear.

"I don't like people who prey on those weaker than them." He said through clenched teeth. "This soldier of yours likes to hurt his pretty girlfriend. She had bloody whip marks across her stomach where he beat her."

Rai's hand continued its soothing circular motion. "Shhh. We'll find him a new place to be so you don't have to see him any more and he won't hurt his girlfriend."

"Far away." Jory's voice was firm.

"Yes, far away. I think the southern kingdom needs a new guard."

"Or I could just let Precious have him. We can see the effect a good acid spray on his pretty face."

Rai's hand continued to rub Jory's back. "Easy love. The part of the kingdom I'll send him to has nothing but sand and baby dragons."

Yes, that would do.

That loving hand continued to stroke him. He felt his anger slide back beneath the surface, sinking back into his skin.

"That's it sweetheart, let it go. We'll have Wesland reassigned. No need to kill him."

Jory straightened, sliding the knives back into their sheaths in a casual graceful motion.

He turned to look into Rai's concerned eyes. "You'll have him reassigned?"

The king nodded.

"Okay."

\* \* \*

Raistan motioned towards a passing servant. "Have Jorlah taken back to my quarters and get him a hot bath to ease him." He looked at the deadly dragon on his lover's shoulder with a cautious respect. "Make sure you get something to feed his dragon."

Like a docile puppy, Jory let the steward take him away and Rai took the first deep breath he had since he came to find his delicate lover seconds away from carving up a man three times his size.

"What the fuck happened here?" Fear for Jory made his voice sharp. If anything happened to his mate he wouldn't be responsible for the number of men he killed.

Tilden, his master guard, stepped forward. "Your man saw Lila battered up." The warrior's eyes followed Jory's progress across the field before giving a disdainful glance at the man on the ground. "He punched Wesland in the face, crushed his ribs and threatened to cut him into little bits if he ever found she was hurt again. That man may be small but he sure kicks ass."

Raistan saw there was an awed respect in the warrior's eyes for the slim man.

"That man is my mate so anyone thinking about revenge, think twice. I'll kill to protect him."

Looking at the warrior gasping on the ground he felt a small burst of pride. His mate may be slight but he was a fighter.

After arranging to reassign Wesland and get him to a healer, he headed to his suite to find his lover.

Who wasn't there.

A quick glance around found the suite completely empty. Pushing the button on the com he paged his steward.

"Where's Jory?"

"Who, your highness?"

"Jorlah, pretty blond with amazing silver-blue eyes?"

The servant on the screen shook his head. "No one came here, your highness."

Fear took over.

Rai dialed Val's number on his comlink.

"Stay away from my mate." Val growled, his picture showing up on the screen.

"You have him then?"

Val's green eyes looked stricken. "What do you mean I have him then? Where is he? He was supposed to meet me for midmeal."

"He decided to take a break and beat up Wesland first. I sent him back to the room with that dragon of his to calm down."

A proud smile covered Val's face. "He pounded Wesland? I always thought that bastard needed a good ass-kicking."

"But now Jory's missing."

"Don't panic, my mate is around here somewhere."

Rai growled. "We'll have this out eventually, Val, but we need to find him first."

"Agreed. I'll meet you at his room."

"I'm going to retrace his steps."

The two men hung up and Rai ran. Once outside Rai closed his eyes and focused on being a dragon. Imagining his green scales, golden eyes and massive body the king felt the transition take over. Thrashing his tail he put his nose to the ground and scented for Jorlah. After last night, the beautiful blond's smell was imprinted on his soul.

With a low growl he leapt into the air to get a better view. A loud cry caught his attention. The little dragon was circling down below. Zeroing in on the little creature, Rai landed with a loud thump shaking the earth with his impact.

Jory lay on the ground still as death. A quick glance found the servant lying dead beside him his brain splattered on the ground.

Rai's transformation back to his human form was his fastest ever. Sobbing he threw himself down beside Jorlah cradling the slim form in his arms. Laser holes riddled his body. With clumsy fingers he reached for his communicator.

“Val, get a doctor. I’m bringing Joriah in.”



## Chapter Nine

Jory woke up to soft sheets and soothing music. Someone was singing a sweet lullaby in a gravelly voice. It didn't suit the voice but it was sweet none the less. His head pounded like a drumbeat and his mouth was so dry it made the dragon sands look positively swampy.

He cautiously opened one eye. Val sat beside him singing in his rough voice. Someone needed singing lessons but he couldn't stop the smile from his lips as he looked at his lover.

"Are you okay love?" He whispered. His throat didn't allow him to speak too loud.

"Baby, you're awake." A joyful smile crossed the darker man's face. He vanished then returned with a cup and a straw. "Try some juice."

Val's strong arm supported him so Jory could sit up and take a drink. "You could come in here and keep me company." Jory said after a couple of sips.

Val sat back easing Jory down. When he turned Jory saw that Val's eyes looked haunted.

"We almost lost you love." Jory saw Val's throat convulse and those beautiful green eyes gleamed with moisture. "You were shot six times by a point blank laser gun. Shanl, the servant with you is dead. Who is after you, my Treasure? Tell us and we'll make sure they die."

With slow careful motions Jory moved each muscle group to see if anything was broken. Pleased that his body felt healed he pushed himself into a sitting position.

"Careful baby." That wonderful arm wrapped around him again.

Feigning weakness, Jory leaned against Val. Sliding his head along the muscular arm he rested it on his lover's shoulder and in a fast lunge latched onto that sexy neck with the idea it was best to distract than to share the truth and really freak him out.

"Baby." Val screamed his body convulsing.

"I see he's feeling better." Rai's dry voice surprised Jory into looking up.

Rai stripped and slid into the bed with Jory. His fingers stroked across his lover's body reassuring himself that the man was all better.

"Anything hurting?"

"No, Rai. I feel fine. If you move your hand a little lower you can tell just how fine."

He heard Val laugh along with him and he met those green eyes over Jory's shoulder as he lowered his hand. "He does feel all better Val maybe you should come and check for yourself."

"With two lovers you wouldn't think I'd have to beg to be fucked." The melodious voice whimpered.

Rai leaned down and gave him a soft kiss.

"Now rest. When you get up it will be time to discuss who might want you dead."

Jory sighed. "I don't have to rest in order to tell you that. It's my brother."

The two royals exchanged a look. "Why would your brother want you dead?" Rai asked in a soft voice. His mate looked so fragile and the memory of him bleeding out on the street was still fresh in his mind.

"My father is the High Galactic King Rufeus Eprion. It is rumored that my brother Prince Detrius wants me dead so that I won't be in line for the throne."

The pair stared at them for a long while.

"You're King Eprion's son?"

Jory nodded. "I didn't tell you because of the mating hunt rules, but since the assassin said he was from my brother I thought I'd share."

Fury filled the men's faces. "I think we should trap him." Val said.

“Indeed. And I know just the way.”

“How?” Jory asked. He didn’t know any way to get his brother here.

“Well, we’ll want to meet the family before the wedding?”

“Wedding?” Jory said weakly.

“I’ve been studying Talivvian marriage practices.” Val said. “It says for a mating to be official you need a wedding.”

Jory sat up. “And what made you think I was Talivvian?”

Val gave a smile. “Let’s just say I did a little research while you were ill.”

“You both knew who I was.” Jory felt a cold chill cover his body.

Val slid onto the opposite of the bed. “Only after you were shot, Treasure. Until then we had no idea.”

Jory sighed. “All right I’ll get married but now we have to wait until the marks come in and see which of you I belong to.”

## Chapter Ten

Jory was nervous. There was no way to hide it as he exchanged small smiles with the others in the group. Z walked up and slapped him on the back. "Today's the big day. Did you look at your mark before coming?"

"I was too nervous." Jory said shaking his head.

"Can I look?"

"No." a soft hiss alerted Z to Precious' presence on Jory's shoulder.

"I swear that little beast goes invisible."

Jory laughed but in the back of his mind he did wonder.

There was a rise in volume of the crowd when Rai walked in with a man he'd never seen before. The similarity of features told him it was probably a relative of Rai's.

"Good morning everyone. I am letting my brother Lewn do the announcements this morning because I have a mate to claim."

Without another word Rai stripped off his shirt and turned his back to the crowd. A black dragon sprawled across his back, a perfect image of Precious.

The crowd applauded wildly.

"As you can see, our king has found his mate." Lewn said into a microphone. "Now brother would you like to announce who your mate bond is with?"

Jory looked hopelessly at Val. Pain ripped through his chest at the thought of leaving the gorgeous man alone.

"Just one moment." Val's voice sounded behind him. "I also claim Jory as my mate."

With one smooth motion Val stripped off his shirt and turned his back towards the audience exposing an identical dragon to the one on Rai's back. Another image of Precious.

Rai scowled. "Jory, come up here."

With a sigh he walked up to the podium, he could feel Val's stare as a physical presence on his body.

"Strip." Rai ordered.

Jory looked down at the sea of people standing around. He glanced back at Val who climbed up the stairs to join him.

"Go ahead."

Taking a deep breath, Jory stripped off his shirt and turned around for everyone to see. "What's on my back?"

He was almost afraid to ask. Val was like a need in his gut but another part of him would feel hollow if he lost Rai.

There was a long silence where no one spoke.

"What's on my back?" Jory demanded.

Lewn came around as the other two men just stared. "You have them both. A green dragon for Rai and a blue dragon for Valer. I've only heard of triple matings in storybooks." Lewn gave him a wide smile. "Congratulations brother."

"Great just what I need, another brother." Jory said in a dry tone.

Only Rai and Val caught the joke and started laughing breaking the tension that rose up.

"As I was saying," Rai went on as if Jory heard the first part, "Jorah is now bound to both myself and Lord Klarian making him my official consort and Val's registered mate."

"Consort?"

This was bad. This was so bad Jory didn't know how to respond. His father was going to be way too happy about this.

"Yes." Rai walked up to him and placed a long hot kiss on his lips.

Forgetting his concerns, forgetting his audience, forgetting his name, Jory gave himself up to the large dragonman.

"I am king and you are my king-consort and Val's duke-consort. You are now the most important person in my kingdom."

"Shit."

Pulling out of his thoughts he looked up at two very angry men.

“What?”

“You could at least pretend to be happy about it.”

Jory swallowed the lump in his throat. “Sorry.”

“You have to present your dragon.” Lewn said.

“What about them?”

Lewn shrugged. “Everyone knows what their dragons look like. But we don’t know about it.” He pointed at the dragon on Jory’s shoulder.

“Her.”

Val and Rai gave him a disbelieving look.

Rai stroked his head like petting an ignorant child. Jory resisted the urge to bite him.

An older woman walked up the stage, her bearing regal and her eyes cold.

Jory swallowed. For the first time he was nervous. If he didn’t miss his guess this was Rai’s mother. With cautious motions so not to startle the little beast, Jory lifted the dragon off of his shoulder and placed her on the table. She stood there like a statue so the others could check for similarities.

Lewn examined her.

“Thank you Precious.” Jory said patting the beast on the head.

“Was that what you wanted?”

“That will do. Matehood is official.” Frest squeaked out.

“Can I hold her?” There was a look of awe in Rai’s eyes as he stared at the black dragon.

“I’ll ask but if she doesn’t want to, don’t push. She spits acid.”

“Acid and fire.” The queen gave a wide smile, Jory was certain the unusual expression could crack the queen’s face. “The pretty man found a god-bedamned queen.” She pinned him with eyes so similar to his lover’s it was unnerving. “Any man who can call a queen is worthy of my son. I give my blessing.”

“Um. Thank you.” He wasn’t proud that it sounded more like a question than a true statement. After all he wasn’t sure he wanted both a king and a duke as his mates. His father would have way too much fun with that. Maybe he could try again and get a foot soldier or someone who didn’t have any royal blood.

This is an accident waiting to happen.

“So what do we do now?”

The men were glaring at each other, low growls rising as they tried to glare each other down.

Breaking between the men the queen took him by the arm. “Why don’t you come with me dear and we can discuss what you need to wear for the crowning ceremony and my son tells me there is also going to be a wedding with your family. How exciting. I’ve never been to a wedding.”

“Crowning ceremony?”

He was afraid from the look she gave him that he sounded as appalled as he felt.

“Yes, you will be a co-king and a co-duke you must look your best. She scanned Jory’s outfit. Though you seem to have a nice style of your own.”

“Can’t I just have Britson make me something?” Wow he sounded whiny. His mother would have kicked his ass.

Surely that would be the easiest. It wasn’t that Jory didn’t know what looked good on him but he’d always had someone else dress him.

“Britson?” The queen gave another look at his outfit. “You’ve only been in town for a week and you already have someone dressing you.” She slid an arm through Jory’s. “Yes, I think you will do very well.”

“Where do you come from, dear?”

Jory was about to give a vague reply when his mates came to his rescue.

“There you are, Treasure.” Val said coming around the corner. With a smooth motion he disengaged Jory from the queen and slid his arm around Jory’s waist.

The king was fast behind him and frowned when he saw Val's position. "Yes mother, we barely have him claimed and you stole him already."

"I thought Joriah would like to decide what he's going to wear for his crowning."

"I doubt he gave it much thought mother." Rai gave Jory a familiar smile. "After all he'll look fabulous in anything."

"Or out of anything." Val whispered in his ear. Jory shivered from the bumps that rippled down his arms. He could feel the blush growing on his cheeks.

"I just wanted to get to know my new son better." The queen said. Oh, she did innocence really well. Jory'd keep a close eye on her. One of his sisters had the same way about her.

"You'll have plenty of time to talk to him later." Rai said giving his mother a kiss on the cheek.

"And with that we'll take our leave." Val said sweeping Jory down the hall with the king fast on their heels. "You're lucky, my parents are dead."

\* \* \*

Jory woke up to silk sheets and warm bodies on either side of him. The light in the room was bright and natural. It was the morning after his official mating and it still hadn't sunk in that he was now responsible for two other people.

Shit. He had to get ready for a wedding and take care of his brother. Protect his mates.

He tried to jerk up but two sets of hands held on, settling him back down.

"Shhh sweet." From Val.

"Calm down love." Raistan said petting him in long sensuous strokes.

"Gotta get up and get things ready for the wedding there are traditions to follow things to do."

"Do you want his mouth or his ass?" The king asked Val.

"Is no one listening to me?" Jory asked, his ire leaving in a rush as Val's hot, hot mouth moved lower licking his nipples. He looked up into Jory's eyes, intense green eyes bright with heat. "I want his cock."

With little prelude Jory felt his balls licked and then his entire dick was swallowed. Screaming he bucked under the intensity.

"I think I'll just wait my turn." Raistan kissed Jory with a single-minded intensity. The combination of two hot mouths on either end was too much. Jory came with strangled moan.

He hoped these rooms were sound proofed.

Val slid back up his body, warm skin wrapping him in a cocoon.

He nudged Rai out of the way to take a kiss.

"What can I do for you?" He asked Val his body loose and boneless.

"Nothing sweet, I came when you did. I'm going to take a bath and leave you to the king." He gave Raistan a look that Jory couldn't decipher, before sliding out of the bed.

When Rai slid across him he didn't care.

"Did you want my mouth or my ass?"

"Your ass if you aren't too sore from last night."

The king's hand brushed across his face an oddly gentle gesture for a man who looked born to violence.

Jory wiggled experimentally. "I'm good."

"On your stomach. I want to see my dragon while I'm inside you."

Willingly he flipped on his stomach. He loved sex from behind with a larger body covering his back. Long fingers slid inside him preparing the way for a rougher ride.

"Go ahead darlin' I'll be fine."

Taking him at his word, the king slid in until his balls slapped the bottom of Jory's ass. Jory let out a groan of need, of want, of desire.

Raiston slid out slowly until Jory was certain he felt every ridge of the other man's cock. Need shivered up his spine sending bumps of desire to coat his skin.

"Come on baby, give it to me, make me yours." Jory panted.

He could almost hear the snapping of the king's control. In and out, powerful bursts of rhythm until the king's next movement became as essential to life as his next heartbeat.

Time had no meaning until a strong pair of calloused hands gripped his face and kissed him, sending Jory careening over the edge.

While his vision was clearing he felt Rai grunt as he came.

"That was so hot." Val said placing another kiss on Jory's lax lips.

"Mmm." He responded. His body too relaxed to do anything. "Next time you can join."

The duke laughed as he pressed a kiss to Jorah's cheek. There's something you should know baby. You and I are mates and you and Rai are mates but Rai and I will never be mates. The most you can hope for is that we don't kill each other."

A chill filled Jory's soul as he turned to the king. Rai looked him directly in the eye. "He's right my sweet. We'll tolerate each other for your sake but we'll never be lovers. There's no sexual connection between us."

That made Jory inexplicably sad. Blinking back tears he slid out of the bed and away from the men. "I'm going to take a shower." He said not looking at either man.

When he came back out Rai was gone. Val stood up off the bed and gave him a soft kiss. "Don't go anywhere without your guards." He said before walking out the door himself.

## Chapter Eleven

Jory stepped out of Rai's set of rooms. Over the past few days he'd taken turns going from Rai's bed to Val's even though they all ended up in the same bed it was a territorial thing between the two dragonkin. Jory was ready to knock out a few walls and make an entire new suite.

He made a note to talk to them about it later.

"Do any of you know where Rai went?"

The tall lanky one nodded and pointed to the left. "He had a meeting."

Excellent. Jory couldn't stop the smile on his face even though he wasn't quite in the clear. "And Val?" Once again tall and skinny spoke. "I saw him follow Rai."

"Perfect."

With a smile Jory headed right only to be pulled back by a large hand on his shoulder.

He jerked away. "Don't touch me." Jory snarled. Since mating it felt wrong to let others not his mate or related to have physical contact with him.

The soldier held his hands up watching Jory warily. "I was just wondering why you cared where they went."

"Well... Val said if I wandered out without an escort he was going to tie me up and spank my ass and Rai said I should have an escort where ever I go to prevent stealing." Jory laughed. As if anyone would want to steal him. "Since they both deserted me to my own devices I'm going to explore. I only have one week before the wedding and my mating gifts aren't ready."

"We'll go with you." The tall one's voice was as hard as his brown eyes.

"Forget it. I don't need babysitting. I'm just going to walk around. Look for the local temple, leave an offering and find my mate gifts."

"I'm not going to report to the king that I let you wander unescorted. I'm Revyn this is Mal and Trius. We will be your escort."

Jory puffed up in anger. "I doubt I need that much escorting." Really did they think he was going to make off with the royal serving ware?

All three guards followed him.

Sighing, Jory ignored them.

The smooth castle walls were like an endless forest. He was about to ask his silent cadre for directions when he saw a break and went for it.

Colors. The bright colors were almost blinding compared to the bright cool colors of the castle. Smiling Jory dived into the crowds, trusting his guards would follow or not.

It was important that he follow traditions. In his mother's culture you always provided your mates with three things, a blanket to warm them and show concern for their comfort, a weapon, to show confidence in their ability to protect the family and a piece of jewelry to show they were cherished and belonged.

The vendors called to him from the sidelines, a hawker of blankets showed brilliant swathes weaved into intricate designs. Perfect. With a flicker towards the guards Jory entered the booth.

"Can I interest you in something sir?" The dark-skinned man asked with a flash of blinding white teeth, cunning eyes as they took in Jory's clothes.

Jory smirked back. He could afford the man's price, any price but what fun is that.

Pretending indifference, Jory looked over the wares thinking of his lovers. Remembering the luxury of Val's chambers Jory picked out an exquisite red blanket with a dragon picked out in black. The material had a sensuous feel reminding him of his enthralling lover and the dragon reminded him of Precious. He also found a silver colored one again with a black dragon that had the feel of Rai to his questing fingers.

"I like these." He told the hovering salesman. "I want these for my mates."

"Excellent choices." The other man's eyes were warm and sincere as only a dedicated sales man could be. Jory was pleased to note the man didn't balk when he mentioned more than one mate until he realized the man probably thought he was hedging his bets.

After twenty minutes of haggling, Jory ended up paying a lot less than advertised but enough that the salesman made a comfortable profit. The blanket merchant wrapped them in a pretty wrapping and arranged for delivery. "Your men will like these very much."

"Yes I believe they will."

Pleased with his purchase, Jory went through the other stalls. Seeking specific gifts it took him a while before his eyes lit on a blacksmith stand. Hanging from a hook was a series of throwing knives.

Excited Jory weaved through the crowds to examine the weapons. They looked even better up close.

"Can I help you, sir?"

Jory turned to see a man that would challenge his new guards for massiveness. "Yes, I'm looking for mating gifts. My culture demands that one of the gifts I send to my new mates is a new weapon. I need something fine for each of them." Jory flashed his black payment band. "Money isn't a problem but quality is."

The blacksmith leered at him. "Are you sure you don't want to dump your mates and try out a real man?"

Mal, Revyn and Trius growled behind him. Jory laughed.

Revyn stepped forward brushing Jory behind him. "Use more respect this man is mated to both Duke Klarian and King Raiston."

Sensing danger, Precious popped back onto Jory's shoulder and gave a low hiss. The guards and the blacksmith froze.

"He has a queen dragon?" The blacksmith asked in a barely heard whisper.

"I don't want to cause any trouble." Jory said feeling the tension in the room escalate. "But I think all you guards should step back. Precious is sweet but I've seen what she does when she thinks I'm threatened and I don't really want to have to explain acid burns on four people."

With a final glare at the blacksmith the guards left the stand.

Jory gave the other man a friendly smile but it went unheeded. The blacksmith had a wary eye on his dragon.

"Listen," Jory said with a heavy sigh. "Part of my mating bonding is I have to provide a weapon for each of my mates."

"How many are we talking about?"

"Two."

"Are your mates really Lord Klarian and the king?"

"Yes, do you know them or do I need to describe them?"

The blacksmith paled. "Oh I know them." His sharp eyes scanned his stock.

"I thought of a sword for Rai and a new set of throwing knives for Val."

Nodding the blacksmith headed for his stand of swords. His hand reached out for a flashy one with a dragon on the front.

"Not that one."

The blacksmith eyed him with a little more respect. Jory didn't know why people took one look at him and assumed he'd want the flashy one. "Which one then? You choose."

Jory walked over to the set and picked them up randomly. He let his senses sink into the various weapons imagining them in his lover's hands. A plain sword with a braided leather handle sang when he waved it around. "I'll take this one."

"I guess you're more than a pretty face with a deadly dragon."

"I guess I am."

The blacksmith waved his hands towards the display of throwing knives tilting an inquiring brow.

"I'll take the jeweled set in the dark brown leather."

He got a wide smile.



Okay sometimes he did go after the pretty.

Haggling over the price took only a few moments.

The blacksmith wrapped up each weapon separately and sent them by messenger to the castle.

Jory left the stand pleased he had two out of three of his mating gifts and directions to a talented jeweler.

“Are we done?” Mal asked.

“Nope. We still need a jeweler.” Ignoring the groans from his guards Jory sauntered through the streets following the directions he was given until he reached a small brick building with a discreet sign announcing it was a jeweler.

Walking inside Jory tried not to chuckle when his three guards lumbered in behind him looking extremely uncomfortable. Poor dears. With a bit of nostalgia Jory missed his own people. His lead soldier, Sandhurst, would never look discomfited no matter where Jory dragged him. He’d tried in the past and even the gay brothel he took his very straight guard to didn’t crack the man’s stoic façade.

“How may I help you sir?” An elegant man in a beautiful pearl grey suit approached. His smooth white hair lay in well cut layers giving him a highly polished look that fit his brilliant surroundings.

“I need mating gifts.”

A frown marred the man’s smooth brow for a moment. “Are you Talivvian?”

“Yes.” Jory almost shouted in excitement. “Finally someone who understands.”

“I am Stanvire. My family has been in this business for three hundred years we have dealt with most types. Now who is your mate?”

Jory blushed. He hoped it got easier with time.

“King Raiston and Lord Klarian are my mates.”

If Stanvire was coolly friendly before he was glowing with pleasure now. “I’m sure we can do something to help you. What type of gift are you looking for?”

“Rings. I want to have three rings designed that have three interlocking dragons along the band.” The thought of the three of them wearing matching rings gave him a giddy warmth. Finally he was going to have the lifetime relationship he was yearning for.

After extensive discussion and some preliminary sketches, Jory left the design in the hands of the jeweler. Despite his uptight appearance Stanvire had an ingenious mind and some brilliant ideas of how to color each dragon to match his two mates natural dragon color.

“What about your braids?”

Wow Stanvire really did now his stuff. “I need green and blue.”

Nodding the jeweler reached behind the counter and came out with some stones that sparkled in the light.

“Perfect.” They haggled briefly but Jory’s heart wasn’t in it. He was too excited about finding exactly what he wanted. He left the building with a receipt for the rings and a handful of stones.

After a quick stop at a hair stylist Jory’s hair was chin length with two braids on the right side of his head that sparkled with the stones as he moved.

Smiling he didn’t even fuss when the soldiers immediately surrounded him after he exited the stylist or even when they shook their head at his new cut.

## Chapter Twelve

Four soldiers surrounded Jory as he approached the study. Apprehension shivered up his spine as he got closer. The message told him that one of his relatives was at the palace but didn't say which one. This was the first of his relatives to arrive for the wedding.

Rai sent out the invitations and every one of his family members responded that they'd come. Jory would've been pleased if he didn't know for a fact that at least one of them was trying to kill him.

Jory was politely scooted to one side as the bodyguard slipped through the door ahead of him.

It didn't do any good as the one man who could see him without vision picked up his presence.

"Joriah."

"Tor."

Happiness bloomed through his body. With a glad cry he ran past his bodyguard, and leapt lightly into the outstretched arms. "It's been so long." He said, tears prickling in his eyes. Wrapping his arms around the taller, muscular man Jory held on like he would never let go. He felt a soft kiss brush across his head. The scent of home drifted through him as he grabbed onto the one steady person in his life since childhood.

"I missed you." Jory whispered just loud enough that he knew his cousin heard him.

"Would someone like to tell me what the hell is going on." Rai's voice boomed across the room, breaking into Jory's moment of joy.

Looking away from his cousin he glanced behind him to see a look of fury crossing the king's face.

"Rai, come and meet one of my favorite people in the entire universe." He gave Tor another tight hug before kissing each cheek.

A large hand grabbed him from behind, and ripped him out of his cousin's embrace.

"Hey," Jory struggled in the king's arms, "what are you doing?"

The king lifted him with one hand and shook him like a bad puppy. Before he could complain a scream cut the air and Precious swooped down and clawed the king's hand forcing him to release Jory.

"Fuck. Everyone just calm the hell down." Jory shouted. "I don't know what has got you all upset, but you need to stand down before Precious does something that can't be fixed."

Rai spoke through gritted teeth. "I will not stand down while you plaster yourself up against another man."

"What?" A new voice joined the mix.

Great. The duke walked in as Rai was ranting. It was amazing how two such dissimilar men had the same exact expression.

Val stepped between Jory and Tor. "Who is this?" His emerald eyes flared as he took in Tor's elegant form.

"Apparently one of Jory's favorite people." Venom poured from the king's mouth as he spat out the words.

"If you two would let me explain." Jory walked around the duke's tall form, dodging the older man's hand that he put out to block him. Linking his arm with Tor's he brought the other man forward. "This is my cousin Tor."

The tension in the room plummeted with his words.

"I don't kiss my cousin." Rai muttered shooting him a glare.

"He's my second cousin and I only kissed his cheeks."

"You're welcome to kiss whatever you want love." Tor said in a silky voice.

Jory laughed. "Shut up cuz, you're getting me into trouble here."

The duke examined Jory's cousin carefully. "You don't look much like our Joriah."

Tor stepped forward sliding his stick with him as he walked. "We're cousins by marriage." He said in the same silky tones.

Jory admired his cousin. Tor never lost his cool. Being bonded with a space dragon at a young age took away Tor's ability to see like a normal person. To compensate his cousin used a cane and a fleet of servants to get around.

Turning away from his lovers Jory linked his arm through Tor's. "Come with me Tor, we've got tons to catch up on." With a final glare at his lovers, Jory walked away leading his cousin back towards his room.

The duke watched the two men walk off before approaching the king. "What do you think?"

Rai shrugged. "Could be a cousin, there wouldn't be any similarity if they aren't blood related."

"Do you think he's only here for the wedding? What if he plans on dragging our Joriah back home..."

"Then we kill him. No one takes Jory."

The duke nodded. "Agreed."

It was the one thing they both were solid about. Jory was theirs.

\* \* \*

"Tor, what are you doing here?" Jory asked as he closed his bedroom door in his bodyguard's face. "I know you're not here for the wedding you hate these kinds of events."

His cousin settled onto the overstuffed sofa by the door. "Your father was worried. He felt I was the least offensive person to check on you. I'm sort of the scout to check out things before he comes tomorrow." A wry smile crossed his handsome face. "Apparently your mates don't see me as harmless as I planned."

Jory sighed, throwing himself beside his cousin. "They are a bit possessive."

Tor gave a snort. "That's like saying I am a little blind."

The cousins laughed together. "How I've missed you cousin. Come lie on the bed with me and tell me what you've been doing lately?"

A large hand reached out to stroke his head like Tor used to when he was a little boy. "Nothing much. Still working as ambassador for your father. I have an appointment with the southern king in a few days to discuss ore sales. They have access to a rare ore that another planet needs. Your father thought it would give me a good excuse to drop in and visit without setting off any alarms."

Jory looked at his stunningly gorgeous cousin, remembering the entourage Tor usually travelled with. "Yeah, you blend right in."

The pair lay on the bed cuddling like they did in younger more innocent times. Tor's chest moved beneath Jory's head but he wouldn't move his position if his life depended on it. His cousin felt good in his arms, like home. The love Jory had for his cousin was a pure, glowing force, pouring out of him like a burst of sunshine. It was a rare event to just be held because of affection. Although his lovers held him it was always after a bout of sex. He'd forgotten what it was like to just cuddle with someone you loved even if it was just in the family way.

"I missed you Tor."

"I missed you too cub. You know your father loves you very much."

"I know." They might have a tumultuous relationship but Jory knew his father loved him. It was an overpowering, smothering kind of love that compelled him to try and escape but it was the only way the strong willed king knew how to show it. "I just need to do this on my own. I can't be his baby boy forever."

Tor laughed again. "Face it Joriah, you will always be your father's baby boy. You just need to show him that you can make some of these decisions on your own. I'll report back that you are healthy, and happy and you report to me if the situation changes and I need to zap you out of here. Deal."

"Deal."

Jory sat quietly for a moment. "I saw Detrius's bodyguard in the market. He was the one who shot me and killed the servant."

Tor's body went rigid beneath his cheek.

"Is he?"

Nodding his head, Jory snuggled in closer as if his big cousin could protect him from the truth. “When father told me Detrius was going to have me killed I thought it was a ploy to get me here but it isn’t is it? My brother really wants me dead.” Blinking, he manfully kept the tears from falling down his cheeks but nothing stopped them from filling his eyes.

Tor stroked Jory’s silky head. “I just wouldn’t have thought it about Detrius?” Tor said. “I would’ve believed it more about that bitch.”

“Cassitty? Why would she be out for me she’s always been nice when we meet?”

“That’s because if she told you that you were lowlife scum who was spurned by the gods for loving other men it might get back to your father.”

The bitterness in Tor’s voice told its own story. “She said that to you?”

“And more.”

“Why didn’t you say anything? I would’ve gone to father.” The fact that his beloved cousin was treated poorly by his sister-in-law angered Jory beyond words.

“I can fight my own fights Jory. Didn’t you hear of that unfortunate painter who did her entire bedroom suite in black?”

Jory giggled. “That was you?”

“Not that I’ll admit to.” Tor said with a laugh.

There was a pause as both men sat in silent enjoyment of each others company. “So, two mates huh.”

“Yep. Can’t say I don’t stay busy.”

The men burst out laughing. Lying next to each other like they did when they were young boys the pair spent the next few hours catching up with everything they’d done since they last saw each other.

## Chapter Thirteen

### *Two Weeks Later*

The wedding preparations were going well and his men were settling into a routine where they didn't try to kill each other in or out of the bedroom. Jory almost dying solidified the two royals until it was almost always them against Jory. He didn't mind though he still knew how to distract his men.

Most of his relatives had arrived for the wedding and there was an extremely uncomfortable dinner with his mates and all of his siblings and his father. He thought his men would transform into dragons and eat them all before the evening was over.

He was a little surprised when his father was only little overbearing in deference to the occasion. Detrius gave Jory a bland smile but he Jory still didn't feel any animosity from the man or his sister-in-law who brought him a fabulous pair of handcrafted boots dyed a deep blue. So he was completely unprepared for what happened next.

\* \* \*

She was waiting for him in his rooms.

"Hello Jory." Cas said, her voice that perfect blend of naturally soft and finishing school trained.

The only thing that ruined the image of the perfect lady was the large laser pistol in her right hand. "If you were going to live past the next few minutes I would recommend getting new guards. They didn't even think to search a lady."

"I'll keep your recommendation in mind." Jory said in a dry voice.

"Don't bother, it won't help you in the grave. But I'll make sure you have a spectacular funeral. I might even cry."

"I wouldn't want you to put yourself out." Jory said as his mind scanned different ways to get out of this situation. He didn't think even his natural healing would fix a three inch hole through his heart before he bled to death. "No one is going to believe I died a natural death with an enormous hole in my body"

"That's why you are going to go onto the balcony and jump."

Jory laughed. "Why would I do that?"

"Because your uncle wanted me to make it look like an accident."

Now the pieces were falling together. "It was never Detrius who wanted me dead was it?"

Cassity laughed, a harsh grating sound. "Your brother is oddly fond of you. He'll actually be crying real tears when you're gone. You didn't really think you could continue attacking Sallon's ships, did you? Your little antics cost us a lot."

"You. You and Uncle Sal?" He couldn't force the rest of the sentence out of his mouth.

"You really are that naïve aren't you? It's no secret that Detrius and I were a match of convenience. With him I have position and power but with your uncle I have everything I ever wanted."

"But you sell people for money." Jory's stomach churned in revulsion.

"They're not people. They're property and why should I care what happens to some two bit whore except for the money it'll bring. Now go outside and stand on the balcony. If you don't cooperate I will slip into your brother's bed and blow his fucking brains out."

"How do I know you aren't going to do that anyway?"

Cassity gave him a smile that chilled him to the marrow. "I give you my word and I've never broken my word to you have I brother?"

"Not that I know of."

"And I do promise you that if you don't jump. I will kill you. Kill your guards and then walk down the hall and shoot your perverted mates." Her voice took on a sing-song quality. "I'm saving you really. Saving you from having to have sex with those shapechanging monsters."

There was a look in her eyes that Jory had never seen before and it struck him. She wasn't just a killer, she was insane. And there was no way he was getting out of there alive. Jory sent a quick prayer to any god who might be listening and walked to the balcony doors.

"That's it. I knew you'd sacrifice yourself for the others. You always were the altruistic type."

As he walked, Jory frantically tried to look for a way out of the situation but there really wasn't one.

"Walk to the edge." Cassity's calm voice told him. "I want it to look like you slipped."

For the first time he objected to the fact that none of the balcony's had ledges to protect non-dragonkin kind. If he survived this he was going to institute immediate safety measures.

He had expected a big buildup or a final speech, since she seemed so fond of them. What he didn't expect was the sound of blaster fire or the quick shove that pushed him over the edge.

A scream sounded in the air and it took him a moment to realize it wasn't from him it was from Precious. Jory let out a shout of surprise when an enormous blue claw latched onto one wrist, and equally large green one grabbed his other slowing his descent. He was placed gently with his feet on the ground and his heart slamming against his chest.

Next to him landed two incredibly familiar dragons. Dragons he saw on his back whenever he caught a glimpse in the mirror.

There was a flash of light and from one breath to the next dragons became lovers. He didn't get a word out before he was wrapped in the embrace of his two men.

"My treasure." Wetness brushed his cheeks as Val placed kisses across his face and Rai nuzzled him from behind, his arms like a vice.

"I'm fine. But I can't breathe."

"You can breathe later." Rai said, his voice rough. "We almost lost you again. We're going to surround you with so many guards that no one but us can get close to you."

"Your father said we could have your personal guards sent here. I'm going to take him up on that." Val said in a firm voice that allowed no room for argument.

Jory didn't bother to object he let his lovers growl and maul him for a while before they were satisfied that he was fine.

"What happened to Cas?"

"Your brother shot her." Rai said. "We came in time to see her push you off. Val and I shifted but we weren't able to reach you before you went off the ledge." A shudder went through the king.

"I'm fine and I believe we were about to be married."

Val took a deep breath that Jory heard rasp in his lungs. His lovers slowly released him but they each took one of his hands.

"Let's go get married." Val said tugging him and the king along.

Jory knew all of their problems weren't solved and he'd have to speak with his brother but he was putting everything else off until he'd wed and bonded with his mates.

When you almost lose your life you remember what's important.