

## Dragonmen: Mate Dance

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## Chapter One

Raven's muscles ached, but it was a good ache. As he stood beneath the stage lights, sweat pouring down his lean, muscular torso, Raven gasped for breath, desperately trying to refill lungs emptied by his exertion. Still panting, he gave a low bow to the screaming audience and flinched as a rose smacked him in the face.

Fucking thorns.

Despite his stinging flesh, he flashed the crowd his megawatt stage smile. The one he'd perfected as a four-year-old dancing sensation.

Raven waved a hand, indicating the other dancers, and as the audience continued clapping, he made a discreet exit off the stage.

"You were amazing." A starry eyed ingénue said to him as he passed, batting her long eyelashes at him. Why she bothered he didn't know. It was a universally known fact that he liked men. Unless she was one of those women who thought they could be the one to convert him to the other side?

"Want to go out for a bite to eat?" She asked, confident now that she'd caught his attention

Yep, she was one of those.

"Sorry, my sweet, I'm exhausted. I'm going to change and get to bed."

"Sure." Her face was crestfallen and Raven reined in his nurturing instinct to try and make her feel better. Experience proved that encouraging relationships with women now led to awkward situations later.

There was still a restraining order out on that last one.

He patted the girl on her back and all but ran to his dressing room. Once safe behind a locked door, he threw himself down on the couch.

"I need a vacation." Raven said, staring at the ceiling. For twenty years Raven had danced. First as a prodigy fighting to get noticed, then as a young star struggling to get the best roles, and now at the age of twenty-four he was the most sought after dancer in the galaxy. He could write his own price for any show he wanted, but right now he was just tired.

Bone tired.

Although this last production had been technically and physically challenging, Raven knew he'd lost some of his fire. The critics and the audience never noticed, but Raven felt something lacking on the inside. Maybe he was losing his passion for dance? Maybe he was sucked dry.

Raven tried to envision a life without dancing but drew a blank.

What would he do if he didn't dance? Choreograph? Direct? Raven didn't know what he'd do, but he did know that he needed a vacation from both the dancing, and the reporters that followed him from planet to planet hoping to catch a picture of him. It didn't help that he was voted the most beautiful bachelor in the galaxy by the top three galacticnet agencies every year since puberty. Even after all this time Raven was still shocked by the amount of fuss made over his appearance. There was too much

glorification over his genetic makeup when dancing was his true talent.

Idiots.

A quick shower and a fresh set of clothes, with the addition of a concealing cap and dark shades, transformed Raven from a shining star to the average man on the street. Checking to see that the path was clear, he made his way through the side gate and, with a lighter heart, walked away from the theatre and down the deserted sidewalk. Raven could feel some of the stress from the evening slough off his body the further he got from the theatre.

The dance show had ended late in the evening so there were few stragglers around. Earlier shows always had some groupies at the doors but this one was late enough that everyone already went home.

Humming a tune from the show, Raven headed down the sidewalk towards the bright lights.

Maybe he could get a drink and find some company for the evening. Although his body was tired, he was too hyped up from dancing the last show of the season to settle down for the night. Hopefully, he could find some discreet friendly company to help him wind down. Once his body was relaxed maybe his mind would stop spinning about his future.

He was within view of some promising bar signs when the sound of someone sobbing grabbed his attention. Curious, Raven followed the noise.

"Hello." The sobbing grew louder as he approached the dark alley. He generally wasn't an idiot who blithely walked into dark alleys but the crying sounded like a child. "Hello." He called again.

Raven peered into the darkness, the dim streetlights barely reached the mouth of the alley and he could just make out the shape of a small figure curled up on the ground. Unable to stop himself, he rushed over to the child stumbling over something as he went.

"Hey, hey, none of that now. What's wrong?"

The young girl looked up. The meager light reflected on a small oval face shiny with tears.

"My nana is gone." She said in a voice that was so heartbroken Raven had to blink back moisture forming in his own eyes. It took Raven's vision a moment to adjust to the dark and realize that he'd stumbled over a body on the ground.

Unmoving.

"Shh sweetheart, I'm here." Raven cooed. "I'll take care of you." He took off his hat and glasses so the little girl could see him and not be scared of a faceless stranger. He set them on the ground as he rubbed a hand across the girl's back in a soothing gesture.

"You're Raven." The broken voice whispered in awe.

"You know me?"

The little girl nodded. "We saw your show. You were amazing."

“Thank you.” Raven said, reaching for his communicator. “What’s your name?”

“I’m Trisha.” The little girl said.

“Nice to meet you Trisha.” Raven said in a soft voice. He pushed the emergency button to call the local authorities. After he explained the situation he was assured that someone would be dispatched immediately.

“Someone’s on the way to take care of you.” He assured her.

The next few minutes were the most nerve racking of Raven’s life. Raven had never had anyone rely on him before. It was always the other way around. It felt strange to take care of someone else. Strange, but good. He was glad he had come along to help the little girl. He didn’t know what happened to her nana but it wasn’t his job to figure that out. In fact his part of this whole ordeal was going to end as soon as planetary security came to pick her up.

“Security.” A deep voice boomed into the darkness.

“Over here.” Raven shouted.

Raven was momentarily blinded as a high-beamed light flashed across his eyes. He held up a hand to block the glare.

“Stand up and put your hands where I can see them.” A voice said behind the light.

Raven slowly raised his hands, turning his head to keep from being blinded.

When the light finally pointed downwards, Raven gave a sigh of relief until a security officer came over to search him.

Efficient hands patted him down impersonally and the officer stepped back once he was satisfied that Raven posed no threat.

“I need you to come back to the station and answer some questions.”

There went his dream of getting a hot night of sex.

Raven nodded his intention to cooperate and allowed the man to lead him to one of their vehicles. As he ducked his head to get into the back of the hover car, a scream ripped through the air.

“I want Raven. No, no, no.” Her hysterical screams got louder and louder until a security officer raced over to the vehicle Raven was being loaded into. He pulled the little girl by her wrist behind him. “I’m going to have her ride back here with you.”

Raven slid onto the back seat and scooted over for the little girl. For the first time Raven got to see what a pretty thing she was, even with her blond ringlets flattened against her head, and her face blotchy from tears. Cleaned up and smiling she probably shattered little boys hearts all over the place.

Raven was surprised when she scooted closer, rested her head on his chest, and wrapped her thin arms around him. He could feel silent sobs shaking her slender body. Two security agents slid into the front

seat of the hovercar and gave a brief look at them before taking off.

Muttering nonsense words, Raven stroked the golden head, trying to figure out where along the way his night of debauchery turned into a baby-sitting assignment.

## Chapter Two

As they walked into the security station Raven didn't understand all the stares sent his way, until he realized he didn't have his hat and glasses any more. He must've left them back in that dark alley. Raven hoped the onlookers weren't transmitting his image across the galactinet.

His agent would have puppies.

Man-eating puppies.

The security officers led them to a room with four chairs and a table. It was an interrogation room, though Raven didn't think they were going to use it as such.

"Want something to drink? A cookie?" One of the officers asked.

"Want a cookie, sweetheart?" Raven asked the little girl. She shook her head.

"Maybe some water for us both." After all that crying, she was bound to be dehydrated.

A moment later they were given two glasses of water and the questions began.

"I'm Officer Baines and this is Officer Trewel." The speaker was a large man with sandy hair and a winning smile. Trisha looked at him with distrust while she was a little warmer towards Officer Trewel who was dark-haired and burly with kind brown eyes.

The little girl haltingly told of a trip with her grandmother to watch Raven's performance. A trip that ended badly when, while returning to their hovercraft, bandits shot the little girl's grandmother for refusing to give up her purse. The two security officers listened intently to her story after getting from her that her name was Trisha Lily.

At least her story cleared Raven of any wrongdoing.

"What is your connection in this?" One of the officers asked Raven.

"I came by the alley and heard her crying. When I saw the situation I called you."

They turned their attention back to the little girl.

"Where's your mother?" Trewel asked.

“She’s dead.” Trisha said. Her voice was cold and distant like it didn’t relate to her. Raven could tell she was slightly shocky. It had been a harrowing night for her.

“How did she die?” The officer continued.

Trisha shrugged. “It was when I was little.”

Raven held back a grin at the mature tone in her voice. She couldn’t be more than nine or ten, obviously approaching middle age.

The officers persisted.

“Who’s your father?”

Trisha shrugged. “I don’t have one.”

“Did he die too?”

The little girl shook her head. “No. Mommy didn’t tell him I was born. She said he didn’t want kids.”

Raven saw the officers relax a little. A man who didn’t want his daughter was at least a father they could track down.

“Do you remember his name?”

Trisha nodded solemnly. “She said he was Prince Kaemon.”

The officers laughed.

“Sure she did. Prince Kaemon is gay, I doubt he’s your daddy.” Officer Baines said not unkindly.

“Don’t completely discount it.” Raven advised. “A lot of gay men try out women first. A DNA sample will confirm it.”

The officers exchanged looks before nodding. “All right let’s run a test.”

The burly officer left the room and came back with a small box. “Lick your finger and press it against the scanner.”

Raven watched with fascination as the officer opened the box, exposing a blue scanning screen. He loved those forensic shows on the net.

Trisha licked her finger and placed it on the screen. After a few minutes there was a loud beep and two names showed up on the screen. Crown Prince Kaemon Dragonspear and Leona Linnett.

Raven looked at the girl with new eyes.

She was half dragonkin.

Trisha must have felt him watching her because she looked up at him with a wary expression.

“Do you not want to be my friend now?”

“What?”

“Nana said people are afraid of the dragonkin.”

Raven wrapped an arm around Trisha and gave her a sideways hug. “Never be ashamed of who you are. I don’t live on this planet so I don’t know how people feel about dragonkin, but it doesn’t matter to me.”

The security officer cleared his throat. “The dragonkin are a protected sect of society. Since most of the royals are dragonkin, it is considered a privilege to be one. Her grandmother probably wanted to protect her from being taken away. Even if the prince didn’t want her, the king would have since his chances of having any other grandchildren are small.”

Raven gave her a quick smile. “See you are wanted. We’ll have you with your family in no time.”

“No!” Trisha clung to him sobbing. “I want to go with you.”

Raven sent a panicked look to the officers.

“Why don’t you come with us to escort her to her new home. That might ease the transition.” Officer Baines said with a rueful smile.

“Fine.”

This was definitely not how he had planned his evening to go.

### Chapter Three

Prince Kaemon paced the foyer waiting for a girl who was supposed to be his daughter. How could he have a daughter and not know? Shouldn’t his dragon senses have kicked in and let him know another with his DNA walked the planet?

Thank the dragon goddess for the man who had found his daughter.

“Sit down, Kaemon.” King Avin said waving a hand towards a chair beside him. “She’ll be here any minute. Besides, I thought you didn’t want children?”

The prince spun on his heel and glared at his father. “Not wanting a child in theory is not the same as not wanting a child once it is born. If I’d been aware of her birth, I would’ve participated in her life.”

Fury ate away at Kaemon. The fact that he could barely remember the woman who gave birth to his daughter didn’t take away from the fact that she stole those years from Kaemon. Years he could’ve spent bonding with a girl who had his blood pulsing in her veins. If the mother weren’t already dead he would’ve killed her.

The sound of a hovercar pulling up had him spinning towards the door. He held himself in check as a servant stepped forward and opened the front door.

Three men stepped through the doorway. One was holding the hand of a little girl who clung to him like he was her lifeline. She had long blonde hair and big brown eyes with flashes of green.

Dragon eyes.

As a female she'd never shift, but her eyes gave her blood away.

The policemen approached bowing low to the king first and then to Kaemon, as was proper protocol.

"I'm Officer Baines and this is Officer Trewel." The sandy-haired man said, waving a hand towards his partner.

"Officers." King Avin gave a genial nod. "Thank you for finding her and bringing her home. Good evening, Trisha." He said gently to the little girl.

"This isn't my home." The girl piped up. The men turned to see the small girl glaring at them. "My home is downtown. It's a white house with green trim."

"Don't you want to live here?" The king asked, waving a hand at the enormous stone entryway. The castle was known for its beautiful architecture.

"No." The girl stamped her foot.

"Now Trisha, you're going to hurt the king's feelings." A smooth voice drawled. To Kaemon's astonishment the girl immediately subsided. She flashed a guilty glance at the king, but didn't say anything more. Kaemon took his first good look at the man standing beside her.

Kaemon's heart stuttered in his chest. As a prince he had dated many beautiful men, but none of them were as breathtaking as this one. The world dropped away as he looked into a pair of impossibly gorgeous blue eyes.

"Do you have a name?" He asked.

"Oh, sorry." The man gave a graceful bow to each royal. "I'm Raven."

"I-I'm Prince Kaemon."

Raven flashed him a wide smile that exposed a pair of deep dimples.

Yum.

Visions of licking the dimples and sampling the man's flavor flashed through Kaemon's mind. His dragon stirred within. They both wanted this man.

Badly.

The gorgeous man was talking but it took a moment for Kaemon to focus enough to hear what he was saying.



“I’ve just come to make sure Trisha made it here safely. Nice to meet you both.” Raven bowed to both of them again and proceeded to free his hand from Trisha.

The little girl screamed, an ear-piercing screech that brought a smile to the prince’s lips. Looks like both of them had the same idea.

Keep the pretty, pretty man.

Kaemon rushed forward every inch the concerned parent. “No. Mr. Raven I think you should stay at least one night. Trisha has had a traumatic day and I think she would do better if she had someone familiar around her.”

The little girl stopped screaming and gave Kaemon a watery smile before turning back to the hunk she was clutching like a lifeline. “Raven, please stay. I’d feel so much better.”

Obviously a soft touch, the gorgeous man gave Trisha’s hand a gentle squeeze. “All right sweetheart, I’ll stay for tonight.”

Kaemon’s dragon growled at the thought of the man leaving.

“Thank you officers, we’ll take it from here.” Kaemon nodded to the men. “Let us know if you learn anything further about the case.”

The men nodded and left.

“Hello Trisha, I’m Prince Kaemon, your father.”

Trisha gave a polite curtsy still clutching Raven’s hand.

“Say hello.” Raven told her.

“Hello.” She said in a sweet soprano.

Her voice was quite pleasant when she wasn’t screaming. Kaemon made a note to have his assistant find her a nanny in the morning.

“How old are you?” Kaemon asked, trying to assess her age by her size.

“Twelve.”

He wasn’t a judge of children’s sizes but she looked small for twelve.

“You’re twelve?” Raven asked, obviously thinking the same as Kaemon.

Trisha tilted her chin up. “I’m small for my age.” She declared, her eyes daring them to say anything about it.

“You’re just right.” Raven assured. He gave her a sweet smile that Kaemon would’ve killed to have sent

his way.

“We’ll feed her properly and soon she’ll grow.” The king said gruffly, but Kaemon could see the concern in his eyes. Dragonkin tended to be larger than the average person. Even with only being a half-blood, Trisha shouldn’t be so small.

He pressed a button on the wall.

“You called your highness.” A man’s voice answered.

“Have some food prepared for four. A light snack considering the hour.”

“The formal dining room has a light repast ready, your highness.”

“Excellent.” The palace staff was genius at anticipating the royals’ needs.

Kaemon waved a hand towards the pair. “If you’d follow me?” He bit back a smile as the pair gave him identical wary expressions before following him down the hall. His father marched beside him.

“Think we can get the boy to stay for a while?”

It took Kaemon a moment to follow who his father was talking about. “I don’t think he’s a boy father. He’s at least in his twenties.”

“When you’ve lived two hundred years, a twenty-year old is a boy.” The king said as they entered the dining room.

Kaemon was pulling out Raven’s chair before he noticed. Other than giving him a strange look, Raven accepted the seat and let the prince scoot him in. Kaemon sat himself not thinking twice about his daughter as she scrambled into her own seat.

“Are you sure you’re ready to be a father?” Raven asked.

“Of course he is.” King Avin interrupted, “My son is a good man despite his flighty ways.”

Kaemon glared at his sire. “I wouldn’t say I’m flighty. I keep up with my responsibilities.” He didn’t appreciate his father making him look bad in front of the blue-eyed man he was trying to impress.

“Yes, you do.” The king agreed, a twinkle in his eye. “My son heads the planetary council and runs some important interstellar committees. What is it you do, Raven?”

“He dances.” Trisha piped up.

“What kind of dancing?” The king asked. Kaemon hoped he didn’t say exotic. The thought of Raven dancing naked in front of other men was enough to make Kaemon want to shift and breathe fire.

“Ballet.” Raven said, calmly biting into a slice of fruit. The gorgeous man licked his lips to get that last drop of the juice. The action sent waves of heat through Kaemon’s body. He obviously didn’t go to the ballet often enough if this is what the dancers looked like.

“He does all kinds of dances.” Trisha piped up. “He’s the most talented dancer of his generation.”

Kaemon gave Raven a curious look.

The gorgeous dancer shrugged. “Some reporter got carried away.”

Still Kaemon was impressed that a reporter felt the dancer was worthy of writing about.

“What school do you go to?” The king asked Trisha, reminding Kaemon about the reason the stunning man was at the palace.

“Bayside Primary.” The little girl said with a frown.

“Is that a good school?” Kaemon asked. He knew as much about schools as he did little girls.

Nothing.

Trisha shrugged. “I don’t like it.”

“Why not?” The king asked.

“The others pick on me because of my eyes.”

“Those eyes mark you as one of the royal dragonkin.” The king said, his voice ringing with indignation. “They should be in awe of your parentage. We are removing you from that school immediately. You will attend the Royal School instead. Every royal has gone there since it’s been established.”

That said, the king went back to his food.

No one said anything. Trisha nibbled on a cracker and Kaemon watched his newest obsession eat only the fruit.

“Do you not like the meat selection?”

Raven shook his head. “I don’t eat meat.”

The royals stopped eating and stared at their guest. As dragonkin it was unfathomable to Kaemon that someone didn’t eat meat.

“Really, no meat at all?”

“Nope.” Raven popped a grape through his lush mouth. “I can’t process it. Makes me sick.”

Kaemon scanned the handsome man with his dragon sight and saw a healthy specimen, no illnesses. Whatever the man was doing it worked for him.

“Please let the kitchen know what special food requirements you might have while you’re here.”

Raven smiled. “I won’t be here long enough for that to be a problem.”

"I wouldn't count on that." The king said, taking a long drink out of his stein.

Kaemon shot his father a warning look. He didn't want the king to frighten the man off. He turned back to see Raven yawning.

"Sorry." The dancer said with a blush. "It's been a long day."

"We should get you to bed then." Kaemon said. And didn't that thought heat up everything inside? His eyes grazed the long, lean lines of the dancer. Dancers were flexible, weren't they?

"There's a nice suite across from the prince's that I had prepared for you." His father shot Kaemon an amused glance. Damn, sometimes the man could read his mind. It was almost eerie.

"If you're finished, I'll show you the way." Kaemon offered.

Raven looked into the fiery eyes of the prince. If he was reading the prince's expression right his chances of a night of debauchery were looking better and better.

"Where am I going to sleep?" A quiet voice spoke beside him.

"You are going to sleep in Kaemon's old room. The one he had as a child." The king said. "It's down the hall from Raven's and your father's rooms."

The king flashed Raven a look that said he wasn't anyone's fool. It looked like the monarch had a good idea what Kaemon wanted to do with his guest. Luckily it appeared the older man didn't mind.

"But I want to be near Raven." Trisha pouted.

Uh Oh.

The king rang a bell. A thin servant dressed in black appeared by his side so quickly it was almost magical.

"Yes, your highness?" The servant asked with a low bow.

"Bring me Ms. Starny."

"Immediately." The servant gave another bow before vanishing down one of the corridors.

"Creepy isn't it?" Kaemon said sharing a smile with Raven. "He did that even when I was a little boy."

"A little, yeah." Raven agreed. Of course with that smile turned on him, he'd probably agree to anything.

"Who's Ms. Starny?" Trisha asked.

"She's the household nanny. She oversees the childcare for the staff."

"You have a nanny for your servants?"

The king nodded. "Of course. People can't concentrate if they're concerned about their child's welfare. We have a small facility on the grounds and then we'll pay a set amount if they want to sponsor them elsewhere."

"That's very generous of you." Raven said. Not that he knew a lot of monarchs but this one seemed to care about his peoples' needs. He just hoped the son was as attentive to his own needs. Another heated look from Kaemon had him hoping the nanny came quickly.

"You wanted to see me, your majesty?" A slim dark-haired woman came into the room. At the sight of Raven she froze. "You're Raven, the dancer, aren't you?" She asked staring at him. Her eyes glowed with the zealous expression of a rabid fan. There was something a little unsettling about her eyes that sent tremors of unease down his spine, but when she looked at Trisha and patted her on the back, the moment passed. Maybe he'd just imagined it. The woman looked genuinely concerned for Trisha as she stood protectively close to the girl.

"Ms. Starny, we didn't call you here to stare at our guest." The prince said in a hard voice. "We need you to look after my daughter tonight. She's had a traumatic experience and needs companionship this evening."

"I want Raven." Trisha said pinning her father with her big, sad eyes.

"You're not the only one." The nanny said in a voice clearly heard by Raven.

"Raven needs his sleep." Kaemon said. "He'll still be here tomorrow when you wake up. Ms. Starny will sleep in the room with you if you get scared, all right?"

Trisha stared at the woman for a long time before finally nodding.

Raven leaned over and gave her a one-armed hug. "I'll see you in the morning."

Trisha's face lit up. "Promise."

Raven nodded. "I promise."

"Okay."

Kaemon stood and walked around the table to Raven's chair. "Now I think it's time to take Raven to his room and tuck him in for the night."

Trisha giggled. "You don't tuck in adults."

Kaemon smiled at the little girl. With the pair of them so close Raven saw the resemblance for the first time.

She had her daddy's smile.

"That's true most of the time. But it's always polite to tuck in special guests." The prince pulled out Raven's chair, wrapped a hand around his arm and all but lifted him out of his chair. Leaning over, the prince's hot breath warmed Raven's ear as he spoke. "What do you say Raven, are you ready to be tucked in?" The prince asked in a caressing tone that made everything in the dancer go hard and tight.

“Oh, I’m very ready to be tucked in.” Raven said.

He saw Kaemon look him up and down, a satisfied smile crossing the prince’s face.

“Excellent, then let’s get you to bed.”

Raven had no problem being escorted through the castle, especially if it came complete with a prince for a tour guide.

Raven bid a teary-eyed Trisha goodnight and followed the prince down a series of halls to a room that was rich, opulent and definitely not a guest room.

“This is your room.” Raven said, confident he was right.

Kaemon gave him an uncertain look. “Did I misunderstand? Would you rather sleep alone?”

Raven looked at the tall gorgeous man before him and tried not to drool. Most men didn’t find that a turn on. Giving in to the passion sparking his senses, Raven sidled up to the prince and slid his hand up the other man’s broad chest. He could feel the thunderous beating of Kaemon’s heart beneath his palm.

“I’d rather not sleep at all.” He purred, giving the prince his best seductive look.

A low growl rolled up Kaemon’s throat. The prince wrapped his hands around Raven’s hips and lifted the smaller man clear of the ground. With a laugh, Raven wrapped his long legs around the prince’s waist.

One of Kaemon’s hands cupped Raven’s ass holding him firmly in place as he slid his other hand through Raven’s hair. With a firm grip, Kaemon took Raven’s mouth in a passionate kiss. Raven could feel the prince’s growl vibrate against his lips.

Damn that was sexy.

Raven moaned his response to the kiss. If he wasn’t so into the prince’s embrace he’d be embarrassed at how easily he spread his legs for the sexy dragonkin, but then no one had ever accused him of being a shy virgin. Even when he was a virgin.

The prince tore his mouth away from Raven’s, his eyes glowing pure gold. “If you don’t want to be mine say it now before I throw you on the bed and fuck you.

Raven’s lust fogged head only focused on the words ‘fuck you’ and he gave the only response he could to that statement.

“Please.”

He wasn’t above begging for what he wanted, on his knees, preferably with his lover’s cock in his mouth.

“Anything for you, my sweet.” The prince said.

Before Raven could get his bearings he was tossed onto the soft bedding and ruthlessly stripped of his clothes.

For a moment Kaemon just stood and stared at Raven. Raven squirmed uncomfortably under those hot gold eyes, yearning for more physical contact. "I'm not just for admiring you know. Touching is so much better."

The prince couldn't stop staring at the man lying amongst his covers. In all his life Kaemon had never seen anyone finer than the man lying on his bed. Never.

Raven's body was lean and muscular with ripped abs and a tight ass, probably all that dancing. Raven's long cock rose taller beneath the prince's gaze.

Kaemon's mouth watered. Cock sucking wasn't his favorite pastime, as a prince, generally he was the one being sucked not the other way around, but for Raven he was willing to make an exception.

He needed to taste the man Kaemon was almost certain was destined to be his mate.

Without conscious thought, the prince sunk to his knees and pulled Raven until his legs dangled over the bed and his cock was in the perfect position. Satisfied he could get good access without breaking his back, Kaemon wrapped his mouth around his lover's cock and started sucking on it like it was his new favorite candy.

Raven's unique flavor slid across Kaemon's tongue, both bitter and sweet. The more he sucked the more he craved. Licking and sucking, he pinned Raven's hips with his hands when the dancer started to squirm.

"Fuck me." Raven demanded.

Kaemon lifted his head. "Quit squirming. When I get my taste you can be fucked. Now give it up."

The look of shock on the dancer's face...was priceless.

Kaemon sucked two of his fingers into his mouth and got them nice and wet before sliding them behind Raven's balls and pressing them into his lover's hot, tight ass. As he scissored his fingers in and out of his lover's constricting hole, he swallowed Raven's cock.

Minutes later a strangled scream heralded a welcome gush of liquid. The prince gratefully swallowed it all feeling an odd rush of pride at making his mate lose control.

After a few more sucks he let Raven's cock slide from his mouth. Looking up he saw Raven's beautiful face showed a nice afterglow and his eyes were heavy.

"Ready for your fucking?"

"Yeah." Raven's voice was barely above a whisper, but the prince heard him fine. "Want me on my hands and knees?"

Kaemon shook his head. Why would he want to deprive himself of that beautiful face? He reached for

the bottle of lubricant he stored on the shelf beside the bed. As he was pressing inside, the prince realized he'd never taken a lover like this before.

There was something incredibly intimate about fucking eye to eye that made him realize all those other lovers were just practice...for Raven.

Sliding Raven further up the bed, Kaemon pushed until his lover was high enough he could get good traction, but not so high that Raven would bang his head on the headboard.

He didn't want to do anything that would cause the stunning dancer even a minute of discomfort. It was his goal to make sure that there was nothing but good memories between them.

Carefully pushing inside Raven, Kaemon searched his stunning face for any signs of discomfort. When he was fully seated, he waited.

"What are you doing?" Raven's blue eyes widened with astonishment.

"I wanted to make sure you are ready."

Raven wiggled beneath him. "If I was any more ready I'd be coming. Now fuck me like you mean it."

Smiling, Kaemon leaned over and kissed his mate. "Wrap your legs around me and hold on for the ride of your life."

Raven smiled back as he lifted his hips and wrapped those long dancer's legs around the prince. "Now show me what you've got."

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Raven woke up extremely warm and deliciously sore. The fact he couldn't move was more because he was wrapped up in Kaemon's arms like a human sized teddy bear than that he was in any pain. Never one to snuggle with a lover, he found the sensation more intimate than sex. Their bodies were spooned together from torso to heel, Raven's back to Kaemon's front, nesting together like they were created for that sole purpose.

Glancing towards the window showed it was still dark out. His nap must've been shorter than he thought. It was relaxing and surprisingly pleasant to wake up in another man's arms.

Tenderness filled him, a foolishness he couldn't give in to. There was no future between a prince and a dancer. He didn't dare hope that either of them was looking for more than a shared night of passion.

A soft kiss to the back of his neck let him know Kaemon was awake.

"Hello lover." The words were whispered into his ear in a sleep-roughened voice, hot words of affection that made his body hard with need. For the first time in a long while he felt wanted.

"Are you too sore?" A concerned voice asked. Kaemon's large, warm hands stroked his stomach



before turning Raven gently to face him.

“A little.” Raven admitted, feeling a blush spread across his face.

Kaemon stroked Raven’s face, his gold eyes looking at Raven with a tenderness the other man couldn’t possibly feel. “Don’t be embarrassed, love, there’s no shame in feeling a little sore after the fucking I gave you.” The prince gave him a wicked smile as those damned hands stroked down his bare back pulling a moan from him. In that moment he would’ve agreed to anything.

A bite to his neck finished melting Raven into a puddle of need.

“Uh.” Was his intelligent contribution as his thoughts scattered like leaves. The prince was his personal storm, blowing away all thoughts from his head and sending bolts of lightning through his body.

“But there are all kinds of other things we can do. Delicious things.” The prince rolled Raven fully onto his back and moved to support himself on his arms, covering the smaller man’s body with his large frame. His handsome face beamed as he took in Raven’s appearance. “You have no idea how long I’ve dreamed of having you at my mercy.”

“Since we just met it can’t have been that long.” Raven said, returning the smile.

“Oh, you have no idea.” He placed soft kisses on Raven’s mouth, his chin, each cheek and then pressed a string of kisses down his chest. His soft lips sent shivers down Raven’s spine and darts of need straight to his cock. “I’ve dreamed of finding my mate for years.”

An itching sensation tickled up Raven’s spine but he was too busy feeling the heat of the sexy man above him to worry too much a twitchy back.

“Suck me, Kaemon.” Raven demanded. He couldn’t stand the gentle kisses any longer. If the prince didn’t do something soon he wouldn’t be responsible for his actions.

Kaemon gave him another charming smile before swooping down and swallowing Raven’s cock.

Raven screamed, arching his back, trying to suppress the need to push into the hot wetness that surrounded him. He didn’t want to choke Kaemon but he would sell his soul to keep that mouth on him forever. It only took a few sucks to get him to spill his seed into that talented mouth. If he didn’t know for a fact the man was a prince he’d be wondering if Kaemon worked as a sex professional. Service from this man would be worth any price.

He gave Kaemon a loopy grin as the man crawled up his body. Boneless, he let the larger man tuck him back against his muscular body.

“I’ll do you in a second.”

Kaemon placed a kiss on the top of Raven’s head. “Not necessary, I came when you did.”

Raven laughed. “The maids aren’t going to like that.”

“They’ll have to get used to it.” Kaemon said, running a hand up and down Raven’s body.

Blinking back tears, Raven swallowed the sudden lump in his throat. The prince talked like there would

be a tomorrow for them when the reality was this was their one and only time together.

Kaemon felt his lover stiffen and turned him on his back. The stricken look in Raven's beautiful eyes made his heart skip.

"What's wrong?"

"I'm scheduled to leave tomorrow afternoon."

"No." Kaemon didn't care if he had to ground every ship on the planet, none of them would be cleared to take his lover away. "You can't abandon Trisha, she's counting on you to be here for at least the next few days." He wasn't above using his daughter to blackmail his lover. It might take a few days to convince the beautiful man that he was Kaemon's mate, but eventually the dancer would learn that he needed to stay at the prince's side and not gallivant around the galaxy. Besides, how long could a person dance anyway. Even though he was young, Raven must be getting close to the end of his dancing career.

Kaemon would have to look into it.

Raven's face showed he was torn.

"Raven." A girl's voice screamed. The sound propelled Raven out of bed, with lightning speed the dancer pulled on his pants and tore out of the room.

Kaemon didn't bother hiding his smile. His daughter was definitely on board with keeping Raven. He just needed to have a little private time with her to establish their plan of attack. The prince might not know much about being a father but he was an expert at getting what he wanted. He had a feeling it was one of the many things he had in common with his pretty daughter.

Raven tore down the hall, running towards the sound of his name.

Trisha was huddled in the middle of her bed trying to escape the clutch of Ms. Starny who was desperately trying to calm the little girl.

"Raven." She called out as he slid onto the bed beside her. Ms. Starny stood up as the little girl crawled into Raven's lap. "I had a dream that you had gone and I was all alone." She said in a hushed voice, as if to say the words louder would make Raven disappear.

"No poppet, I'm still here. I wouldn't leave without saying goodbye."

He rocked the little girl, astonished at how she clutched him so trustingly.

"You won't leave me, will you Raven?" She asked, looking up so he could see tears dripping from her eyes.

Raven rubbed a hand up and down her back. "You know I have to go eventually but your father and grandfather will be here to take care of you."

He wouldn't lie to the little girl even to make her feel better.

"But you'll be here tomorrow won't you?"

"Tell you what." Raven said kissing her on the forehead. "I'll stay the week to get you settled before going to my next job."

Truth was he didn't have any work for another month, but he knew if he stayed any longer he would get too entrenched with the pretty little girl and her hot as sin father. He glanced up to see Kaemon standing in the doorway.

Without a shirt.

Yum.

"That is of course if your father doesn't mind."

"You can stay as long as you want." Kaemon said, giving him a heated look that told him exactly where he'd be spending his nights. "In fact, Trisha would probably like it better if you took her to school tomorrow instead of me."

He looked down at the little girl in his lap. "Would you like that?"

She nodded.

"Well that's settled." Kaemon said, stepping into the room. With a gentle hand he lifted Trisha up and off of Raven's lap. Raven pulled back the covers so the prince could tuck his daughter into the bed. With a kiss, and a good night to Ms. Starny, Raven was hustled out of the room and down the hall.

"That was sweet of you to agree to stay for my daughter." The prince said stroking a hand down Raven's back. The hand stayed on his ass as they entered the prince's bedroom.

"She's a sweet girl that has gone through a lot. I'm happy to help." Raven said, and if there were some fringe benefits in the form of her father he wasn't exactly going to protest.

"I have some problems myself." Kaemon said.

Raven turned to see a sparkle in the prince's eyes. "Do you now?"

The prince gave him a wicked smile. "Yes, there is a part of my body that needs some of your personal attention."

This was banter Raven was comfortable with. Traumatized girls were out of his comfort zone but horny men he knew exactly how to handle. As soon as they were in Kaemon's room Raven flashed the prince a seductive look through his lashes. "I think I can help you with your problem." He said, sliding to his knees.

"Oh, I know you can." Kaemon sighed as Raven pulled down his pajama bottoms and freed his erection.

\* \* \*

“Good morning your highness.” The quiet male voice was followed by brilliant light flooding the room as the servant opened the curtains.

Instinctively Raven pulled the blankets back over his head and snuggled into the hard body beside him.

“What time is it?” Kaemon’s voice rumbled in the warm chest beneath his ear.

“Your father said it was time to get up if Sir Raven is to escort the princess to school.”

Raven laughed beneath the covers. Sir Raven indeed.

“Ready to get up, darling?” Kaemon asked, lifting a corner of the covers to peek down at his lover hiding underneath.

“Since when does school start at the crack of dawn?”

Kaemon chuckled. “Not a morning person?”

“I’m barely an afternoon person.” Raven confessed.

“Can I start you a bath?” The servant asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

“How long do I have?” Raven asked the prince.

“About an hour.”

“Great. Wake me up in fifty minutes.”

Kaemon frowned down at him. “You need to eat some breakfast.”

Raven shuddered. He hated breakfast with a passion. His stomach couldn’t even handle food until well into the afternoon, hopefully after several hours of dancing.

“I never eat breakfast.”

“Never?” The prince’s tone was as appalled as if he’d announced he strangled a puppy every morning.

“Never.” Raven said firmly.

“Bring us some coffee and fruit.” Kaemon said to the servant.

Raven heard the footsteps recede from the room but he wasn’t going to look. The sunlight was still streaming into the room.

Kaemon slid down until they were both under the covers together, a lovely warm cocoon for two.

“Hey beautiful.” Kaemon said, gripping Raven’s hips with his large hands and hauling him closer. “Whatever will we do while we wait.”

Raven sucked in his breath as Kaemon scooted down beneath the covers to the foot of the bed. A hot, wet cavern engulfed his cock, which had been rigid since he first woke to the warm body beside him.

Moaning loudly Raven sank his fingers into the prince’s thick hair, unable to stop his hips from lifting to get more of the sensation. Kaemon pinned him to the bed as he deep-throated Raven’s cock tearing a strangled scream from his throat and liquid from his body.

Kaemon swallowed it all down, licking Raven clean before crawling up his body.

Raven looked up into Kaemon’s warm eyes. “Now that’s one alarm clock I can appreciate.”

“Glad to be of service. Now if you’ll just roll over I’ll see what else I can do to make you more amenable to mornings.”

With a wide smile Raven rolled over onto his hands and knees. He let the blankets slide away so the prince could get a clear view at his body. He knew he looked good and he wanted the prince to know it too.

“Fuck you’re beautiful.”

Raven hid his smile in the fall of his dark hair.

Their coupling was rough and furious. The prince took Raven hard and fast until they both lay like a puddle beneath the blankets.

“We should bathe before we break our fast.” Kaemon said, rubbing lazy circles across Raven’s back.

“You mean before our coffee.” Raven said, curling up against his lover.

“I’ll have you eating breakfast yet.” The prince vowed.

Raven laughed, sliding out of bed. “You might make me more of a morning person if that is how we wake up, but I’ll never be a fan of breakfast.”

Kaemon followed Raven out of bed. He scooped up the younger man and tossed him over his shoulder.

“Kaemon!” Raven shouted. “Put me down.”

The prince carried him through the doorway and set him down in a warm tub of water.

“Mmmm.” Raven said, spreading his arms and floating in the enormous bath.

“Don’t hog all the room, love.” Kaemon said, stepping into the water.

“Sorry it’s all mine. You shouldn’t have put me in the middle before finding out if I’ll share.”

“But I can wash your hair for you.” Kaemon said in his best wheedling tone as he watched Raven float in the water.

“Why didn’t you say so?” Raven sat up and scooted forward to make room for his lover. “I love a man who’s willing to help with domestic chores.” He said with his best seductive smile.

“I’m all kinds of handy.” Kaemon said, sliding in behind him.

In a matter of minutes, Raven’s hair was clean and he was certain there wasn’t any part of his body that hadn’t received the prince’s personal attention.

“I think I’m cleaner than I’ve ever been before.” Raven said in amusement as Kaemon towed him dry. He started to get hard again but he was determined to ignore it. He wanted his coffee, and he wanted it now.

The men dressed quickly, Raven slid away from the prince’s touch so he could actually put on his clothes.

A cart sat at the end of the bed containing two covered containers and a silver pot.

“Yum.”

Raven raced towards the silver pot eagerly pouring the steamy liquid into a delicate white cup. Barely waiting to set down the pot, he quickly put the cup to his lips.

The first sip brought a frown to his mouth and the cup was quickly set on the tray.

“What’s wrong?”

“That’s the worst thing I’ve ever had.”

Kaemon leaned over and sniffed the liquid. His tanned face paled.

“How do you feel?” He asked, snatching Raven up in his arms.

“What is wrong with you?” Raven said laughing. “It’s just bad coffee not a planetary tragedy.”

Kaemon didn’t answer immediately, he was too busy running out of the bedroom, carrying Raven in his muscular arms.

“Get me a medic.” He shouted to the first servant he found.

“Kaemon stop panicking. What’s wrong?”

Kaemon looked at him with fear in his golden eyes. “It wasn’t just coffee, love. It was poisoned.

“What’s going on?”

Kaemon watched in relief as his father marched up the hall.

“Raven was poisoned. It was in the coffee.”

The king's face grew thunderous. He pulled out his communicator and dialed.

Kaemon was too busy watching his lover to listen to the conversation.

"I'll be fine." Raven said with a smile.

"You'd better be."

"A medic will be here in a moment. Let's put Raven back in the bedroom where he can rest."

It was only a matter of minutes, but they felt like hours, before a doctor arrived. Under any other circumstances Kaemon would've stopped to admire the man. Clear blue eyes with sparks of gold looked up at him with a sexy confidence that said the man was good at what he did and knew it. The man probably got hit on a lot even with the huge ass mating bracelet the man wore covering half his forearm in jewels and precious metals. Anyone who marked his man that prominently would not take poaching well.

"Hello, I'm Dr. Blythorpe, I heard you have an emergency."

"My lover's been poisoned." Kaemon couldn't stop the panicked sound in his voice. He knew he should be calm but it felt like his heart was shredding as he watched his lover lay on the bed.

"Take off your shirt." The doctor told Raven.

Raven stripped.

"Hey I know you. You're that dancer."

"Yeah, are you a fan?"

"I saw you on Caelus 10 a few years ago, you are amazing."

"Thanks." Raven said.

Kaemon didn't like the stunning smile the doctor sent his lover. He let his displeasure show in a low growl. "Just heal him."

The doctor flashed him the same smile. "You don't need to growl at me. Nevair would have my balls if I strayed." He turned back to his patient. "Close your eyes and take slow, deep breaths."

Kaemon watched as the gorgeous doctor placed his hands on Raven's sculpted chest. He resisted the urge to rip off the man's arms and beat him with them. The fact that this was the mate of the world's religious leader was only part of the reason he held back. Besides, he didn't think Raven would approve.

"This is going to tingle a little bit, but it shouldn't hurt. If you begin to feel any discomfort you tell me, all right handsome?"

"Will do."

A soft humming filled the air. Blue light poured from the doctor's hands and spilled across the dancer. The prince watched in fascination as the glow slowly encompassed his lover.

Raven giggled. "That tickles." His voice sounded low and relaxed like he'd got the really good drugs.

Kaemon would've asked but he didn't want to distract the healer.

After a few minutes the doctor lifted his hands and Raven lost his blue glow.

Dr. Blythorpe stood up. "You might want to find out who is after you."

"Why do you say someone's after me? Raven is the one who was poisoned."

The doctor pinned him with his brilliant eyes. "Yes, but the person used a poison that only kills dragonkin. Raven's body would've processed it with only a little discomfort but no real harm. Someone thought you would drink the coffee not him."

"So he's fine?" He indicated his lover who was sleeping soundly on the bed.

"Yeah, I made him go to sleep. I didn't know if you wanted him hearing this. I removed all of the poison from his system."

"I thought you said it wouldn't hurt him."

"It won't kill him, but it's better to be safe than to leave a strange poison in his system. I'd hate to be wrong for the first time."

The last was said with a brilliant smile that warmed him down to his toes. Looking at the doctor, Kaemon realized that although he found the man gorgeous, he didn't pull at him like Raven. He was able to recognize the man was attractive without feeling the need to bed him.

Two black dressed enforcers entered the room armed to the teeth.

Kaemon was about to demand what they were doing there when Dr. Blythorpe turned and saw them.

"It looks like my ride is here. Call me if you have any other problems."

"Will do." Kaemon watched as the guards flanked the doctor protectively watching their surroundings like someone was going to jump out at any moment.

Nevair definitely wasn't taking any chances with his mate.

Raven opened his eyes trying to fight the sensation of being wrapped in cotton. The first thing he saw was the prince.

"Hello handsome."

A wide relieved smile crossed Kaemon's face. "Hello gorgeous."



“Did I miss taking Trisha to school?”

Kaemon placed a soft kiss on Raven’s forehead.

“No, she hasn’t left yet. You are registering her at the Royal School this morning.”

“Are you sure it isn’t too early? Shouldn’t she take a few days off to deal with her grandmother’s death?”

Kaemon shook his head. “Dragonkin accept death as a part of the natural cycle and move on. To mope and mourn is only to benefit the living. It is more respectful to carry on and remember them as they would like to be remembered. If she didn’t immediately pick up her life it would be disrespectful to her grandmother’s memory. It would say that her grandmother didn’t give her the skills to stand on her own. That she was weak.”

“That wasn’t what you were saying when you thought I was poisoned.”

The prince gave him a tender smile. “You weren’t dead yet. I’m allowed my moment of insanity.”

Raven laughed. “Are you going with us?”

Kaemon brushed a hand across Raven’s head. “No. I have an important meeting that can’t be rescheduled. I’m putting my daughter in your hands. Father called ahead so they are expecting you both. It won’t take more than a few minutes of your time. Afterwards you can come back here and keep me company.”

Raven laughed. “Do you think you’re going to get lonely while I’m gone?”

The prince leaned over and brushed his lips across Raven’s. “The meeting will seem like an eternity without you by my side.”

Raven could feel the blush rising on his cheeks at the prince’s words. No one could claim the prince was shy about his feelings.

“Is he all right?” The king’s voice made Raven jump. He hadn’t realized the other man was in the room. Shit, he almost kissed the prince in front of his father. Raven wasn’t shy, but he drew the line at making out in front of parents. He outgrew that in his teens.

“I’m fine.” Raven sat up and slid out of bed. He grabbed Kaemon when a bit of dizziness spun his senses.

“I’ve talked to the servants but no one will admit to the poisoning. My senses said that none of them were lying so I’m not sure what to make of it. The poison must have been added to the pot before the coffee was poured into it, which would account for no one knowing how Raven became poisoned.” He gave Raven a piercing stare. “Are you sure you can take Trisha? I can send her with Ms. Starny.”

“No!” Raven felt oddly possessive about having anyone else take Trisha to school. It was almost as if because he found her she was at least partly his. “I promised I’d take her.” There that didn’t make him sound like a nutcase.

“I’m ready.” Trisha appeared in the doorway wearing a strange green and gold dress. It had that

schoolgirl uniform look so Raven assumed that was what she was supposed to wear to school.

“Give Raven a minute and he’ll join you outside.” Kaemon said.

The king put an arm around the girl. “Come, I’ll walk you to the hoverlimo. Raven will be with you in a minute.”

Raven didn’t waste any time. He quickly put on his shirt and headed for the door.

“What no goodbye kiss?” Kaemon asked.

Raven turned around and saw the prince looking at him with a pitifully hopeful look.

“I don’t want to be late.”

He went to his tiptoes and pressed a soft kiss to Kaemon’s forehead.

“You’ll have to wait for more.”

“You’re a cruel man, my love, a very cruel man.”

Raven laughed as he walked out the door.

Stepping outside the castle he slid inside the limo giving a nod to the driver who opened his door.

“Take good care of her.” The king said.

Raven gave him a wave. If he stayed to reassure the king they would definitely be late.

“Are you okay?” Trisha was looking at him with anxious eyes. “I heard you were poisoned.”

“I’m fine. Apparently the poison can’t hurt humans. Now what do you like best about school?” He wanted to head her off before she asked any more questions. The girl just lost her grandmother. She didn’t need to worry about losing another person so soon. Raven wondered what they were going to do about a funeral. The authorities probably needed to keep the body for a few days for the investigation, but then he didn’t know what the traditions were for the dragonkin. Did they have elaborate funerals or did they discreetly get rid of the body and move on with their lives?

Trisha looked remarkably calm for someone who just lost her primary caregiver.

“I like dancing and drawing the most.” Trisha said, drawing Raven’s attention back to the discussion at hand.

That explained why she’d gone to watch him dance.

“Are you any good?”

Trisha sat up straight and beamed him a smile. “I’ve won three medals for my drawing and I always do well in dance class.”

“Well I’m sure they have a good program.” Raven assured her. “You grandfather said it was the best

school in the kingdom.”

“I guess.” Trisha shrugged.

Raven awkwardly patted her arm. “It’s hard being the new kid, but I’m sure you’ll make friends right away.”

“It’s not that.” Trisha said looking out the window.

“Then what is it? Is it your grandmother?”

She shook her head. “Grandmother didn’t really want me, she just kept me for the money. I heard her telling a friend once that I was worth a fortune, but only if I was alive.”

Bitch.

Raven kept that opinion to himself, but from that bald description he didn’t doubt that if she’d been worth more dead her grandmother would’ve arranged an accident. The only miracle was that she hadn’t contacted the prince or king earlier. Raven wondered what she had been waiting for.

“Then what’s bothering you?”

“Do you think the prince really wants me?”

Raven resisted the urge to answer right away and gave the question the attention it deserved. “I think that your father never thought about having children, but now that he knows about you, he’s happy you’re a part of his life. It will take a while for you to get to know each other but I think once you get more comfortable together, you’ll find he loves you very much. And your grandfather is extremely excited you are here.”

“It’s because dad likes men.”

Raven choked on a surprised laugh. “Yes it is because your father likes men. The king didn’t think he’d get the joy of having a grandchild so he’s very happy to have you.”

Trisha looked at him through her lashes. “Do you think you’ll stay longer? I can tell that my father likes you.”

“Maybe.” It was Raven’s turn to avoid her gaze. “I have some work obligations but I’d like to get to know everyone a bit better.”

“We’re here.” The driver announced, pulling up in front of a stone building.

Both Raven and Trisha took a deep breath, laughing at each other at the action.

“Why are you nervous?” Trish asked.

Raven shrugged. “I’ve never been responsible for a child before. What if I mess it up?”

Trisha patted his hand. “All you have to do is sign some papers and then you get to leave.”

“That’s true.” Raven perked up. After all how hard could it be to sign a few papers?

After following the signs to the head master’s office, they were ushered into an elegant room by a harried looking woman who gave them a shaky smile before rushing back out.

“Good morning.” A tall man with grey hair and a genial smile stepped forward to shake Raven’s hand. “I’m Headmaster Franklin. His highness told me to expect you both. You must be Trisha.”

He gave Trisha a bright smile, but something about the way he looked at her gave Raven the creeps. It was in the eyes, Raven decided. Something in the man’s expression triggered alarm bells.

He didn’t trust this man.

He didn’t want to leave Trisha at this place.

“Please have a seat.” The Headmaster indicated two intricately carved wooden chairs placed precisely on the other side of the desk.

Pulling out a stack of papers he slid them across the desk. “Now if you could look these over it tells all about our school.” He gave a pompous laugh. “Not that you need to review, after all the king already chose us.”

Raven shot a look at Trisha and saw a corresponding panicked look in her eyes.

He pretended to look over the papers trying to buy time. “What kind of arts program do you have here?”

Franklin gave another laugh. Raven was really starting to hate his laughs.

“We don’t have any arts program. Our students have more important things to do than waste time drawing and dancing about. They are going to be prominent citizens and need to focus on learning laws and customs of foreign countries.”

Raven stared at the man so appalled he didn’t know what to say.

“You don’t have an arts program?” Trisha asked. Raven could hear she was close to tears.

“Not a one.” The headmaster answered cheerfully. “Now just sign there.” He indicated the spot for parental signature.

Raven stood up. “Come Trisha, we’re leaving.”

“What? You can’t do that.” For the first time the headmaster lost his smile.

“Trust me, I can. If you think the leaders of tomorrow don’t need to be creative and know about the arts then this isn’t the school for Trisha.”

“The king will hear about this.” The headmaster threatened.

“Oh trust me, he will.” Raven promised. “I’ll be sure to share with him my opinion of this school.”

Turning on his heel Raven hooked a hand on Trisha’s arm and rushed her from the room.

“Where are we going?” Trisha asked.

“I don’t know, but you aren’t going here.”

“Yeah, that guy gave me the creeps.”

Raven turned to her as they left the building. “You too huh?”

She nodded.

“Raven, Raven.”

An influx of reporters swarmed the stairs. He had to admire them for their ability to get past the school gates.

He put a protective arm around Trisha even though the reporters were keeping a respectful distance. It didn’t take long before something like this could get out of hand and he didn’t want Trisha to be frightened. Scanning the crowd he pointed to one of the few reporters he recognized.

“Gena?”

“Is this your daughter?”

Raven laughed. “No, she’s the daughter of a friend.”

“Why is she leaving? I heard you were registering her.”

He resisted the urge to ask where she heard that, but it could’ve been anyone on the staff, though he thought a school of this caliber should have better protection for it’s students.

“I refuse to register her at a school that has no arts program. Exposure to the arts is what feeds the soul of society.” Raven said, warming up to one of his favorite issues. He’d spent a great deal of time and money bringing art programs to lesser developed planets and poor areas throughout the galaxy. To find such backward thinking at a top school was unforgiveable from his point of view. “There is no way Trisha is going to attend a school that not only doesn’t feel that arts are important but spurns them. The leaders of tomorrow need to be well-rounded individuals who appreciate all facets of the human spirit, not just contract negotiations and war room rules. To understand a civilization is to understand their people’s soul.”

“So where will she be going?”

“I’ll be making some phone calls.”

“Who’s her father?”

“Prince Kaemon is my father.” Trisha said, when Raven hesitated to answer. “Raven is his boyfriend.”

The reporters pounced, pelting him with questions.

“How long have you been dating?”

“Are there any plans for marriage?”

“Are you going to be living here, Raven?”

“Are you giving up your career for love?”

Raven held up his hands laughing. The press had never intimidated him. He’d been dealing with them since his first dance. “The prince and I met last night. I’m doing him a favor this morning.” He shot a glare at Trisha. “I am not his boyfriend. Now please excuse us, I have to get Trisha to a new school.”

The driver opened the door and they got inside.

Raven pulled out his communicator and scrolled down the list. One name caught his eyes.

Perfect.

“Where are you taking me?”

“A friend of mine runs a school for the arts a few miles from here. Let’s go see if she’ll let you in.”

“Why wouldn’t she let me in? My father’s a prince and my grandfather is the king.”

Raven looked at Trisha and saw the underlying nervousness beneath those words.

“Because in this school they let you in because of skill, not because your father is royalty.”

Trisha gave him a sweet smile. “Good. I think I’d like that better anyway. That other school was probably filled with snobs.” She gave Raven an anxious look. “Do you think father is going to be angry with you?”

Raven shrugged. “If he is then he should’ve taken you to school himself.”

\* \* \*

Kaemon disconnected his call and looked at his father, stunned.

“What?” Asked the King.

“That was Headmaster Franklin. He said that the person we sent to register Trisha refused to sign her up with a school that had no arts program.”

“That’s what you get for sending a dancer to sign up your daughter for school.” King Avin said with a laugh. “You should’ve taken her yourself.”

“I was hoping they’d bond.”

“Don’t you want to bond with your only child?”

Kaemon nodded. “But if I can get Raven to bond with her then I get her and my mate. Raven isn’t the type to leave when he thinks the child might be neglected.”

The king frowned. “Playing games with your mate can backfire, son. I’d be careful if I were you.”

“Maybe, but it’s all I’ve got right now. If Trisha and Raven bond I get the entire package.”

“And if they don’t?”

Kaemon shrugged. “Since he’s refused to dump her off at that school I’m willing to bet I have enough to work with. Though I’m kind of curious about where he’s taking her.”

The king smiled. “Me too. I never liked that school when I went there. I only sent you there because my father was hounding me about tradition.”

“Huh.” Kaemon said, giving his father a long, considering look. “I only was going to send her there for the same reason.”

“I guess it’s a good thing your mate decided to shake things up a bit.”

Kaemon smiled. “I have a feeling that’s not the only thing my mate is going to shake up around here.”

\* \* \*

Raven led Trisha up the steps of the School for Arts ignoring the slew of reporters that followed them. He was barely at the top of the stairs when Jani Valle raced through the doors and into his arms.

“Hi handsome.” She said, giving him a big hug.

“Hi beautiful.” Raven said, returning the embrace before placing her on her feet.

“I’m so pleased you called.” She turned to Trisha who was glaring at her.

“So you’re Raven’s friend, Trisha.” Jani said with a smile holding out her hand.

Trisha gave her the briefest handshake in history. “My father, Prince Kaemon, is Raven’s mate.” She said with a less than friendly smile.

Raven hid his smile at his promotion from boyfriend to mate. If he hung around this girl much longer she’d have them married. Instead of commenting he patted her on the back. “Let’s go inside and audition, shall we.”

“You have a mate?” Jani whispered as the trio walked inside.

“I have a lover.” Raven whispered back not wanting Trisha to hear. “They are kind of possessive on this planet.”

Jani laughed. “Only the good ones.” She wrapped an arm around his waist and squeezed. “I’m so glad you’re here. You’ve sent us so much money over the years but never had the time to come visit.”

Raven felt a stab of guilt. “You know I would’ve come, Jani, if I could fit it in my schedule.”

“I know, but now you are here and you brought a protégé. I can’t tell you how thrilled I am. I pulled the committee in just for this audition. We don’t usually let people in mid-cycle you know, but for you we were willing to make an exception.”

“Thank you, Jani.” Raven hoped Trisha was as good as she claimed. He knew they would probably let her in anyway just because of Raven’s contributions to the school, but he wanted her to get in on her own merits. Otherwise, she might as well just go back to the other school and use her father’s title to get in.

They entered the large auditorium and Trisha was led to the stage while Raven was seated beside two women and three men who were all dressed in suits but had the bodies of dancers. Raven felt a little underdressed, especially when all five of them looked like they were trying to strip him with their eyes.

Raven sat down in the chair at the end and watched Trisha’s tryout.

Jani had Trisha do the basic forms and a few jumps and then asked her to do any routine she was familiar with. Stepping off the stage, Jani sat next to Raven and together they watched Trisha turn from a gangly pre-teen to a graceful dancer. Her pirouettes were stunning and her jumps were surprisingly high for her height.

“She’s good.”

“Good enough?” Raven asked. Although he supported art education he had no idea what was good at what level.

“You said she can draw also.”

Raven nodded. “I haven’t seen any of her work but she said she’s won some awards.”

“You know I’d let her in just for you.” Jani said patting his arm. “But I’m relieved I don’t have to. She’ll fit in nicely.”

After placing a kiss on his cheek, she went to collect her new student.

An hour later Trisha and Raven left the school with good spirits and a list of supplies.

“This is going to be so exciting.” Trisha said, all but bouncing down the steps.

Raven gave a quick scan and was pleased to see the reporters had lost interest or had been moved on



by security officers. "You think you'll like it there?"

"No I think I'm going to love it. Let's go home and tell father all about it."

Raven couldn't hold back his laugh. "Yeah, let's go tell father."

Raven was nervous as they made their way back to the castle. He didn't want to upset Kaemon, but then there was no way he was going to turn Trisha over to that Royal School and suppress her creativity. He'd seen the damage other schools had done to dancers and artists over the years. It was one of the reasons he spent so much money supporting them.

"Did they let me in the school because of you?" Trisha asked in a small voice.

Raven shoved down his insecurities to deal with the girl's.

"No." He reassured her. "They would have if I insisted but they told me they thought you were very talented and were happy to have you there."

His honesty was rewarded by a brilliant smile that was so similar to her father's that it made his heart hurt.

Raven panicked.

He was already too close to the prince. The thought of leaving Kaemon and his daughter was like a dagger in his heart. He didn't know if he could survive the week no matter what kind of promises he made.

"You're not going to run away are you?"

Damn the girl was perceptive.

"Do I look panicky?"

Trisha laughed. "Kind of."

"I promised your father I'd stay and help you settle in."

"Do you think he likes me?"

"Yes, Trisha. I think your father likes you. Why wouldn't he? You're a beautiful, sweet, talented girl. What's not to like? It will take him a while to get used to having a child, be patient with him. I don't think he knows quite what to do with you."

Trisha nodded her head. "I will, if you will." She flashed Raven her heart-breaking smile. "I don't think my father knows what to do with you either."

Raven wasn't ready when the driver stopped and opened the door.

Wasn't the castle a little farther before?

He slid out and nodded to the driver who was looking at him with a suspicious twinkle in his eyes.

Helping Trisha out of the car they both approached the castle with dragging feet.

Raven turned and caught Trisha's eyes. They both laughed.

"We have to face him sometime." Raven said.

"Yeah."

The front door opened as they approached.

"Good afternoon. Sir Raven, Princess Trisha." The butler said. "If you are looking for the king or the prince, they are both in the dining room having their afternoon meal. I can order you some food if you are interested."

Raven exchanged looks with Trisha.

"I'm hungry." Raven said.

"Yeah, me too." Trisha agreed.

"If you'd follow me."

Raven was glad he didn't have to find his way on his own. It wasn't something he advertised, but his sense of direction sucked.

They found the royals sitting down to a fine platter of sliced meats and cheeses. Raven was surprised to see an enormous selection of fruits and vegetables were also laid out down the middle of the table.

Kaemon gave him an intimate smile when he walked in. The man obviously hadn't heard of his antics yet.

"How was your meeting?" He asked the prince.

"Fine, fine."

The prince didn't meet his eyes, making Raven suspect the meeting might not have been as important as Kaemon had implied.

"Mmm hmm." He let his cynicism shine through.

Kaemon's face turned a little red. "I had them prepare some dishes I thought would appeal to your tastes."

Raven let him off the hook. The prince blushing was adorable, but his consideration regarding Raven's eating, especially since he didn't know if Raven would be back for lunch, was sweet.

He motioned for Trisha to take a seat beside her father and he took one next to the king.

It wasn't until he was settled in that he realized he was seated directly across from the prince who was staring at him with hot eyes.

"So Trisha, how did you like the Royal Academy?" The king asked.

Trisha scooped up some food with great concentration.

Raven came to her rescue.

"She isn't going to that school."

"Why not?" The king asked, setting down his fork and piercing Raven with a pointed stare.

Raven scooped up some odd yellow vegetables as he concentrated on what to say. He settled with the truth.

"The headmaster gave me the creeps and they didn't have an arts program. Trisha told me she was interested in continuing her studies."

"She could've had private studies and still gone to the school. I can replace the headmaster if he bothers you so much."

Raven picked up a purple fruit and regarded it on his fork.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to replace the headmaster, but it is the basic philosophy of the school that bothers me. They don't respect the arts and as such they are building one-dimensional thinkers for your future leaders. If Trisha is going to take her place in the royal family she is better served to be a well-rounded individual and able to relate to your people. How is she going to relate if she doesn't understand your culture through dance and music? She doesn't have to become a professional dancer, but learning dancing isn't going to do any more harm than teaching her how to be graceful. I registered her at an arts school that I know also has an amazing scholastic program. If you want to register her at a different school then it's up to you Kaemon. Actually, you might want to get her a tutor for the political training. I don't think they'll cover that completely at an art school." Raven said.

Kaemon gave him a sweet smile that immediately made Raven suspicious. A man that buff didn't do sweet well.

"I'll keep her wherever you think best, my Raven. I know you have her best interests at heart."

Raven flashed a glance at the king who made an odd cough.

"Are you all right, your highness?"

The king smiled at him. Raven decided King Avin didn't do innocent any better than his son.

"I'm just fine Raven. Just fine."

Raven decided that the men on this planet were just plain strange. Too bad they were so gorgeous.

"Are you finished?" Kaemon's voice rolled over him like a physical touch.

He nodded. It was too difficult to eat while the prince was undressing him with his eyes.

“Father, I need to show Raven around today. Could you make sure Trisha has everything she needs for school tomorrow?”

“Of course.” The king scanned the list. “Trisha, would you like a servant to get this for you or would you like to go with me and pick them up?”

“I’d like to go with you.” Trisha said in a soft voice, not looking up from her food.

The king beamed. “Excellent. We can get to know each other better.”

Kaemon stood up sliding his chair across the floor in his haste. “Raven, come with me.”

Before Raven could say anything, an iron grip enclosed his wrist as the prince pulled him up from his chair. “Come on darling. Let me show you around.”

Raven waved to the others as he was hauled out of the room.

\* \* \*

Kaemon’s hands were made to caress this man. Watching Raven writhe beneath his touch made everything bearable. Every irritating politician, every scary overlord trying to take over the kingdom, every annoyance vanished beneath the sensation of silky skin beneath his fingers.

Watching Raven’s beautiful face tossed back in passion made his life worthwhile. He would do anything to persuade his mate to stay by his side. Kaemon licked a line of heat up Raven’s neck letting some of his innate fire warm the skin beneath his lips.

“Do that again.” Raven said in a whispery voice, as if he couldn’t collect enough breath to speak at full power.

Kaemon leaned forward and breathed warm air, careful not to let it out into a flame. It was a rare ability to breathe flame in human form, an ability passed down through his family. He should check and see if Trisha could do that. Even though she couldn’t shift, she still would have a dragon spirit. It would be an interesting test to see how much dragon she had.

However, right now he had to be careful of his lover. He didn’t want to burn Raven’s luscious skin. Mate bond or not Raven was it for him. The one man he would spend the rest of his life with or yearning to.

Raven snapped Kaemon’s attention back to his task by wrapping those strong dancer’s legs around him, pulling him close.

“I need you.” Raven’s eyes were wild, his pupils were blown and the ring of blue remaining was three shades darker than normal.

"I'm yours." Kaemon promised over the lump in his throat. He took Raven's mouth in a savage kiss, intent on branding his taste on his lover so that no other man would ever be enough.

Not passionate enough.

Not strong enough.

Not him.

Raven, his spirited lover, surrendered. Kaemon sank into the giving body of the dancer. Now was the moment to make the man truly his. Giving himself partially over to his dragon self, Kaemon let his teeth elongate and after licking the meaty part of Raven's shoulder to anesthetize it, he sank in his dragon fangs, and pumped his mate with the fluid that would bind them for eternity and lengthen Raven's life to match his own. In that moment they were truly mated and not even time, space, or death could separate them.

Power surged through Kaemon's body as he pumped both his seed and his mating fluid into his willing lover. Once he was certain he was out of both fluids Kaemon removed his fangs and licked over the spot.

Moans and whispers filled the air. The moment was too powerful, too sacred, for loud noises. When he came, Kaemon hid his face in his lithe dancer's shoulder so Raven wouldn't see his tears. With his fingers he felt the heat of Raven's skin and knew that his lover now carried a tattoo on his back that would match what he looked like in dragon form. He hoped Raven wasn't against tattoos.

With a moan he pulled out of his lover. Kaemon's body wanted to stay inside the warm, welcoming man below him but he didn't want Raven to suffer any discomfort. Reaching into a bedside table, he removed a towel and wiped them both down before tossing it on the floor.

"Tidy." Raven teased in a breathless voice.

"That's why we have servants." Kaemon said. "Keeps people employed."

Laughing, Raven poked Kaemon in the ribs. "You're so sweet to think of your people like that."

"Yep, that's me, always thinking of others."

"Did you bite me?"

"Yes. Did it hurt?"

Raven shook his head. "It was kinda sexy."

"Good."

Unable to stand the inch of bed between them, Kaemon wrapped his arms around Raven and pulled him into his arms, letting the dancer's lean body rest on top of his.

"I always wanted a royal mattress." Raven said rubbing his head against Kaemon's chest like a friendly cat.

Kaemon smiled stroking Raven's silky hair. "You can have one as long as you want."

Lifting his head Raven stared into Kaemon's eyes. "You know I can't stay, right?"

"You could stay if you wanted." Kaemon let everything show in his eyes. He knew he'd conveyed the great love he felt when Raven sucked in his breath.

"I have obligations." Raven said, but his voice wasn't as determined as before.

Kaemon could feel victory within his grasp.

\* \* \*

Raven sat down for dinner with the king, Kaemon, and Trisha, smiling as he listened to the little girl's chatter. The feast set before them would've fed an entire dance troupe, much less the four of them.

He flashed a smile towards Kaemon when he felt the prince's foot slide along his own.

A short melody drew his attention to his communicator.

Glancing at the display Raven stood up.

"Excuse me." He said, before quickly exiting the room. Once he was out in the hall he answered the call.

"Hello."

"Raven, sweetness, how are you?" Evan's smooth voice poured across the line like rich temptation.

"I'm doing well." Raven said. He couldn't help the smile that crossed his face. He and Evan may be old news in the romance department but his ex-lover was still one of his favorite people.

"I'm so glad to hear that. Listen I've got good news. Remember that dance special we did for the Hyltarian orphans?"

Raven searched his mind. After so many years of planet hopping some of his shows were starting to blur together in his memory. This one he did remember because it was the last time he saw Evan.

"Six moon cycles ago?"

"Yes, we're up for an award by the galactic arts council."

"No!"

"Yes!"

Raven was excited. As many awards as he'd won in the past, the galactic arts council award was one of the few he'd never won. It was usually saved for do-gooder humanitarians.

“How did we rate?” He asked his ex-lover.

“Someone submitted our names.” Evan said with a laugh.

“And would this someone be the other person I performed that particular dance with?”

“Maybe.”

Raven laughed along with Evan. Although Evan was a talented dancer, he wasn't as recognized as Raven, one of the points of contention in their relationship. Evan needed to be the star of any relationship and Raven refused to be less to make his lover feel better.

“Well that's great. Let me know what they decide.”

“No.” Even blurted out. “We have to perform at the awards ceremony. It's a really big deal and the best part is that it's going to happen on the dragon planet you're touring on.

Raven was starting to get a bad feeling. “How did you know what planet I'm on?”

“Baby, just because we're not together any more, doesn't mean I don't keep track of where you're performing.”

“How does Myles feel about that?” Raven asked, referring to Evan's lover, a pale blond who worshipped the ground his ex danced on.

“Myles understands. Besides you're on every dance news show in the galaxy. I have to stay current with dance information and you are it my friend.”

Raven couldn't argue with that but he still felt a pang of concern for the fragile Myles.

“Just, be gentle with him, Evan. The poor guy really loves you.”

Evan's rich laughter came across the phone. “I know Raven, I'll take care of my man. Is it true that you hooked yourself a prince?”

“I am dating Prince Kaemon, yes.” Raven said cautiously, knowing anything he told Evan would be on the galacticnet the next day. Evan couldn't help it, he was a horrible gossip, but as most of the universe had already heard the news, Raven didn't mind confirming it with his old friend.

“Good for you.”

Raven thought Evan's cheer was a little forced but he wasn't going to step on that emotional land mine. “Now can I tell the promoters that you'll do the dance with me?”

Raven sighed. “When is it?”

“In two weeks.”

“Two weeks?” Raven felt a trickle of unease. These shows didn't get planned overnight. “How long have you known about this?”

There was a long silence.

“Two moon cycles.”

“And you are just telling me now?”

“Listen Raven, I had them shift the show to accommodate you. I didn’t want to mess up whatever you have going on with the prince but I-I’ve missed you.”

Raven felt his heart pang. Evan had been the first dancer he’d met when he came upon the dance scene and years later was Raven’s first lover. Evan was imprinted on his heart but he wasn’t going to go there romantically again.

“Just friends.”

“What?”

“I’ll dance with you, but we are just friends. I wouldn’t do that to Myles.”

“Of course.” Evan’s relief was clear across the line. “I adore Myles and don’t want to hurt him.”

“Okay. Send me the info and I’ll be there.”

“Brilliant. Love you, Raven.” Evan said before the line went suddenly dead.

“Who was that?” A low growling voice asked behind him.

Raven spun around to see his lover towering over him, eyes glowing.

“An old friend. I guess I’m going to be here a few more weeks. I have to do a reward show performance.”

Looking into Kaemon’s eyes, Raven’s back suddenly itched. Reaching back he tried to scratch but couldn’t quite reach the twitch spot.

Kaemon stepped forward until he towered over Raven. His hand slid behind him and scratched, hard. It felt like bliss.

“And this old friend is going to be there with you. This old friend who says he loves you before he hangs up.”

“I’m sure that was just an automatic statement. Something he tells everyone when he hangs up.”

He almost convinced himself it was true.

The prince continued to glower at him, his lush mouth pressed into a thin line. “Will this old friend be at your performance?”

Raven nodded. “We’re doing it together. Scratch a little to the right.”



Kaemon moved his hands to accommodate Raven's request.

"I can't say I'm not happy you're staying a few more weeks but I don't want you to be alone with him."

"What!" Raven was surprised to see that Kaemon looked completely serious.

"I don't trust this man who claims to love you and finds a reason for you to dance with him." Kaemon said running his hands up and down Raven's back completely derailing his thought process.

Raven was going to argue as soon as he collected his thoughts. Kaemon's touch made his mind go fuzzy.

"So you'll take a chaperone wherever you go." Kaemon commanded.

Raven laughed.

"I'm not some sheltered virgin. I can take care of myself."

"No. You can't. It is my job to take care of you. I'll have one of the guards escort you about. It will save you from having to push away unwanted advances." Kaemon's tone left no doubts in Raven's mind that the advances better be unwanted.

Sometimes it was better to give in gracefully and fight another day.

"As you wish, lover." Raven said going up to his tiptoes he placed a kiss on Kaemon's cheek. "I wouldn't want you to worry."

The prince wrapped Raven in his arms even as he looked at his lover suspiciously. "Why do I worry more when you are agreeable?"

"Because you are a smart, smart man." Raven said, before bringing Kaemon's head down for a passionate kiss.

## Chapter Four

Raven was relieved to find out they were performing at the same theatre he'd danced at a few nights ago. It would be easier if he didn't have to get used to the stage as well as learn a new number.

Evan raced down the steps to meet him.

"Raven." He shouted, his handsome face lighting up as he watched the dancer exit the chauffeured vehicle.

With a laugh he grabbed Raven and twirled him in the air.

Raven was plucked from Evan's arms by one guard while another slammed Evan to the ground.

"What the hell?" Evan shouted, looking up at the large guard with his foot on Evan's chest.

“The prince doesn’t appreciate others touching his mate.”

“He was my lover before he was the prince’s mate.” Evan protested, his green eyes shooting daggers.

“Now he’s not.” The guard said, his hand on his weapon.

“There’s no need for that.” Raven said, escaping the guard’s hold. “Evan is a dancer. We’re notoriously a touchy-feely group. Let him up.”

The guard assessed him for a moment but when Raven didn’t back down the other man shrugged and stepped aside.

Raven helped his ex-lover to his feet.

“Sorry about that, Evan.” He said in a low voice.

Evan gave him a weak smile. “That’s all right. I don’t blame you.” He gave the guard a glare letting him know who he blamed.

“What are we performing?”

“I thought we’d do the second half of that dance we did on Lewiston X.”

Raven searched his memory. “That would work. I’m a little rusty on it but it was a good number.”

“You should think so you choreographed it.” Evan said laughing.

Raven shrugged. “I don’t like everything I choreograph.”

Evan swung an arm around Raven’s shoulders giving him a one armed hug that even the guard couldn’t find objective. “That’s true. I missed you Raven. I haven’t seen you in too long.”

“We’ve both been busy.”

Raven smiled as he walked into the theatre and everyone clapped at his entrance. He stepped away from Evan and gave an exaggerated bow. “Thank you everyone.” He said, blowing extravagant kisses and making everyone laugh.

The afternoon was eaten away with the sound of feet hitting the wooden stage floor over and over. Routines long forgotten slid back into Raven’s muscle memory as his body flowed through the movements as if it was yesterday and not many months since he last performed those steps.

They finished the number maneuvering their bodies in and out of each other’s spaces in a complicated movement that brought the stagehands and onlookers to their feet. Raven flipped over Evan’s back and landed solidly on the balls of his feet.

“I think we did that well.” Evan said.

They bowed to their makeshift audience wearing wide grins.

“We have two more rehearsals scheduled.” Evan said as they went back to the dressing room to change.

When Raven stripped off his shirt he saw Evan staring at his back in the mirror.

“You have seen me naked before.” He reminded Evan.

“Yeah, but that was before you got that tattoo.” Evan walked over and touched Raven’s back. “It’s amazingly realistic. Who did it? I might want to get one too.”

“What are you talking about?” Raven asked crossly. He was tired after the dance and all he wanted was a nice bath and a nap in his lover’s arms.

“Your dragon tattoo.” Evan said.

“Dragon tattoo?”

Evan spun Raven around so his back faced the mirror. An intricate tattoo of a bronze colored dragon covered his entire back.

“I’m going to kill him.” Raven said with complete conviction.

\* \* \*

The first person Raven saw as he stormed through the castle was Ms. Starny.

“Have you seen Prince Kaemon?” Raven asked.

“No sir, I haven’t.” She said with a frown when she caught Raven’s expression. “Is something wrong?”

“He mated me.” Raven said. Damn his voice was shrill.

“I beg your pardon.”

Raven spun around and lifted up the back of his shirt. “See.”

“He mated you.” Starny said in a sad voice. “I’m sorry I have to do this.”

Before Raven could ask her what she was talking about, everything went black.

Kaemon checked the time again.

"I don't think it's gotten much later in the past few seconds." The king said laughing. "He'll be home soon."

"He's practicing with an old flame. What if he goes out for drinks or something afterwards?" The thought of Raven getting chummy with his ex-lover sent acid churning in Kaemon's stomach.

"First of all the boy's nuts about you, and secondly you sent him with a bunch of guards. Look there's Sallen now." He said, pointing at one of the guards Kaemon had sent along with Raven.

"Sallen, where's my mate?" Kaemon asked. He glared at the guard, certain it was the other man's fault that his lover wasn't next to Kaemon like he belonged.

The guard frowned. "I thought he'd be here. He discovered the tattoo on his back and he was quite upset about it." The guard gave a sheepish smile. "I have a side bet going that he'll punch before he yells. He's got a bit of a temper, that one."

Kaemon's stomach went into free fall. "Send out the guard and search the property. Something has happened to Raven."

"What makes you think that?" The king asked, jumping to his feet.

"If Raven was coming to yell at me he would've come straight here. How long ago did you get here?" He asked Sallen who was calling for back up on his communicator.

"Ten minutes ago."

"Dragon hell, he could be anywhere." Kaemon cursed.

The guards fanned out. Kaemon waited impatiently, going over in his head where his lover could've gone. It felt like forever before Sallen returned.

"The last time he was spotted was in the company of Ms. Starny. They are both missing."

"Father, what do you know about Starny?"

"Apparently not as much as I should." The king said, pulling out his communicator.

Several calls later and the truth about the woman was revealed. She was part of an anti-dragonkin organization and had been fired from several jobs for spreading negative values among the children. In fact, the king's administrative people just fired her due to her teachings after one of the children came home claiming she told him that dragonkin were evil and would be damned in the afterlife.

"Why did we not know about this?" Kaemon said. "She's worked for us for years?"

King Avin ran fingers through his hair. "I'm so sorry son. She was recommended to me by the headmaster of the Royal School."

Kaemon gave a snort. "From what Raven said she probably had plenty to blackmail the fellow with, he

thinks the man's a pedophile."

The king growled. "We'll look into it. If we find he's guilty of molesting children we'll hang him in the courtyard and invite the press."

"Good. But we need to find my mate."

"Did you inject him with the mating serum?" King Avin asked, gripping Kaemon's arm.

"Yeah."

"Then you can find him with your dragon."

Kaemon smiled. "That will give that bitch a real reason to worry about dragonkin."

\* \* \*

Raven woke up freezing. It took a lot of blinking before he realized it wasn't his eyes that weren't working, it was the fact that he was in a dark cellar. The floor was so cold he felt it freezing through his thin pants.

Shivering he looked around to figure out where he was.

"You're in the wine cellar." A voice said in the darkness.

A sizzle and then a spark went through the air before the light evened out and Raven could see Ms. Starny in the light of a candle.

"I had to save you." She said in a calm voice. "It is for your best interests that you get away from that beast."

"What beast?" Raven asked, but he had a good feeling he already knew.

"That monster that claimed you for his own." She said. Hatred was so thick in her voice, Raven was surprised he couldn't see it in the air.

"Kaemon?"

"Yeah. You are too precious and fine to belong to a beast. I will help you run. We can find a new planet to hide on together."

She gave him a look she probably thought was alluring but made Raven queasy. Spikes of pain went through his head. A touch to his scalp came back sticky.

"Sorry I had to hit you. Luckily we were close to a hidden entrance to the cellar or I might not have been able to drag you away, but now that you're awake we can plan our escape."

“How do you plan on doing that? Kaemon is going to have the spaceports watched.”

The woman was certifiable.

Starny bit her lip. “I don’t know, I thought you’d come up with a plan. You’re so handsome and smart. Not like that stupid prince. I couldn’t believe that poison didn’t kill him. First his daughter escaped the killing because the bastards were too queasy to shoot a little girl, and then the poison I lined the pot with didn’t work.” She gave Raven an apologetic smile. “Sorry if it made you sick. I didn’t think you’d drink it since everyone knows you don’t take breakfast.”

“Why were you trying to kill Trisha?”

“She’s an abomination.” Starny said, as if that explained everything. “Her grandmother sent a letter. I found it before the king received the mail. She was going to let the king buy his granddaughter. I couldn’t let that happen. She might breed and bring more of those creatures into the world. I thought Kaemon was safe. Who thought he’d ever sleep with a woman? If he did it once he could do it again. He had to die. King Avin is too old to breed and he’s a good king even if he is one of them. I decided to let him live but kill the others. It was a good plan.” She nodded her head as if Raven should agree with her.

“Um, yeah, good plan.” As his eyes adjusted to the light he saw that she held a phaser in her hand. He recognized it as one of the few models that actually had a kill level, unlike the others that were used as a deterrent and would only stun.

He hoped his lover found him soon. He didn’t know what he could do to keep the psychotic woman’s interest much longer.

A loud roar had them both jumping to their feet.

“He’s coming.” Starny said, the hand holding the pistol started to shake. Raven hoped she didn’t shoot him.

The ground shook beneath his feet. Something big and heavy was coming down the stairs.

Starny started screaming as the door slammed off of its hinges and shot across the room. An enormous reptilian head shoved through the doorway. The smell of sulfur filled the room.

Raven started to shake. The dragon shot a stream of flame right past Raven. He could feel the heat so close he was surprised it didn’t singe off his hair.

Turning his head so he didn’t have to see the screaming woman, Raven squeezed his eyes shut and hoped the creature didn’t see him.

Eventually the woman stopped screaming and he felt the heat recede. Tears dripped down his cheeks but he still didn’t look.

It was a horrible dream he hoped he’d wake from soon.

“My poor mate.” Kaemon’s voice had Raven’s eyes snapping open.

His lover stood before him, stark naked.

“Why are you naked?”

“Because when I shift my clothes get shredded.”

“That was you?” Raven had known, deep down, that the monster was his lover but it was one thing to know the man you have sex with can turn into a dragon and a completely different thing to actually see it. “I was scared.”

Kaemon pulled a resistant Raven into his arms. “There is nothing to fear from me, no matter what form I’m in.”

Raven pulled out of Kaemon’s arms and punched him in the face. “That’s for mating with me without my knowledge.”

“Ouch.” Kaemon said grabbing his nose. “That hurt and now I owe Sallen fifty credits. I told him you were a gentle man who’d never punch his lover.”

“Serves you right.” Raven said, not feeling a twinge of remorse.

Kaemon gave him a contrite look. “Will you stay and be my mate? Please?”

Raven looked over to the pile of ash that was Ms. Starny. “Why didn’t I burn when you flamed her? I could feel the heat but it didn’t burn.”

“Because my love. You are my mate. You will always be immune to my fire.”

Raven looked at the ashes again. “I can live with that.”

“Good. Let’s go and get me some clothes. It’s chilly down here.”

Laughing, Raven let his lover take him upstairs and back to their room.

## Chapter Six

The awards ceremony had been fun and surprisingly he and Evan received the prestigious award. Unfortunately, Kaemon had to go out of town on a business trip and missed the entire thing.

Because of the late night Raven was still sipping his coffee and nibbling on a croissant when his lover strode into the room looking as if a thundercloud was following him. With little regard to the delicacy of the device he tossed his widescreen media reader onto the table.

“Do have an explanation of this?” He roared.

Raven took another sip. “Good morning darling, how was your trip?”

The prince leaned over and pierced his lover with a vicious glare. “It was going fine until I read the morning gossip reports and found a picture of my lover on the front page.”

“Tsk, tsk. You should never read gossip. You of all people should know better.”

Kaemon’s eyes turned pure gold.

“You have such pretty eyes.” Raven sighed leaning up and placing a soft kiss on the prince’s cheek.

“Don’t think to distract me with your sweetness.” Kaemon grumbled, but Raven could already feel the anger in the room ratcheting down to a more moderate level.

“Just look at the picture.”

With a put upon sigh, Raven set down his cup and picked up the reader. On the front of the entertainment gossip page was a picture of him hugging Evan and lifting him off his feet. A picture of two men hugging wasn’t front page news but the look of pure adoration on Evan’s face chilled Raven to the bone. The headline read. “Evan and Raven back together?”

“Shit this will break Myles’ heart.”

“Who cares about Myles? What about mine?”

Raven looked up in surprise. “Nothing happened. I was hugging him because he told me him and his lover just adopted a little boy.”

Kaemon startled Raven by leaning over and sniffing his neck. The tension in the prince evaporated. “You’re telling the truth.”

Anger surged through Raven. Never had he felt as furious as he did at that moment. Without thinking he jumped to his feet, pulled back his fist and punched the prince in the face.

“Ow!” Kaemon said grabbing his nose. “What the hell did you do that for?”

“You don’t think I know what you’re doing? You were seeing if you could smell another man on me. Thanks for the trust.”

Kaemon reached for him but Raven moved away. The prince opened his mouth to speak when Raven’s pocket started to ring.

Flashing a furious look at his lover, Raven pulled his communicator out of his pocket. Pushing a button brought the caller to his screen. A thin blond with puffy red eyes looked back at him.

“Myles?”

“I-I a-always thought you’d get him in the end but I hoped you’d warn me first.” The blond sobbed.

“Nothing happened. I was hugging him because he told me the two of you just adopted. Congratulations by the way.”

“Th-thanks.” Myles dabbed at his eyes. “You don’t have to lie.” He continued sadly. “I always knew I was second choice.”



Kaemon snatched the communicator. "Hello Myles, I'm Prince Kaemon. Trust me when I tell you Raven hasn't been with any man but me for the past two months."

Raven grabbed the communicator back. "The bastard had the nerve to smell me when he got back a few minutes ago."

A wide smile crossed Myles' face giving Raven a hint of why his ex-lover was with the man. Myles was pretty when he wasn't red and puffy. "Thanks Raven. I'm sorry I called. It's hard being second choice."

"You're not second, Myles. Evan chose to spend his life with you. You have a house and a baby and everything with him that I never had."

Myles nodded but Raven could tell his argument wasn't persuading the man a bit.

"I'm glad you found someone. I like it better when you're involved. When you're single I worry there's the chance you'll get tired of being alone and take Evan back." Myles gave a bitter laugh. "I can't exactly compete with the galaxy's most beautiful bachelor and Evan still loves you."

"Trust me when I say even if things don't work out with the prince, Evan and I will never be back together. We are happier apart and despite what it might look like in the picture, the hug was all we shared."

There was a pause and Raven could tell Myles was thinking something over. "I know I don't have the right to ask but could you answer me one question honestly?"

Raven shrugged. "Maybe."

"Did Evan hit on you while you were at the party?"

Raven bit his lip as he tried to come up with the right answer.

Myles gave a choked laugh. "That's what I thought."

"I'm sorry." What else could he say?

"No." Myles blinked back tears. "I know it's not your fault. I've always known. Could I talk to the Prince?"

Raven handed his communicator over.

Kaemon walked off with it and spoke in hushed tones that didn't allow Raven to hear what he was saying. They spoke for several minutes before the prince came back and handed over his communicator.

Myles eyes were clear and he gave Raven a tremulous smile. "Thanks for everything Raven, you've been very patient with me. I know why Evan has always been enamored of you. You're a really nice guy."

After giving an uncomfortable smile to the man, Raven disconnected.

"Honey." Kaemon started.

“Don’t you honey me.” Raven said. Now that the conversation with Myles was over he remembered his anger at the prince. “You don’t trust me.”

That hurt worst than anything else. He thought they were building a relationship but Kaemon obviously thought he was a cheap piece of ass who would cheat on him the first chance he got. Shit, he was feeling as weepy as Myles.

Straightening his back Raven gathered his dignity about him like a shroud and walked out of the room. He needed to get back to reality. As much as Trisha wanted him there he wasn’t really her father. Her father was the asshole who just ripped out his heart.

\* \* \*

Raven marched through the space station hauling his one bag on his back. Good thing he traveled light, he’d hate to be dragging a trunk through the station. The line to get tickets was long but he didn’t care, he wasn’t in the palace any more and that was all right. He’d left a note for Trisha telling her he had to go. He hoped she wouldn’t be too upset.

Raven just couldn’t take it any more. Never in his life had he ever cheated on anyone, despite the many temptations thrown his way. If he was in a relationship, he stayed there and never even looked at another man while he was with the current one.

When Kaemon doubted his word after seeing that article in the paper Raven knew they were over. How could Kaemon doubt him? Where along the way had he given the impression that he would ever cheat on his lover?

“Next.”

Raven went up to the window and told the clerk. “I need a ticket to Dreenvi.”

“Identification.”

Raven tapped his identi-bracelet to the scanner.

It made a rude beep.

The clerk looked up with wide eyes. He looked at Raven’s information on his screen.

“Sir, could you please stand over there. Someone will be by to get you in a minute.”

“What? Why? I don’t need anyone to come get me, I need to get on that ship.”

The clerk looked embarrassed as he looked up at Raven. “I’m sorry sir but the prince has put a hold on your passport. You’re not allowed to leave the planet without royal permission, and as you’re listed as the prince’s mate, I don’t see him letting you leave any time soon.”

Sighing, Raven left the line and threw himself into the nearest chair.

“Bastard.”

He knew something like this would happen. There was no way Kaemon was going to let him go so easily and did he really want to get away? As much as it hurt to discover the prince had little faith in him, it hurt more to be separated from the man.

Tilting back his head, Raven blinked back tears.

“Don’t cry, darling. I’m here for you now.” Kaemon’s big hand patted Raven on the leg. “Come back to the palace with me and we can talk this out. I’m sorry I didn’t trust you.”

“I’m sorry too.” Raven said. He was tired. Tired of fighting. Tired of missing his lover. “Why do I miss you so much? It’s only been an hour.”

Kaemon’s big hand stroked Raven’s head. “Because we’re bonded and our souls belong together. There’s nowhere you will ever go that you won’t miss the feel of me beside you. Even if you got on that ship you’d return because you’d miss me too much.”

Raven laughed. “Are you sure I’d miss you?”

“I’m sure.” Kaemon leaned forward and kissed Raven. “Come back to me and I promise even if I see you on the front pages with your hands down some guy’s pants, I’ll believe your version of the story.”

Kaemon looked so sincere that Raven had to believe him. “Y-you really hurt me when you accused me of cheating.” He said, swallowing back his tears.

The prince wrapped an arm around Raven’s shoulders. “I will spend the rest of my life making it up to you.”

“What about my career?”

“I’d prefer if you kept your dancing to this planet, but if you have already signed contracts with others then we will respect them, but after that please try to stay near home.”

“So you think you have everything under control, do you?”

Kaemon looked at his lover with an assessing eye. “Don’t worry my sweet, I will never think I have you under control.” He said with a smile. “You are everything to me. Will you give me another chance and be my mate for life?”

From his pocket he pulled a small box. “I saved this to give to my mate, but I always thought it would be under more romantic conditions.” He said with a look around the space station. “But I don’t want there to be any misunderstandings about us. You are my other half. My sexier, kinder, sweeter other half, that makes my life worthwhile. Come back, live in the palace, and be my mate.” The prince opened the jewel box and Raven was surprised to see a pendant. He’d been expecting a ring.

It was a pendant of a black raven holding a rare Sylian diamond in its beak.

He looked up at the prince.

“My mother had the sight. She made this for me when I was five. She said she had a vision that I would fall in love with a bird instead of a dragon.” Kaemon laughed. “I thought she’d drunk a little too much wine the night before, but as usual she was right. So will you be my forever mate?”

“Yes.” Raven said, blinking back tears. “I’ll be your forever mate.” He leaned forward and let the prince place the necklace around his neck.

The crowd at the space port applauded, making both men suddenly aware of how many people were watching.

Raven stood up and let Kaemon take his baggage.

Intertwining his fingers with the prince’s, Raven smiled up at his lover. “Let’s take the next part out of the public eye or it will be your father who doesn’t approve of the morning news.”

Kaemon laughed.

“Let’s.”

The End

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