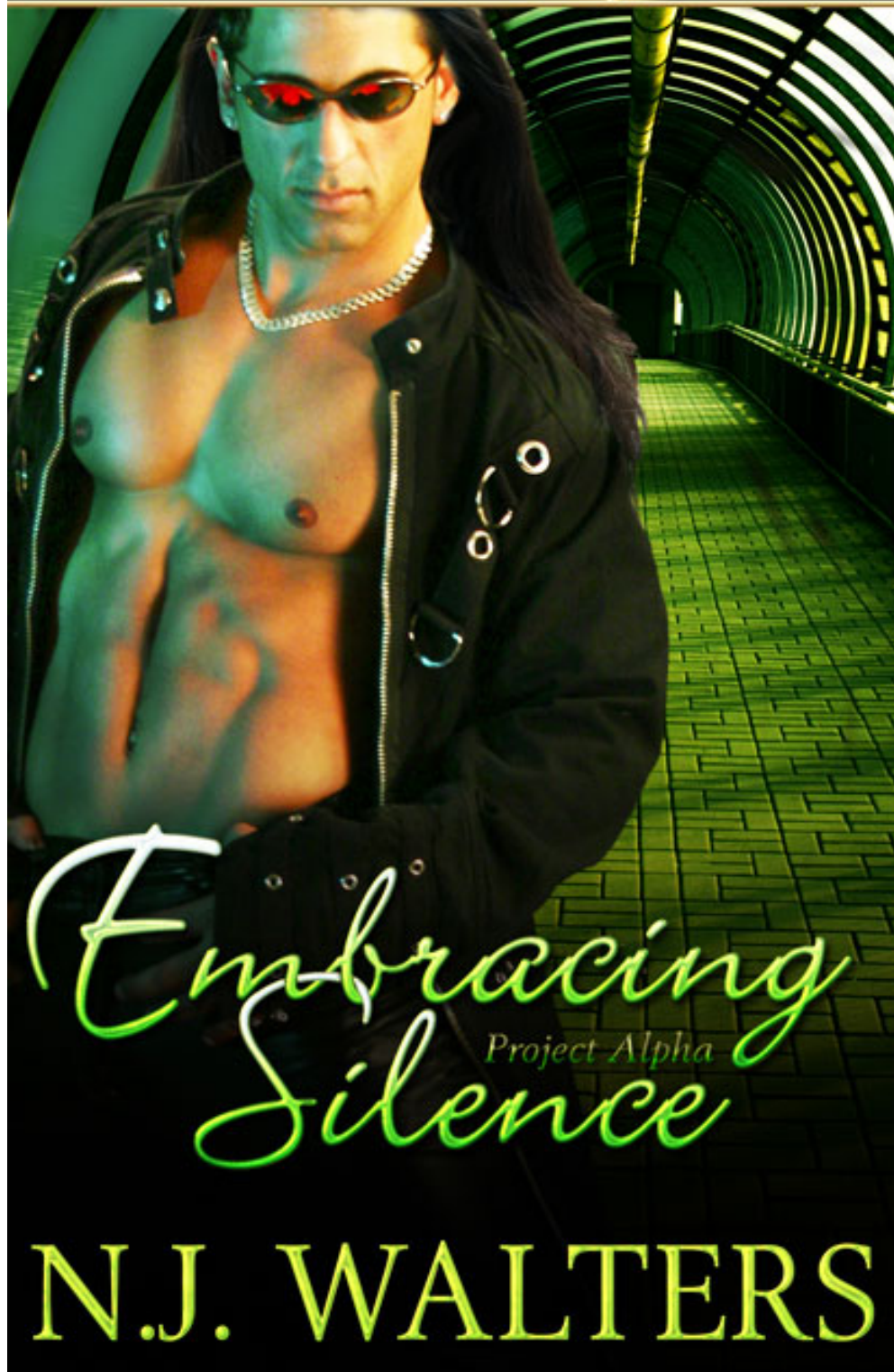


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Embracing Silence

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# *EMBRACING SILENCE*

**N.J. Walters**

### *Dedication*

As always, to my husband whose support is unwavering and never-ending.

Thank you to all the readers who read my books and who wrote to me wanting to know what happened to Tienan and Logan.

### *Trademarks Acknowledgement*

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## **Chapter One**

*Earth 2133*

Fog blanketed the outer city, wrapping it in dampness and filtering out what little light managed to penetrate from the moon and stars that hung in the night sky. The air was thick with the stench of garbage and human waste.

It was a perfect night for hunting.

Anyone with any sense at all was inside, tucked away in whatever dubious shelter they could find. In a lawless land, even the criminals and killers weren't out on such a night. It was just too dangerous.

Tienan waited in the shadow of a burnt-out building, the bricks darkened with soot, dirt and age. Motionless. Nothing, not a twitch or a sound, betrayed his position. He could stay like this for hours. And would, until he found out who was following him.

A man in his position couldn't be too careful.

Tienan knew what he was—an Alpha. Alpha One to be exact. He'd been bred to be an unstoppable fighting machine. And he was damn good at his job. Thanks to genetic enhancements, his senses were more acute than a regular person's, his reflexes faster, his body stronger. The microcomputer that was part of his brain allowed him to learn at an incredible speed, to calculate the odds and make the right decision in any situation.

In short, he was the perfect killer—intelligent, adaptable, ruthless and strong. But there was one tiny problem his creators, the scientists at the Piedmont Corporation and the members of the Ruling Council, hadn't counted on.

He was an Alpha. That meant he didn't take orders from anyone.

In a world divided and constantly at war, that made him a dangerous liability. One to be destroyed no matter the cost. That might have been his fate if not for the help of one of the scientists who worked for the Piedmont Corporation who'd created him.

Kathryn Piedmont. Just the thought of her made his heart skip a beat. She'd shown him kindness, treated him like a human being for the first time in his entire thirty years of existence. She'd risked her life to save both him and his friend Logan, Alpha Two, from termination.

But Kathryn was no longer here. He and Logan were alone in their fight against the injustice that existed. Wars, natural disasters and disease had transformed the planet more than a hundred years ago. When the dust settled, the world was divided into two sections. The rich and privileged lived inside the Gate—a high-tech shield, which protected the enclosed city from contamination from the outside. Climate-controlled and almost impenetrable, the Gate protected the ruling class who lived inside its safe confines. Everyone else resided outside in poverty, filth, disease and lawlessness.

That had to change.

It was a daunting task, but one he was determined to accomplish or die trying. There was nothing else for him.

He had no home. He'd been hatched in a lab and reared under the tutelage of scientists whose goal was to make him strong and impervious to pain. He'd breathed recycled air and had never been outside the confines of the Piedmont Corporation labs until he was sixteen. That was when he'd gone out on his first mission.

The contrast between the sterile, pristine world he knew and the one outside the Gate had been startling. The air had been thick and hard to breathe until his body adjusted. Occasionally, smog coated the outer city, making the air quality even worse, burning his lungs and irritating his eyes until he'd become acclimated to it. The sights and sounds and colors had almost overwhelmed him. But he'd done the job he'd been sent to do and returned back to the lab. He'd been too young, and too well-trained to do anything different.

That changed as he grew older and began to work and train with Logan. He'd known other Alphas existed but he'd never had any contact with them up until the

moment he'd met his new sparring partner. Their handlers liked to keep them separate, except when they were training. And even then their contact was carefully controlled.

A muscle twitched near the corner of his mouth as he remembered his first meeting with Logan. They were a study in contrasts. Although they were both six-foot-two, the similarity ended there. Logan had short blond hair, a muscular build and a craggy face. Tienan had seen himself in a mirror enough times to know his body was leaner, his face more aesthetically pleasing, his hair longer and darker.

But the real difference was in their eyes. Tienan's eyes were green, his expression flat and dead. Logan's eyes were a vivid blue and filled with emotion. Logan might be schooled at not showing his feelings, but they were there for all to see. If one cared to look.

Tienan might not officially have any family, but Logan was his brother. Over the years they'd sweat and bled together. Then they'd escaped together.

They'd split up for safety's sake when they returned to the world outside the Gate, meeting at a prearranged site every few days to check in. The security force that policed the inner city and beyond would be searching for them. Their orders simple. Destroy them at any cost.

The security force was led by General Caruthers, the coldest, most ruthless son of a bitch Tienan had ever known. Known for his brutal ways and iron fist, the General, as he was called by one and all, was a man to be feared. He didn't take losing lightly. They had struck a blow to the man's reputation by escaping a secure facility and getting beyond the Gate to the outer city. Nobody crossed the General and lived.

A scuffing sound, so faint a normal person wouldn't have heard it, alerted him that his quarry was creeping closer. Tienan would give whoever was trailing him credit. His tracker wasn't rushing to chase him but following him in a methodical manner. It was as though his nemesis was secure enough in his tracking skills to know he wouldn't lose Tienan.

That might be the case if Tienan were a normal man, but his skills gave him something extra. He could easily use his strength and cunning to evade whoever was after him. It would be a simple matter to scale the side of the building and disappear in the shadows if he chose to do so.

But this tracker had gotten dangerously close on several occasions over the past month. He'd never seen who was after him but on more than one occasion he'd sensed his presence. Most folks would laugh, insisting there was no way he could know it was the same person.

But Tienan knew.

It was in the way the tracker moved, the way he went about his business. There was a methodical pattern that never varied. Plus, Tienan knew it in his gut and, when he felt something that strongly, he listened to his instincts.

The two of them were locked in a deadly game of hunt-and-evade, which neither of them would abandon. But the game was about to come to an end. The hunted had become the hunter.

It was time to discover who was following him and why. Which was the reason he'd led the tracker to this particular building. Tienan had stayed here two nights ago and decided it was as good a place as any to bait his trap. There were no other squatters living in or around the building. It had been abandoned by all but the rats years ago. Although it was falling down, there were a few areas that were strong and solid. He'd taken the time to set up an interrogation room in what had been the basement. That way he wouldn't be disturbed as he *talked* to the tracker and uncovered the truth.

The most likely scenario was that his pursuer was an assassin, sent by the General to terminate him once and for all. However, Tienan didn't like to make assumptions. He much preferred to work with facts. That meant he had to find out exactly who was after him and why.

The cool, damp air penetrated his clothing, the leather pants and jacket not quite heavy enough to keep out the cold. Tienan ignored it the same way he did everything



else. His focus completely on the person tracking him and his surroundings. There was always the possibility the tracker wasn't alone.

It would make more sense for them to send a team to take him down. The General knew what he was capable of. It would take more than one man to kill him no matter how skilled at killing he was. No one was as good as him. He wasn't just any Alpha, but Alpha One, the best of the best.

He felt no sense of pride in that admission. Nor was there any sense of conceit. It was a fact, much like the cold and damp that currently enveloped him.

He had a blade strapped to his back, a dagger in each boot and another one in a sheath at his waist, but his hands were empty. He didn't need weapons to kill. A heavy strand of wire was tucked up his sleeve. He'd garrote the tracker when he found out whatever he needed to know from the man. It was a quicker, quieter method of disposing of his problem.

Tienan felt no sense of remorse at the thought of killing. The man had come after him. Death was inevitable.

His sharp ears picked up another sound. The tracker was damn good. If he hadn't had enhanced hearing, he would never have heard the subtle sound of breathing just a dozen feet away.

Still motionless, he waited for his tracker to come closer. There was no sound to give away any movement, but his nostrils detected the lightest scent of...

Disbelief filled him. Impossible.

He let the perfume drift into his nose once again. There was no mistaking it. The faintest trace of honey and soap was there for sure. But underlying it was the unmistakable scent of a woman.

Silence stood next to a Dumpster, her stomach roiling as the stench of years of garbage and excrement assaulted her nostrils. Nothing. She strained her ears, searching

the darkness for even a hint of sound out of the ordinary. The wind blew gently between the dilapidated buildings, whistling through broken windows and shattered walls. Rats scurried along the dirt and bricks, their nails scratching as they went in search of food and shelter.

She felt a kinship with the rats. She'd been like them once. A shadow, a forgotten child rummaging through the trash at night, hiding to stay alive during the day. If she'd had parents, she didn't remember them. Her earliest memories were of being alone, of scratching and clawing to survive.

Then he'd found her. Tall and strong, Adrian had been eighteen when he'd found her sick and huddled in a dank corner of a burnt-out building, much like the one before her.

She shuddered as memories threatened to swamp her. Those were dark days she didn't like to remember. Hunger and thirst had been a living entity, eating her from the inside out. And the cold. God, how she remembered the cold. Her clothing had been little more than rags, as it had been months since she'd been well enough to fend for herself and pilfer some new ones.

She'd been certain he was going to kill her. To her twelve-year-old eyes, he'd seemed much older. And her experience on the streets had taught her that the strong took what they wanted from the weak.

Instead, he'd lifted her into his arms, taking her away from the squalor. Even as he'd fed and nursed her back to health, she hadn't trusted him, refusing to talk. He'd taken it with good humor, giving her the name Silence. She liked it. She'd never had a name before.

Eventually, he'd broken down the walls she'd built around herself for protection. Then he began to teach her how to take care of herself. Adrian had become the brother she'd never had. He was her family and she'd do whatever it took to protect him. And right now the man she was tracking was a danger to Adrian and the entire group he led and protected. She wasn't the only stray he'd taken in over the years.

Adrian was the leader of the Resistance. They were an organized group of rebels who lived to bring an end to the reign of terror headed by the Ruling Council and General Caruthers. They wanted the same rights and privileges as those inside the Gate. The same access to food and medical care and security.

Over the past twelve years, Silence had earned a reputation as a tracker. She could slip in and out of anywhere without anyone knowing she'd ever been there. She was silent as a ghost, never leaving a trace behind as she flitted in and out of dangerous places, seeking information on the security force and those inside the city. Knowledge was power and she was very, very good at obtaining it.

She'd literally almost stumbled over the man she was tracking more than a month ago. There had been rumors of two men living in the ruins just beyond the inner city. Ghosts, some said. Demons, claimed others. That was news, and not necessarily good news. These men were strong and cunning and not known to any of her usual sources.

Rumor was that they were spies for General Caruthers. A more sinister rumor was that they were actually Alphas. A shiver went down her spine. Alphas were legendary. They were efficient killers. Totally focused with no emotions. They'd believed them all dead, killed by their creators. But still, the whispers remained, circulated between friends and allies around fires over a mug of cheap ale on a cold night.

Those who lived in the ruins kept tabs on all the comings and goings from the city. Their lives depended on it. The security force from the city was always rounding up those they could find and taking them back to the city to interrogate them or put them to work in their factories as slave labor. No one ever returned.

The General was trying to stamp out the Resistance, but as long as there was breath in their bodies, they would all fight. Which brought her back to her reason for being out on this godforsaken night. She'd found one of the strangers. She'd lost his trail over and over, but she'd persisted until she'd located him again.

Tonight, she was determined to follow him back to wherever he was living. Once she knew his location, she'd hurry back and tell Adrian so he could decide what to do.

She winced as she imagined his reaction. He'd told her in no uncertain terms to leave this man alone.

Actually, his exact words had been, "Stay the hell away from him, Silence. And that's an order."

Adrian was their leader, the leader of the Resistance. Normally, she'd follow whatever orders he gave her. But not this time. This man was a huge threat to Adrian and he was her family. She would protect him at all costs. It didn't matter to her that he was bigger, stronger and older. He might be an excellent tracker, but no one was better than she. She would find this stranger and take his location back to Adrian.

Now she wasn't so sure. It seemed as though she'd lost him yet again. The man was skilled at evading. But if he was one of the General's assassins, she'd expect nothing less.

Even though she couldn't hear a thing, she waited. Seeing him was out of the question. In this fog, she was lucky to see a few feet in front of her face. A shiver crept down her spine and the hair on the back of her neck lifted. She might not be able to see or hear him, but he was out there.

For the first time, she began to think that maybe this wasn't such a great idea. Not on a night like tonight. The shadows were too deep and the air was tinged with something dark and dangerous. She couldn't quite put her finger on it. It wasn't desperation or fear. It was more like anticipation. Expectation.

Silence swallowed back the lump in her throat. She sucked in a deep breath and held it, trying to slow the wild rhythm of her heart. She'd evaded teams of security police many times in her life, tracking information and people to the very edge of the Gate itself. To be caught was certain death. Yet she'd done it. And in all those times, she'd never been as scared as she was at this moment.

The hunter had become the hunted.

He knew she was out here. He knew she was following him.

But how? No one ever knew. She could even track Adrian for a short time without him knowing, and no one was better than Adrian at detecting a tracker. No one.

She froze in place, not blinking, her chest barely moving as she kept her breathing shallow and light. If he didn't know her exact location, she didn't want to attract his attention. Nor could she move until she knew he was gone. She would outwait him. She was good at that.

And if it came down to it, she'd run like hell. Silence knew this area of the outer city like the back of her hand. There were plenty of bolt-holes and camps where she could find shelter. No one would turn her away, not unless they wanted to get on Adrian's bad side, which no one did. She loved her adopted brother, but she knew his strengths and his faults. He was strong, incredibly smart and loyal, but he was also ruthless and unforgiving. You didn't cross him if you wanted to live.

That was the way it had to be. It was the only way to keep some kind of order among the Resistance. What had started as a ragtag group a dozen years ago was now an organized fighting machine.

Time lost all meaning as she stood next to the Dumpster. Sweat trickled down her temples and burned her eyes, but she didn't dare reach up to wipe it away. Her dark T-shirt stuck to her body beneath her thin black jacket. She could have been standing here five minutes or five hours.

Realistically, she knew it was more like five minutes, it just felt much longer. Nothing moved in the shadows. A rat scrambled down the alley, scampering over the toe of her right boot before disappearing through a crack at the base of the Dumpster.

She had to move. All her senses were telling her she was alone. There was no scent or sound of another human being around. The fog was disorienting. It was easy to convince herself that the earlier feeling she'd had of being hunted was nothing more than a combination of the strangeness in the air tonight coupled with her imagination.

She'd go home and try to find her quarry another night, one that was much brighter.

A sense of defeat descended on her. She hated the feeling. The days of being a victim were long behind her. She wasn't a defenseless child with no one who cared about her. She was Silence, legendary tracker and adopted sister of Adrian. If the stranger knew anything after living in the ruins these past months, he'd heard about Adrian's reputation. If anything happened to her, Adrian would come after him and wouldn't stop until he was dead. That gave her a sense of peace and bolstered her courage.

She'd just ghost around the building in front of her and see if she could pick up his trail. If she could, she'd come back tomorrow, in the daylight and have a better look around. Two minutes and she'd be on her way home.

Her boots made no sound as she slipped quietly around the Dumpster, still keeping to the shadows. She might think she was alone, but she wasn't stupid. The building loomed before her, a hulking beast. But she wasn't afraid of it or the dark. The dark was her friend, hiding her from those who would hurt her. Most people feared the shadows, but not Silence. She'd learned at an early age to use the blackness of night to her advantage.

And she did so now, stepping carefully down the alleyway. Her muscles twitched, wanting action, but she ruthlessly controlled her movements. Sweat soaked her body, plastering her hair to her skull. Adrenaline surged through her veins, causing her heartbeat to race.

The knife resting against her hip was cold comfort. She'd used it before. Once. When she was sixteen, she'd used it to stop a man from raping her. She hadn't killed him, but the wound had bled copiously, covering her hands and clothing. Her screams had also brought Adrian to her rescue. He'd killed the man with his bare hands, ripping his still-beating heart from his body.

No one had touched Silence again. At least not without her permission. She'd managed to have two short-lived relationships. Adrian intimidated all other men and they couldn't handle the pressure of sleeping with the leader's adopted sister.

It had been several years since she'd had sex. She'd had offers. The most recent from a fellow tracker. Sandor was handsome enough but there was no spark between them and she'd turned him down. He'd taken her rejection well enough, but she'd been careful not to be alone with him. She found it hard to trust most men. It was nothing personal.

She didn't miss sex, not the act itself. What she missed was the closeness after sex, the few moments of being held securely in a man's arms.

It was a weakness, and one that could be used against her. She'd decided it was much easier to be alone. At least that's what she told herself as she lay alone in her cold bed night after night.

She released a tiny sigh. She was certainly in a strange mood tonight. She rarely thought about her childhood or the lack of a relationship in her life. There was definitely something in the air.

It was time to go home.

Swiveling on her heel, she started toward the opening at the end of the alley. She'd had enough tonight. Tomorrow she would begin again.

There was no warning, no sound. A huge forearm suddenly wrapped around her midsection and another banded across her throat, cutting off her supply of air.

She kicked back at her attacker, while slamming her head toward his face. The two simultaneous moves should have loosened his hold. He countered each move so quick it was as though she'd never made them.

His hold tightened, making it harder for her to breathe. Blackness tinged the edges of her vision. The entrance to the alley was merely a few steps away. It tempted her, taunted her. Now she knew why she'd had such strange thoughts about her childhood, Adrian and her life in general.

She was going to die.

Killed at the hands of an unknown assassin. Her only consolation was that her death would alert Adrian to the danger and he would be able to take the necessary precautions to protect himself and the people who depended on them.

She clawed at the arm pinned against her throat, but it was protected, covered in leather. Her movements became more sluggish as the blood supply to her brain dwindled. Still, she couldn't quit fighting.

Silence thought she heard a male swear. The thought that she was making this difficult on him made her smile.

Then darkness swarmed up and consumed her, swallowing her whole.



## **Chapter Two**

Tienan swore under his breath as he checked the woman's pulse. It was weak and thready, but it was there. She'd fought silently and with tenacity and quickness. He admired the fact that she hadn't given up, but it had almost cost her life. He'd loosened his hold long enough to depress a pressure point on her neck. He'd had to be careful. Too light and she wouldn't pass out. Too hard and he'd kill her.

She felt insubstantial in his arms as he carried her into the decrepit building behind him, her slight weight a contradiction to the fighter she was. He'd planned to sling her over his shoulder as he hauled her inside, keeping his hands free to help him maneuver among the ruins. Instead, he cradled her in his arms. The need to protect her and keep her safe overrode all else.

The smell of honey and soap wafted up from her still form and he buried his face in the curve of her neck and inhaled. His cock stirred, pressing against the zipper of his leather pants. It was painful, but he welcomed the small hurt. It was a reminder that he was still alive and human. Sometimes he had his doubts.

He carried her through the rubble, stepping over downed beams, piles of brick and other debris as he made his way to the staircase. Holding her with one arm, he yanked open the door and stepped inside. Darkness met him. But with his superior eyesight he could see well enough to navigate the stairs. Closing the door behind him, he made his way to the basement, his cargo held carefully in his arms.

She shivered and he frowned. Her hair was damp and so was her clothing. He worried she might be cold. His frown deepened.

Why the hell should he care if she was cold? She'd been following him, tracking him for weeks. His sole purpose in capturing her was to find out who she was and what

she wanted. The fact that his tracker was a woman didn't matter. Shouldn't matter. Yet somehow it did.

Her breath feathered his cheek, a light caresses. Every muscle in his body tightened and his cock jumped. Rock hard now, it strained for release. He ignored his body's reaction, concentrating on the job at hand.

The basement room was dark, an interior room with no windows. He needed to put his captive down long enough to light a candle. His arm muscles tightened at the thought of releasing his precious cargo.

He growled at himself in displeasure. She didn't matter. The only thing that mattered was the information she could give him.

Tienan forced himself to set her in the wooden chair he'd placed in the center of the room when he'd set it up as his interrogation chamber. She mumbled and slumped to one side. Grabbing the arm restraints, he cuffed her wrists to the arms of the chair. A belt encircled her waist and he pulled the loops behind the chair, tightening it to keep her upright.

His fingers stroked her hair, an automatic gesture that made him curse. He jerked his hand away, rubbing his palm against his thighs, trying to erase the softness he'd felt. Turning to the small table behind him, he struck a match and lit a candle, one of several he'd *liberated* from a camp several nights ago. The candle flared to life before settling down to a slow, steady burn. Taking a deep breath, Tienan faced the woman in the chair. She'd been his nemesis these past weeks.

She was about five-foot-seven and very slender. Her legs were long. Hair as dark as his own was cut short and shaggy. It had little style and looked as though she hacked at it with a pair of scissors whenever it got too long. For some reason the image of her standing with a pair of shears or a knife, cutting off whatever hair was in her way, made him smile.

Her heart-shaped face was ordinary, her cheekbones high, her skin pale. Her nose was straight, her lips full. She wasn't beautiful by any means, but for some reason his heart beat faster just watching her.

There was something about her.

Cocking his head to one side, he studied her. He knew she was smart and tenacious. She'd been tracking him for weeks, picking up his trail again days after she'd lost him. He was curious as to how she'd managed that. He was very good at evading, but she seemed to always be on his tail.

Crossing his arms over his chest, he leaned against the table and watched her breasts rise and fall with each breath she took. She was still wearing her jacket, but it was wide open, exposing the black T-shirt beneath. Although her shirt was dark, where it was damp, it clung to her like a second skin, outlining her breasts. The mounds were small but well-shaped, her nipples pressed against the soft fabric.

Frowning, he stepped away from the table and went to crouch at her feet. He'd been so taken with just looking at her, he'd forgotten to check her for weapons. Stupid! Just because she was a woman didn't mean she wasn't dangerous. In fact, it made her more so.

Unlacing her boots, he found a short but deadly, three-inch blade tucked inside. Her ankles were so slender he could circle them with his hands. They seemed too feminine and delicate to be encased in combat boots. Tienan carefully retied the laces, not wanting her feet to get cold.

Ignoring the voice in the back of his head that told him he was being ridiculous, he slowly slid his hands up her calves and then her thighs. Her legs were slender but muscular. Her hips flared out and then dipped in at her waist. Tienan plucked another knife from a sheath at her waistband.

Dumping the weapons on the table, he resumed his search. The pockets of her coat turned up nothing more than a squashed half of a sandwich, which he tossed next to the weapons. Her hands were small, almost dainty next to his as he started at her wrists

and worked his way up her arms to her shoulders. She was still wearing her coat, but he could feel the roped muscle beneath the fabric. She was stronger than she appeared.

He began to sweat as he stroked his palms over her belly. His movements becoming slower, less brisk. More of a caress than a search. Still, he couldn't stop himself from cupping her breasts in his hands. Her nipples stabbed the center of his palms.

Tienan wanted to see them, wanted to know what color they were. Soft beige or rosy red? Disgusted with himself, he dropped his hands to his sides and walked away. He'd do one final check of the perimeter to make certain she was alone.

He was almost positive she was, but it didn't pay to make assumptions. He hadn't survived this long in his life by being stupid. It was incredibly hard to leave her behind, which only served to piss him off. What was it about this woman that made him feel things he'd never felt before?

Whatever it was, he didn't like it. The quicker she answered his questions, the quicker they could part ways. He hoped she would give him the information he wanted to hear. He'd hate like hell to have to kill her.

Slipping out of the basement, he began to reconnoiter the building and beyond. He should have blown out the candle before he'd left. It was a waste of precious resources. But he hadn't wanted her to wake up in the dark. Bad enough that she'd find herself tied to a chair. He didn't want her to be afraid of the dark.

Which was crazy. She was going to know she was a prisoner. That alone would be enough to frighten her.

Pushing all thoughts of the woman from his mind, he focused on the job at hand. The quicker he finished securing the area, the faster he could return to her.

Silence came awake slowly. Her head hurt, a continual throbbing in her temples. She tried to swallow, but her throat hurt too. Frowning, she tried to bring her hand to her face, but it wouldn't move.

She was cold. A shiver raced down her spine and spread out to her limbs. Her arms and legs felt damp. Taking a deep breath, she tried to open her eyes. The smell of damp earth, mold and decay filled the air around her. It took a mighty effort but she managed to pry her eyelids open. She blinked twice and swallowed, biting back a moan at the pain in her throat.

She was in a room of some sort. As she looked down at her wrists, panic flooded her. She was strapped to a chair.

The stranger!

The man she'd been tracking for weeks had caught her. She had a vague memory of a very large shape behind her, of strong arms wrapped around her waist and throat, of all the air being driven from her body. He hadn't killed her after all. That didn't mean he wouldn't. Obviously, he planned to question her first.

She listened carefully for a few minutes and determined she was alone. Turning her head slowly, she scoped out as much of the room as she could, which wasn't much. A single candle sat in a holder on a small wooden table, her two knives next to it. One of the table legs had a rock beneath it to keep it level. The ground was mostly dirt and pebbles and she couldn't see a window anywhere.

*Think!* There had to be a way out of here. Now was her chance to escape. Once her captor returned, she knew in the pit of her belly she'd never get another opportunity. If she didn't make a break now, she was as good as dead.

Wrapping her fingers around the arms of the chair, she placed her feet flat on the floor and pushed up. The chair scraped against the ground, moving about an inch forward. Buoyed by success, she ignored the aches and pains in her body as she did it again. The table seemed to be miles away instead of just a few feet. Still, she moved forward at a steady pace. Sweat coated her body, her muscles strained and cried out in pain, but she ignored all discomfort. Pain was better than the alternative – dead.

Keeping her ears tuned to her surroundings, she began the slow journey of moving the several feet that separated the chair and the table. When she was close enough to the

table, she leaned forward as far as she could. Her waist was tied to the chair, but she could manage to touch her forehead to the table. Rocking side to side, she tucked the chair a few inches beneath the slab of wood. Her forehead touched the hilt of her smaller knife.

Working slowly, she managed to pull it toward her. The rough wood of the table scraped her forehead but she didn't care. When the knife was at the edge of the table, Silence sat back and took a deep breath, trying to figure out the best way to do this. If she got the knife in her lap, she might be able to use her legs to work it close enough to her fingers. She was about to attempt it when a more obvious solution came to her. It was so simple it made her laugh.

Shaking her head, she stood slowly. The chair was heavy and, tied as she was, she couldn't stand up straight. But she could stand up enough to grasp the hilt of the knife with her fingers. Holding it as tightly as she could, she slowly sat back down.

Triumph filled her. She had the knife. Carefully turning it in her grip, she angled the blade toward the straps on her right hand and began to saw. It was difficult and she nicked her skin more than once, but it was working. Ever so slowly, the leather straps began to split open.

She was almost through the first strap when she sensed the air behind her stirring. Silence continued to saw frantically at the restraint. He was here. He'd made no sound, and she'd been listening, but he was here. As always, she could sense his very presence, as though the air shifted and made way for him wherever he went.

"You're resourceful." His voice was deep and dark and raspy. His words made her shiver with dread. He didn't sound particularly mad about her escape attempt. He didn't sound anything at all. His total lack of emotion was more frightening than if he'd bellowed in anger.

Silence almost sobbed with relief when the leather strap gave way. She clawed at the second strap, getting it undone. Not pausing to even think about why he was allowing her to do so, she sawed at the strap around her waist. Blood from several

shallow wounds on her wrist dripped down her fingers, making it more difficult for her to work.

“How do you plan to get past me?” His question was thoughtful, almost as though he was curious about her intentions.

His voice was closer now, coming from the deep shadows behind her. The last restraint fell away and she lurched from the chair. She whirled around to face where she thought he was. She couldn’t see a thing.

“Stay away from me. I’ll kill you if I have to.”

No reply. But she knew he was there in the dark. Watching.

Tucking her short blade in her jacket pocket, she grabbed up her larger one. She wished she had a gun but they were in short supply and given to the men and women who went out daily on patrol in the outer city. Somehow she felt all the weapons in the world wouldn’t do her any good against this man.

“Who are you?” she demanded. Her voice was little more than a croak. Her throat was slightly swollen and fear made it close even more.

“Who are you?” he countered. She circled slowly. He sounded as though he was on the other side of the room. She damned the shadows that made it impossible for her to track him. There should be some indication of his movement – a stray sound, a breath, a wavering of the air. But there was nothing.

The man was a phantom.

She took a step back and hit the edge of the table. The candle teetered and fell to one side, its flame flickering before being extinguished. Darkness descended. Silence got a sick feeling in the pit of her belly. She had no idea how to get out.

Moving forward, she tried not to make a sound as she headed toward where she’d first sensed him in the room. It made sense that the entrance would be somewhere around there.

As before, there was no sound, no telltale giveaway, but she sensed him as he moved in behind her. Before she could react, his hands wrapped around her wrists. He didn't squeeze them, but his fingers pressed some pressure points. Her hands opened and her knife fell to the floor, clattering on the dirt and stones.

He bent her elbows, crossing her arms over her chest. Because of the way he held her, his arms were crossed over her chest too. He surrounded her totally, much like the darkness.

"I don't want to hurt you." His voice was little more than a murmur in her ear. His breath ruffled the hair on the back of her neck, tickling the sensitive skin.

Silence licked her lips almost afraid to ask, "What do you want?"

The heat from his body seeped into her back, warming her. He was so warm and she was so cold. She wanted to lean against him and soak up his heat, but she held herself erect and as far away as his grip would allow. There was no safety, no solace to be found here.

"What's your name?"

She thought about it and then decided that telling him might be in her favor. Maybe he knew her brother. It was possible Adrian's name might get her out of here alive. "Silence. My name is Silence."

He chuckled and the raspy sound stroked over her skin sending goose bumps down her arms. "Very apt. You're an excellent tracker."

"Obviously not good enough," she countered, unable to keep the bitterness from her tone. Her entire life, it was the one skill she had that separated her from others. It had given her a place of respect within the resistance movement.

"No." He rubbed his chin over the top of her head. "Not good enough."

The matter-of-fact way he said it made her feel like more of a failure and that made her angry. Anger was a much better emotion to focus on than defeat. She could use anger to her advantage. "Who are you?" She figured if she asked him enough times, he



just might answer her. And as long as he was talking to her, he wasn't killing her, which was definitely a plus in her book.

"Why were you following me?" He pulled her back against his body, leaving no space between them. He shifted his arms lower on her chest, his wrists grazing her nipples, which stiffened from the unintentional caress. Or was it intentional? She didn't know.

Heat washed through her, driving away the chill. She felt off balance by her reaction to this stranger. He was dangerous and a killer, of that she had no doubt. Why the hell was her body reacting so strongly to him? It must be some kind of Stockholm syndrome. Adrian had told her about the phenomena as part of her training on the off chance she was ever captured. Captors tried to build an emotional connection with their prisoners in order to get them to cooperate. The problem was, this man hadn't done anything of the sort.

"Silence?"

She shrugged, or at least tried to. It wasn't easy with him wrapped around her. From what she could tell, the man was solid muscle without an ounce of give in him. "You're a stranger in the area. You're not one of us and that means you're probably from the inner city."

"Ah."

Now what did he mean by that?

"So you were sent to kill me."

It wasn't a question. "Obviously you have enemies, if you assume that?" Curiosity was what had gotten her into this predicament and it hadn't abated in spite of her current situation. If she managed to get out of here alive, the more she knew about the man, the better.

"Hmm. If you weren't sent to kill me, why were you following me?"

She tried to move, but his hold just tightened. He wasn't hurting her, but there was no way she was getting free. Not in this position. Her only option was to talk to him and try to lull him into relaxing. Maybe then she could break free.

*And do what?* a voice in the back of her head demanded. He'd be on her before she could take more than a few steps. "I was trying to find out who you were, where you lived and what you were doing here."

"Why?" He shifted his hold, grasping her two wrists in one hand and placing his free hand on her stomach.

Butterflies danced in her belly, whether from fear or something else, she couldn't tell. She ignored them. "Because information is power." Adrian had quoted that sentiment to her so many times, it came out of her mouth without her even thinking about it.

"So it is." He lowered his hand, letting it slide over her bellybutton and lower.

She whimpered and tried to pull away from his touch. That drove her back tighter to his chest. Something long and hard pressed against her butt. Oh damn, he had an erection. Memories of long ago when she'd almost been raped swamped her. "No," she whispered, fighting his hold. "No!" Yelling, she struggled, kicking and thrashing. She wouldn't let him rape her. She'd rather he just killed her.

He picked her up in his arms and before she could figure out what was happening, her back was pressed against a cold, hard wall. He was in front of her, his strong legs trapping hers, his hands holding hers above her head.

A sob broke from her throat. Then another. She took a deep breath, trying to control them. She had to think. Had to escape. Her pulse was pounding in her ears and it took her a while to realize he was talking to her.

"Shhh," he crooned next to her ear. "I won't hurt you." He said it over and over.

Although she didn't really believe him, his voice calmed her. Eventually, she caught her breath. "Why are you doing this?"

She felt him shrug. "Damn if I know." He held her two hands over her head with one of his. His free hand cupped her chin, holding her steady. "There's something about you that calls to me." His fingers were warm and strong as they traced the contours of her face. "You're not beautiful in the classic sense, but there's something about you, a beauty that radiates from within. Maybe it's the way you've tracked me these past few weeks, never giving up. I feel as though I know you."

His words mesmerized her. She hadn't been able to give up searching for him. No amount of reasoning or threats from Adrian had stopped her.

His hands feathered through her hair. "Your hair is dark, like mine, but shorter." He paused. "Do you cut it yourself?"

"Yes." She knew her hair was a ragged mess, but she didn't care. She had more important things to worry about than if her hair looked good.

"I thought so." She sensed his amusement and it made her angry again. Angry was good, it helped keep her wits about her.

"So where does that leave us?"

He sighed and his breath feathered over her lips. "I don't know." His mouth touched hers, the briefest and lightest of caresses and it sent a blast of heat pulsing through her entire body.

Silence swallowed hard and asked the question she dreaded. "Are you going to kill me?"

"I don't know."

## **Chapter Three**

Silence woke and immediately knew her captor was gone. For the past two days, he'd kept her locked in this room, returning at times to watch her from the shadows. They talked from time to time but neither of them had shared much with the other. Still, there was something intimate about spending hours on end with someone.

They slept together too. He insisted on it. The pallet she was lying on was thick enough to keep most of the dampness from the floor from seeping into her bones. His large body did the rest. The man radiated more than enough heat to keep them both warm.

Her body was becoming attuned to his in a way she'd never experienced before. He had a hard-on almost all night long, but true to his word, he never did anything about it.

As strange as it seemed, Silence was beginning to trust him in an odd way. He'd said he wouldn't rape her and she believed him. He'd also said he wasn't sure if he was going to kill her. She believed that too. If he changed his mind, he'd let her know what was coming.

It had taken her almost a full day in his company to figure out who he reminded her of. Adrian. He had that same take-charge, hard-ass attitude her brother did. This man was a leader, not a follower.

She had yet to see his face. He seemed to prefer the darkness, having no trouble maneuvering in the room without light. Still, she was grateful he'd leave a candle for her to light when he left to do whatever it was he did when he was wasn't here with her. Her weapons had disappeared, but the table and chair remained.

Silence had paced off the entire perimeter of the room, exercising constantly for warmth and as a way to pass the time. Her captor fed her regularly and had set up a

bucket in the corner for a makeshift latrine. It wasn't perfect, but it was better than it might have been.

Adrian would be frantic by now and have searchers out all over the outer city looking for her. She regretted the worry she was causing him. She'd gone over the room about a hundred times, but there was only one way out and that was through a wood and steel door that locked from the outside.

She'd chipped away at the hinges of the door with a chunk of rock she'd found in the corner of the room but had barely made a dent with it. Her best chance for escape was to either overpower her captor or to convince him to let her go. Neither option was promising.

The first time she'd tried to sneak out in the middle of the night, he'd caught her before she'd made it off the pallet. The second time she didn't get any farther either. Nor the third. The man had the instincts of a predator. If she moved as much as an inch during the night, he was awake and watchful.

Then they'd both lie awake for hours in the dark. Silence would try to remember he was her enemy. But it was becoming more and more difficult as time went on. He held her tenderly, cradling her head on his chest. He rubbed his hands over her arms and back, warming her and soothing the muscles she'd strained in her first escape attempt.

Her bruised throat was back to normal. He supplied her with plenty of water and had even scrounged up some tea, instructing her to heat the water over several candles until it was hot.

Through it all, he'd kept his identity a secret. That gave her hope she might get out of this situation alive. If she didn't know who he was then he had no reason to kill her. At least she hoped not. In fact, she was counting on it.

Rising from the pallet, she carefully made her way over to the table and fumbled until she lit the two candles that sat there. Now that she had some light, she used the bucket in the corner, making sure the lid was on tight when she was done. Then she washed her face and hands using the tepid water in an old battered metal bowl he'd

procured from somewhere. She rubbed the coarse cloth over her face, wondering what today would bring.

The candles flickered on the table, illuminating a tin plate with a slice of bread and a piece of meat sitting on it. Silence ate both, trying not to wonder where the meat had come from. It was cold, but it filled the emptiness in her belly.

When she was done, she paced around the room. Hours passed and she sensed it was getting close to her captor's arrival. He was fairly regular with his comings and goings. The opening and closing of the door made barely any noise at all but she heard it all the same. Swinging her gaze around, she stared at the corner where the door was hidden by a small alcove.

As much as a part of her wanted to keep her captor's identity a secret, another part of her wanted—no, needed—to know who he was and what he looked like. This was the first time she'd heard him entering the room. Usually he slipped in when she was pacing and the only notice she got that he'd arrived was the candle being extinguished.

Silence licked her lips, her mouth gone dry. Was he going to let her see him? If so, what did that mean? Maybe it wasn't her captor at all. Her stomach dropped and she automatically fell into a fighter's crouch, knees bent, arms loose, ready to defend herself. She wished she still had her knives.

"There are people scouring the outer city for you."

She relaxed the moment he spoke, recognizing the low, raspy tones. Ignoring the way his voice made her skin tingle, she scowled at him. "I told you Adrian would search for me." She'd made a decision her first full day as a captive to tell him about her adoptive brother in hopes it would encourage him to release her. Since she was obviously still here, it hadn't worked.

"So you did." He strode forward and the dim light of the candles illuminated his size. The man was at least six inches taller than she, his shoulders incredibly broad. He was wearing a pair of combat boots and dark leather pants that clung to his thighs and emphasized the rather impressive bulge in the front. A tight, short-sleeved T-shirt was

tucked into the waistband of the pants. His leather jacket was slung over his shoulder. She'd known he was big and strong. After all she'd lain next to him the past few nights. But somehow he looked even larger, harder in the light.

She let her eyes drift higher. Trepidation filled her. She wanted to see him but was almost afraid to. His jaw was chiseled, his chin strong and stubborn. Full lips turned up slightly at the corners. He wasn't smiling. She had the feeling this wasn't a man who smiled often, but he was amused.

Her captor wasn't merely good-looking. He was devastatingly handsome. His features were strong, his nose straight. Silky, black hair hung to his shoulders and a pair of brilliant green eyes studied her from beneath thick lashes.

Silence knew her mouth was hanging open, but she couldn't seem to close it. The man radiated sex appeal.

"Are you done?"

His laconic tone jolted her back to reality and she realized that while she'd been studying him, he'd been checking her out. Not that there was much to see. She was slender, her breasts were small and she was ordinary, at best. Of course, he'd seen her before when she'd been unconscious when he'd first captured her.

Her breasts felt heavy and her nipples puckered into tight buds. Her core contracted and she almost moaned at the power of the need she felt for this man. She was hot and wet between her thighs. Ignoring the way her body responded to his, she nodded. "I'm done."

One corner of his mouth quirked up. "Like what you see?"

She shrugged. "You're handsome enough." There was no way she would let on she found him sexy as all get out.

"I can smell your arousal."

*Impossible!* He had to be lying. Her cheeks heated and she knew her face was getting red. "You keep telling yourself whatever you need to," she taunted.

He prowled closer, looming larger with each step he took. Tossing his coat on the chair, he moved behind her. He didn't touch her as he circled her, inhaling deeply. "It's like warm honey and a hint of spices and musk." The heat from his body surrounded her like a warm blanket. Her knees weakened and she stiffened them to keep from falling to his feet in a heap of wanton need.

He was behind her, for which she was grateful. There was no way she wanted to face him. Crossing her arms over her chest to hide her stiff nipples from his eagle eyes, she said nothing.

A touch, as light as a feather, stroked over her nape. "So fragile, yet so strong."

She couldn't move if her life depended on it. With just that simple touch he had her shackled as tight as though she were wearing chains. She longed to lean back into his touch but didn't dare. The power he had over her was frightening. "What's your name?" she blurted out. "You know mine. It's only fair."

He chuckled, his breath warm against her ear. "No one ever accused me of being fair, sweet Silence." His teeth closed over the lobe and he tugged gently before releasing her. "Tienan. My name is Tienan."

She said his name over in her head several times. It was a strong name. It suited him.

"Say it," he ordered.

"Tienan," she whispered.

He groaned and wrapped his arms around her from behind. His erection pressed into the small of her back, a vivid reminder that he was all male. "I want you, Silence." His lips pressed dozens of kisses over the back of her head and down the side of her neck. "I want to strip you naked and lick you from head to toe."

Silence moaned as her pussy clenched. Her mind might be telling her she was making a huge mistake, but her body made no secret of the fact it wanted him. Bad.



His large hands gently pushed her arms down by her sides, his palms slipping under the hem of her shirt to caress her stomach. Her tummy quivered, her insides turning to jelly.

“Then I want to eat your juicy cunt until you scream with pleasure.”

Breathing was getting harder with each passing second. She felt lightheaded. Her body ached from head to toe and her fertile brain could more than imagine what he was proposing. She could see the two of them on the pallet, naked, their bodies entwined.

No, she'd be on her back, her legs spread wide, his face buried between her thighs, licking and sucking. She moaned as hot cream slipped from her core, coating her pussy.

“You like that idea, do you?” One of his hands shifted higher until he was cupping her breast. “Small and firm and perfect.” His thumb circled the hard nub, which puckered even tighter. “Just like you.”

She was panting now. Never had she felt arousal like this, hadn't even known it was possible. Tienan was incredible, each touch perfectly placed, as though he could read her body and mind and know exactly what turned her on.

“And when you're hot and wet and ready, I want to fuck you until we both come.” The hand still resting on her stomach made a slow trip south until it was covering her mound through her pants.

This was crazy. This was wrong. She barely knew him.

She didn't realize she'd said the words aloud until he answered her. “You know me.” His hand slipped from her breast to cover her heart. “Here. You know me here. Your heart knows me, as does your soul. There's something between us, some kind of connection that defies logic.”

God help her, she knew exactly what he meant. The attraction between them had been powerful before she'd seen him, but now that she'd seen his face, his eyes, it was tenfold what it had been. It occurred to her that the past two nights of sleeping together had been foreplay. He'd been gentling her, getting her used to his touch, the feel of his

big body next to hers. And it had worked. Oh heavens, how it had worked. She was so aroused, so primed, she couldn't even think about saying no.

Still, he waited behind her, the patient hunter. Waiting for her to come to him. For a moment, Silence wished he'd take the choice out of her hands. If he overwhelmed her with passion, she could always say it wasn't her fault when she looked back at this night in the future. But that would be the coward's way out.

She knew Tienan wouldn't do it. As much as he wanted her, and the evidence was currently pulsing against the curve of her ass, he wouldn't go any further. It was up to her to take the final step.

Taking a deep breath, Silence thought about Adrian and what he would think. She thought about her long, bleak life. And she thought about Tienan. In her twenty-five years, she'd never wanted anything as much as she wanted Tienan. Her life was dangerous, filled with subterfuge and lies. The possibility of death hung over her daily, a grinning specter waiting for her to fall.

If she were to die tomorrow, she wouldn't regret sleeping with Tienan, but she would regret it to her last breath if she walked away. Here in this dark chamber, it didn't matter who either of them was. Not at this moment. Tomorrow would be time enough to go back to being enemies. Tonight was for them.

Silence took a step forward and Tienan's hands fell away. He didn't move, didn't make a sound. Turning slowly, she met his gaze. His eyes burned with a green fire that seared her soul. A muscle twitched in his jaw, his hands were fisted at his sides.

Reaching up, she cupped his face in her hands. His chin was rough with stubble. It should have looked unkempt. On Tienan it was sexy.

Still, he didn't move. Every muscle was under tight control. She knew if she unleashed him, she'd lose all control. Even knowing that, there was no going back.

Staring into his eyes, she nodded. "Yes."

As though she'd released him from chains, he sprang. Jerking her into his arms, he slammed his mouth down on hers. His tongue sought and gained entry, stroking and tasting.

Fingers digging into his shoulders, Silence hung on, caught up in the whirlwind of his passion. His hands cupped her ass, lifting and pressing her mound against his cock. Silence moaned as cream slipped from her core. Her pussy was hot and slick with need as she wrapped her legs around his waist and rubbed up and down his length.

Tienan tore his mouth away from hers and buried his face in the curve of her neck. "Naked. I've got to get you naked." With her twined around him, he carried her to the pallet in the corner. Each step he made shifted her sex over his erection in a maddening caress. It wasn't enough, merely a tease.

He fell to his knees and laid her back against the blankets. Silence dug her fingers into the thick muscles of his shoulders, not wanting to let him go. But he wouldn't be denied. He pried her hands away, grabbed the hem of her shirt and ripped. It parted all the way to the neckband, which held. Tienan didn't seem to care. His eyes feasted on her.

Silence was suddenly very aware of her small size and moved to cover her naked chest. Tienan caught both her hands in one of his and raised them over her head. The motion shoved her breasts upward.

Tienan growled low in his throat as he licked the curve of her breast, making circles around the mound. With each one, he moved inward until he was tracing the edge of her areola. Her nipple was puckered tight, a silent demand for attention.

"What do you want?" he demanded as he blew softly on the hard tip. "Tell me."

She'd never done anything like this. Her few experiences with sex had been hurried couplings without much foreplay and never any talking. This was new, and if she was honest with herself, extremely exciting.

"Do you want me to lick your breast?" he asked, as casually as he might ask her to pass him a piece of bread at mealtime. "Maybe you'd like me to suck your pretty pink nipple?"

"Yes," she hissed from between clenched teeth. She was wound so tight she might explode at the slightest touch. "Anything. All of it."

He moved to her other breast and began the slow, torturous licking. Her breasts felt hot and swollen. Her pussy ached and her core clenched. "Tell me." His voice was hard, brooking no disobedience.

"Lick me, suck me, fuck me," she cried. "Anything you want."

Tienan smiled at her then. In the candlelight he looked dark and dangerous and feral. With a growl, he covered her nipple with his mouth, pressing it with his tongue. Silence struggled against his hold, but it was like trying to slip from velvet manacles. Impossible. She arched her hips, stroking her aching pussy over his cock. They both still had way too much clothing on.

Capturing her nipple between his teeth, he tugged gently. The sensation bordered on pain but instead filled her with a dark pleasure that reached all the way to her soul. Arching up, she offered herself to him. Whatever he wanted of her, she wanted to give him.

"Keep your hands above your head." He slowly released her and sat up, reaching for the opening of her pants. The zipper sounded startlingly loud in the silence. The air was thick, ripe with anticipation. Tienan's chest rose and fell with every breath he took.

"Take off your shirt." She wanted to see his naked chest. She'd felt it these past two nights, but it wasn't the same as actually seeing it.

Reaching behind, he grabbed two handfuls of shirt and dragged it over his head, tossing it aside. His skin was tanned and smooth. A light dusting of hair covered his chest, narrowing down his stomach and disappearing into the waistband of his pants. The man was sculpted muscle from his shoulders to his waist. He wasn't muscle-bound but lean and incredibly strong.

Returning to her pants, he slid his broad hands inside and shoved them down her hips, taking her underwear as well. Scooting back, he unlaced her boots and pulled both them and her socks off before yanking the rest of her clothing away.

Tienan captured her ankles in his hands, the heat from his palms searing her skin. He slid them over her calves and up the insides of her thighs. Her legs fell open, encouraging him to touch her.

Kneeling between her legs, he was a huge and imposing figure. He could snap her neck like a twig, yet at this moment, she wasn't afraid of him. Whether that was stupid on her part or not didn't seem to matter. She trusted him not to hurt her. It was disconcerting how much, and how quickly, she'd come to trust Tienan.

He reached into his boot and drew out a short knife. The slide of metal against leather was quiet and deadly. Silence held her breath as he slipped the blade beneath the neckband of her shirt and sliced it. The fabric gave way and he returned the knife to his boot.

Without a word, he stripped her jacket and shirt down her arms and shoved them aside. Totally naked, Silence lay on the pallet and watched him. All his attention was focused on her body. She should have felt vulnerable. But a feeling of feminine power flowed through her. This strong man wanted her. Her. The heavy press of his cock against his pants was proof of it. Yet she knew that one word from her would stop him.

His breathing increased and she began to squirm, needing him to touch her. She began to lower her arms, but he caught them and raised them over her head again. "Don't move." He wrapped one large hand around her neck, capturing her gaze with his. The strength of his hand was unmistakable, as was the inherent command. He was in charge and he wanted her to admit it. While it went against everything she was, everything she'd worked hard to be in her life, she acquiesced, giving him a tiny nod.

He didn't say anything, but there was no mistaking the satisfaction in his face. He lowered his head to her breast, keeping his hand around her throat, his fingers warm against her skin, as he lapped at her nipple. "Mine," he growled.

His declaration of possession should have angered her. She belonged to no man, had built a reputation among them as the best of trackers. An equal.

Instead, it filled a void within her that she hadn't even known existed. She longed to feel that connected to another person. Adrian was her friend, her adopted brother, but there was always a distance between them. No one, not even her, knew where he came from, what his past was. No one asked. And he never offered.

Tienan slid his hand down the column of her throat and over her collarbone. He feasted on one breast with his mouth, while stroking the other with his hand. Silence wanted to press her legs together to help ease the growing ache, but Tienan's hips kept her thighs spread wide. Tilting her hips upward, she ground her pelvis against his, seeking relief. It just made matters worse.

Levering himself up on his hands and knees, Tienan licked and nibbled his way down her torso. His tongue swirled around her bellybutton before dipping inside. Silence laughed and groaned, the sensation both ticklish and arousing at the same time.

His hands shaped her waist and hips before slipping down between her thighs and pushing them wide. Sitting back on his heels, he stared down at her pussy. She knew her folds were slick with cream. Arousal had sent blood pumping to the area, making her red and swollen. And he was seeing it all.

She swallowed, so tempted to move her hands from above her head. He glanced at them, as though he could read her thoughts. She locked her fingers together and tilted her hips upward.

He smiled then and Silence almost swallowed her tongue. He was the perfect male animal, primed and ready to claim what he considered to be his.

"Now I'll do what I promised." Cupping her hips with his hands, he lifted her toward his mouth. "I'm going to eat your cunt until you come."

Tienan watched Silence carefully, monitoring her breathing. She was extremely aroused, right on the edge of orgasm. He wanted to keep her that way. At least a bit longer. He wanted his mouth on her hot, sweet cunt when she came for the first time.

He'd had women before, even when he was still a prisoner in the lab. The scientists considered sex part of his health program. Personally, he thought that the bitches he'd serviced just wanted to get off with an Alpha so they could brag about it to their friends. The lab had hired out his services, bringing him to a specially designed bedroom that had been created for the ladies' comfort. After all, many of them were high-ranking political figures, some of them married.

They had been taped and his performance critiqued. He'd asserted his dominant nature early, wanting some measure of control in a situation that was completely out of his control. He'd kept all the women on the edge, making them beg and plead with him. Confirming to himself that they were nothing to him but a way to ease a physical ache.

Silence was different. He still wanted to control her pleasure, but only so he could increase it. Logically, he knew it was pheromones, a chemical reaction that drew him to her. The human side of him ignored the computer logic and knew it was something more. He'd felt something for Kathryn, the woman who'd helped free him and Logan, but this was different. What he felt for Silence went to a whole other level.

He should have let her go two days ago. He knew a hundred ways to get information out of her. And, that aside, he hadn't needed to. She'd been missed almost immediately and the word on the street was she belonged to someone important, someone he'd been trying to meet. Adrian.

Even though he knew her relationship with Adrian wasn't a sexual one, he felt compelled to put his mark on her. To fuck her until she knew who she belonged to. It was totally illogical and not like him at all. He had a plan and Silence had thrown it all to hell.

For two days he'd tortured himself with her nearness, holding her in his arms at night and watching her for hours on end. Before this night was over, he'd know every inch of her body intimately. Tomorrow he'd let her go and follow her back to Adrian.

Right now, he had more important matters to deal with.

Inhaling, he sucked in her unique scent. Her arousal was an aphrodisiac pushing him closer to the edge. He was legend for his control, in all areas, but Silence was making a mockery of it. He needed her the way he needed air to breathe.

Lowering his mouth, he tasted her pussy for the first time. Her flavor hit his tongue and went straight to his head and groin. Honey and cream. She was sweet and addictive.

Silence moaned low and long as he stroked his tongue up one side of her slick folds and down the other. Sitting back, he licked his lips, not wanting to waste a single drop. Using his thumbs, he opened her wide as he leaned forward again.

This time, he pressed the flat of his tongue against her swollen clit. Her entire body bowed back. "Yes," she hissed. He knew she was poised on the edge of orgasm and it wouldn't take much to drive her over.

Tienan stroked his fingers over her, slipping the tip of his finger in and out of her entrance, teasing her. She undulated her hips, searching for his touch. "More," she pleaded.

He gave it to her, sliding two thick fingers into her at the same time he flicked his tongue over her clit. Silence cried out his name as she came around his hand. Her inner muscles tightened around him as he pumped his fingers in and out. She shuddered, breaking his silent command and lowering her hands to grip his shoulders, her nails digging into his skin. She wrapped her legs around him and held him close.

Finally, her hands slid away and she melted back against the pallet. Tienan licked at her folds. Silence whimpered and tried to squirm away, but he held her firm in his grasp until he was ready to release her.



Her eyelids were half closed and a smile turned up the corners of her mouth. He leaned down and kissed her, running his tongue along the seam of her lips until she parted to let him in. The taste of her cream mingled with the sweet flavor of her mouth. Her hands cupped his ass, her nails scoring him even through his leather pants.

Reluctantly, he pulled away. He'd have liked to extend their foreplay for hours, but he was too close to the edge. He stared down at her, the sated look in her violet-blue eyes pleasing him.

"Now it's time for my next promise." He sat back and reached for the waistband of his pants. "Now I fuck you."

## **Chapter Four**

Silence's skin was sensitive from head to toe, every nerve ending energized and tender. She'd never had an orgasm like that in her life. It was like racing toward the sun, feeling the burn on her skin and in her soul, and living to tell about it. It was all encompassing, blocking out all else. She felt exhausted, yet strangely energized.

Her pussy was wet and pulsing. Tienan had lived up to his promise, eating her cunt until she'd cried out his name. His tongue was like rough velvet against her slick folds, pure magic as he'd circled and stroked her clit.

Silence licked her lips, moaning as her inner muscles quivered. His long, thick fingers had stretched her pussy in a delicious way. Not being able to touch him, all her focus had been on the wicked sensations between her thighs, culminating in an earth-shattering orgasm that still echoed through her body.

Although she'd thought it impossible to even think about having another orgasm any time soon, the second Tienan announced he was going to fuck her, her body went into overdrive. Her breathing increased until she was almost panting at the prospect.

He shoved his pants around his thighs, releasing his cock. She licked her lips again. This time in anticipation. His erection was thick and long, the bulbous head flaring wider. The tip was red and slick with pre-cum. Reaching out, Silence wrapped her hand around his shaft and squeezed.

Tienan froze, the muscles of his thighs and stomach tightening. "Again," he commanded.

She tightened her fingers around the base of his cock before sliding it to the top and then down again. His eyes never left her hand. The cords of his neck were visible, beating rapidly as his heartbeat raced.

Up and down, she stroked his hard length, feeling it pulse against her palm. Her core clenched and released, following the same rhythm.

The flickering candles painted Tienan in their dim light. He looked ferocious, a beast bent on devouring her whole. And she was more than ready to feed his hunger.

None of this made sense. The attraction she felt toward Tienan went beyond anything she'd ever known. In her more logical moments, she put it down to some sort of psychological dependence on her captor. But deep in her heart, she knew she was lying to herself. Any other man but Tienan and she'd be fighting him to the death.

His large, tanned hand covered hers where it wrapped around his cock. "Let go."

Reluctantly, she released him and he scooted upward until he was straddling her chest. The new position brought the head of his cock close to her lips. Her mouth began to salivate as she stared at him. She wanted to taste him, to let his flavor coat her tongue and mouth. Her lips parted and he groaned.

"Suck me." His words were raw, his green eyes glittering in the dim light. Silence propped herself up on her elbows and leaned forward, letting her tongue barely touch the tip of his erection.

Tienan swore. His large hands slid behind her, one cupping the back of her head, the other supporting her shoulders.

Silence slid her tongue around his cock head, sampling his musky flavor. Oh, he tasted divine. He was so elemental, so natural and unashamed of his need, that it fired her desires. Her sex throbbed, her breasts ached, but above all that, she yearned to please him as he'd pleased her.

Trusting him to support her weight, she lifted both her arms off the ground. She felt weightless and free. Wrapping one hand around his shaft, she used the other one to cup the heavy sac between his thighs. His jaw clenched and more fluid seeped from the tip of his cock.

Lapping it up with her tongue, she continued to tease the sensitive flesh. Tienan thrust his hips forward, forcing her to take him into her mouth. She sucked his cock, letting her tongue tease the ridge around the head.

"So fucking good," he growled. He continued to thrust his hips in and out, pushing himself slightly deeper each time. Silence panicked when his cock hit the back of her throat. She gagged, but he soothed her. "Just relax your throat. You can take more." He withdrew and pushed in again, watching her carefully. "Take as much as you can."

Silence relaxed and did as he asked. It felt strange, but she got used to it quickly. She loved the hot, hard feel of him in her hands, the way he grunted and groaned as her tongue and lips and mouth worked his cock. A light sheen of sweat covered his torso. His face looked as though it was carved from stone. His jaw was clenched tight, his skin pulled tight over his cheekbones, his eyes half closed.

His cock rippled and she knew he was close. She sucked harder, squeezing his balls gently before lightly scoring his sac with her nails.

Tienan pulled out of her mouth with a wet pop. Before she could ask why, he'd flipped her onto her stomach and pulled her up on all fours. The casual way he used his strength was frightening and a huge turn-on at the same time.

His hands held her hips, his fingers digging into her flesh. She felt the bump of the head of his cock at her entrance. "Let me in." Silence sensed the double meaning to his words. Ignoring the deeper meaning, she spread her legs and pushed back. The bulbous tip slipped inside. She was wet and ready but still he stretched her.

Her fingers tightened around the blankets. She tilted her head back and cried out as he surged forward. Her core rippled around him, stretching to accommodate his girth.

"You're so tight." His words were little more than a tortured whisper.

"You're so big," she countered, groaning when he pulled back slightly before driving in again. This time he went even deeper.

He slid one of his hands around to her stomach and then lower, finding the hard nub at the apex of her thighs. "You can take me." He fingered her clit, making her inner muscles spasm. "You were made for me."

Banding his other arm around her midsection, he began to thrust. He picked up the tempo with each one, driving into her swollen flesh. Silence would have fallen forward if he hadn't been holding her up. He teased her clit, alternating between featherlight caresses and firm strokes.

Her breathing was labored. The blood pounding in her ears blocked out all sound. Her body was slick with perspiration and their skin made a slapping sound every time he thrust. Every few strokes, he'd stop and grind his hips in a circular motion, trying to get even deeper inside her.

Silence couldn't think, couldn't speak. All she could do was feel the erotic sensations, the desperation. She shoved her hips back, wanting him harder and deeper. She didn't want it to ever end, but she desperately needed to come.

Her orgasm was so close. "Tienan!" She didn't know what to do to push herself over. As though he knew what she wanted, his hips began to hammer at her. "Yes," she screamed, letting the passion take her.

Tienan thought he'd died and gone to heaven. He'd never believed such a place existed until now. He'd almost come while Silence was sucking his cock, her warm mouth and hot breath coating him each time she'd taken him between her lips.

And her body. Sweet lord, her body was hot. She was slender and lithe and muscular. Her hot, wet cunt squeezing him tight with every thrust. At first he'd worried about hurting her, but Silence was with him every step of the way, shoving her tight ass against his pelvis, driving him deeper with every stroke.

He pounded into her, his rigid self-control nonexistent. He lost track of time and place as he sought sweet oblivion in Silence. She was a contradiction to her name. For a woman who was impossibly quiet when she moved, she was loud when it came to sex. She moaned and groaned and cried out her passion, giving him everything she had.

When the first ripple of her orgasm skated over his cock, he lost it. He wanted to prolong the pleasure but couldn't hold back any longer. Hot jets of semen spurted into her as he came. Her inner muscles squeezed his shaft as he pumped harder, wanting her to take every last drop of him.

Tienan wanted to shout, wanted to roar at the top of his lungs that this woman was his. And he did, but only in his mind. His training and innate caution kept him silent.

When Silence's arms buckled, he caught her, easing her down to the pallet. She murmured something he couldn't make out. A sound of contentment more than actual words. He smiled as he covered her with his much larger body, not wanting to lose the connection quite yet. She sighed and snuggled beneath him.

But not even he could stay erect forever and when his cock softened, he finally withdrew. Yanking his pants up, he fastened them before grabbing his T-shirt and pulling it on. Years of training couldn't be undone and he wouldn't take the risk of being caught with his pants down. Literally or figuratively.

Silence whimpered and shivered as he stretched out beside her. Pulling the blankets out from under them, he covered her as he lifted her on top of him, letting her use his body as a mattress.

She rooted around until she found a comfortable spot. With her head resting on his shoulder and her nose resting against his neck, she relaxed. He knew the moment she went to sleep. Totally boneless, her legs and arms wrapped around him.

Content, he closed his eyes and told himself he'd sleep for an hour. Then he'd have to wake her. They needed to talk. All the rules had changed.

When Tienan woke, he instinctively knew that more than an hour had passed. He also knew the room was empty. Silence was gone. Cursing himself, he sprang from the pallet and headed to the door.

How had she gotten past him?

His reflexes and instincts were legendary. No one snuck up on him. It should have been impossible for her to get up, dress and leave without him waking. But he'd done the unthinkable, broken the cardinal rule of his training. Deep in his subconscious, he'd trusted her.

"And look what that got you," he muttered. Still, he couldn't really blame her. He'd captured her and kept her captive. She'd had no way of knowing he'd planned to release her and return to her home with her.

Grabbing his coat, he slipped it on. At least she hadn't taken his knife from his boot and gutted him with it. All the other weapons were hidden in the ruins of the building. That meant Silence was running around in the outer city, unarmed.

Leaving everything behind, he headed for the door and was pleasantly surprised to find it unlocked. He'd half expected her to bar him in and keep him prisoner until she could return with Adrian and his band of rebels.

One corner of his mouth turned up as he slid out the door. It was dark, about midnight by the look of the night sky. It was a fairly clear night for a change. A rarity to be sure. He looked up at the vastness, enjoying the sight of the moon.

His head snapped back down and to the right. Someone was there.

Moving silently, he ghosted through the ruins, gathering his weapons from where he'd stashed them in several locations. When he was armed, he went up. Most people never thought to look up, not when the building was unstable. But Tienan had thoroughly explored the area when he'd chosen it as a base. He knew where to step and where to avoid. He'd also set some traps to discourage any curious trespassers.

The clear night was now a curse and he found himself wishing that the air was heavy with smog and fog as it usually was. But there was no changing Mother Nature. All he could do was work with what he had. Fortunately, that was his specialty.

He could hear more of them now, and see them. An entire squadron of security police was spreading out around the building. His muscles tensed as he caught a glimpse of the man at the head of the squadron. General Caruthers.

The man might be in his late fifties, but he was in better shape than a man half his age. His iron gray hair was cut ruthlessly short. His lips were thin and hinted at the cruelty of the man himself. Tienan knew the General's face as well as he knew his own. He'd fantasized for years about killing him. His enemy had come to claim him.

How had they found him?

*Silence.*

He didn't want to believe it, but there was no other explanation. She hadn't locked him in the building because there had been no need to. She'd turned him in to the General and his security force.

Betrayal hit him like a sledgehammer. Breathing was almost impossible. His chest felt as though it were being ripped apart. He ignored the pain, channeled it, used it to fire his determination as he slowly worked his way toward his escape route.

There would be a reckoning. Silence would pay for her betrayal. He'd make sure of it.

"You've got to help me," Silence pleaded with Adrian for what seemed like the one-hundredth time. "The security police were just moving in when I slipped out. I think General Caruthers himself was there." The glimpse she'd caught of the man was enough to chill her blood. His cruelty and ruthlessness were the stuff of nightmares. She couldn't bear to think of Tienan caught in his clutches.

"I barely got out as it was. I couldn't go back to warn him without being caught. There's no way Tienan could have escaped."

"Then he's gone and there's nothing we can do about it." Logical as ever, Adrian sat at the head of a scarred wooden table, legs stretched out in front of him and his elbows propped on the arms of his chair. His fingers were steepled together as he contemplated her. "And after what he did, I'm not inclined to mount a rescue."



"He didn't hurt me." For some reason, she felt compelled to defend Tienan. Maybe it was the guilt she was feeling for leaving him.

She closed her eyes, not wanting to think about that. He'd been sleeping on the pallet, legs sprawled, arms wrapped around the blanket she'd bunched up and left beside him. It had taken all her willpower to make herself leave the warmth and comfort of his embrace. She felt safe there. And that was crazy considering he'd all but kidnapped her.

It had been her duty to escape and to return to the base camp and tell Adrian about him. Then why did she feel as though she was betraying him?

"Are you sure?" Her eyes snapped open to find Adrian watching her. He reminded her so much of Tienan at that moment, she wanted to cry. Not in physical appearance. Adrian was blond haired and blue eyed. But in temperament.

"I'm sure." Her voice softened, but she could do nothing about it. Memories of the time she'd spent in Tienan's arms were ones she'd treasure for the rest of her life.

"I see," Adrian responded, his voice neutral. And she was afraid he did see. He knew her better than anyone else.

"Please," she begged. Going to his side, she placed her hand on his shoulder. "I've never asked you for anything since I first met you."

Adrian stared up at her, unblinking.

"I'm asking now. I need to know what happened to him. Maybe he escaped them. Maybe we can still intercept the security squadron that took him."

He shook his head.

Silence fell to her knees beside him. "I'm begging you to do this one thing for me."

Adrian sighed and leaned forward, cupping her face in his hands. "You mistake me, Silence. I will do this for you, but it's useless. If he's not dead, he'll soon wish he were. If you're right and General Caruthers has him, then there's nothing we can do for him."

They both knew the General would torture Tienan. And it would be a long and painful process. Tienan had escaped from the inner city and the General would make an example of him. Whatever happened to Tienan wouldn't be pleasant.

She sprang to her feet. "We've got no time to waste."

Adrian pushed to his feet and called his second-in-command. Derrick was at his side in an instant. "Sir." He stood at attention, awaiting orders.

"Get a squad together, we're going out."

Derrick glanced at Silence but asked no questions. They'd all known she'd been missing for over two days but no one knew exactly where she'd been or what had happened to her. She'd rather keep it that way.

"Sir," he responded again before turning on his heel and hurrying off.

Impulsively, Silence hugged Adrian. "Thank you."

"Don't thank me." He brought his hand up to rest on the crown of her head. "We haven't found him yet. And if we do, he and I are going to have a little chat. He may wish the General had taken him by the time I'm done with him."

Her stomach lurched at his deadly tone, but she ignored it. One problem at a time. First they had to get to Tienan.

Pulling away from Adrian's embrace, she hurried to her duffle bag beside her pallet to rearm herself. By the time she got outside the abandoned warehouse that was their current base, a group had assembled. She knew them all. Every last one of them was a battle-hardened veteran.

Giving them a nod, she took her place at the front beside Adrian. "This way." Not giving herself a chance to think about what they might find, she led the way through the twisting streets of the outer city. She skirted around buildings and through alleyways. They had to stop twice to let security patrols pass. There seemed to be an abnormally high number of them out and about. Usually they would have engaged the enemy but not tonight.

It seemed to take forever for them to reach the ruins of the building where Tienan and she had first met. It was almost dawn. The sun was just starting to break over the mountains in the east. Silence felt her heart pounding so hard against her chest she was afraid everyone else could hear it.

The quiet was disturbing. Not even a rat scabbled down the alleyway where she and Adrian had hunkered down. "This is the place," she whispered, barely making a sound.

"Wait here," Adrian ordered as he began to silently glide toward the building.

For the second time since he'd taken her in and given her a home and a purpose, she disobeyed a direct order. Moving from her spot behind a rusted Dumpster, she followed him. He turned and glared at her, sensing her presence the moment she got within a few feet of him. She shrugged and crept by him, leading the way.

The door was wide open, but still she moved with caution as she entered the basement, her feet making no sound on the gravel and brick. The table and chairs were upended on the floor, the remains of the candles smashed beside them. The pallet was still in the corner, the blanket that had covered her tossed aside.

Walking blindly toward it, she picked up the blanket and held it to her chest. It smelled of damp earth and sex and Tienan. Folding it carefully, she tucked the blanket beneath her arm. "We have to see if we can catch the squadron that captured him." Not looking at Adrian, she headed for the door.

He caught her in his arms before she had one foot outside the room. "It's too late, Silence. Either they have him or he's gone."

"No." She wouldn't believe it. Couldn't believe it. Not Tienan.

"Yes." Releasing her, he squinted into the darkness. "There is nothing more we can do." Leaving her there, he headed toward the door and the light of the day.

Tears burned her eyes but she wouldn't let them fall. It was useless to cry. That was one lesson she'd learned at a very young age. Her steps were leaden as she forced

herself to follow Adrian. All she wanted to do was curl up on the pallet they'd shared and cry and scream and curse the fates.

She did neither.

She was stronger than that. Pausing, she took one last look around the room. Her prison really. But it had been more than that, as Tienan had been much more than her foe and captor.

"You only knew him a couple of days," she reminded herself.

It didn't matter.

Somehow, against all reason, she'd fallen in love with her dark warrior. Her chest ached with a longing that would never be filled. She'd never see Tienan again.

Gripping the blanket tighter, she held her head high and stepped out of the room. Taking hold of the door, she let it fall closed with a solid thud. Adrian was waiting at the edge of the ruined building. Several sentries were keeping watch, but Silence could feel their eyes on her, watching for a sign of weakness.

Keeping her expression blank, she walked past Adrian, neither of them speaking as they headed back to the rebel camp.

## **Chapter Five**

Tienan watched the comings and goings from the shadows as he had for the past three days. He'd caught a glimpse of Silence once. She'd had her head down, walking beside a man who oozed confidence and control. This had to be Adrian, the leader of the resistance movement.

She'd had a blanket clutched tight to her chest. He'd recognized it as the one they'd shared. Anger burned in his gut. So the traitor had returned to make certain he was gone. He pushed all soft thoughts of her aside. She was treacherous, a betrayer of the worst kind.

He wouldn't be satisfied until she'd paid for her transgression. His need to meet with Adrian had been superseded by his need to punish Silence for her betrayal. All his intellect and energy was focused on that goal.

They were a well-organized group, he'd give them that much. Who came and went from the dilapidated warehouse seemed to be carefully controlled. Patrols went out and came back on a regular basis.

There was one oddity. A slender man in his mid-to-late twenties seemed to come and go at odd times, slipping out and returning with no one seeming to be the wiser. Perhaps he was sneaking off to be with a lover.

Outwardly Tienan was calm and in control. Inside he could barely contain his fury. He was overdue for his meeting with Logan, but he couldn't make himself leave the outside of the rebel camp. Even as he loathed his weakness, he longed for a glimpse of Silence.

His empty belly protested, but he ignored it. Food and sleep had become secondary to his need to recapture Silence. She'd go out eventually and, when she did, he'd be ready for her.

He'd followed them back to their compound three days ago before heading off to another one of his safe houses around the outer city. There were dozens of them scattered for miles. It was a precaution he and Logan had set up as soon as they'd arrived. That way, if they were being pursued they had bolt-holes where they could wait out the heat.

Thankfully, there was one not far from here and it hadn't been compromised. Tienan was careful to always check to make certain no one else had been there. He and Logan left signs for one another if they used one of the safe places so the other one would know it was still okay to use it.

Tienan's muscles ached. He'd been crouched in the rubble of the building across from the warehouse for hours. But he wouldn't shift his position. Any kind of movement could alert the sentries posted along the walls. They were hidden from view, but they were there. Tienan could feel them. He'd also caught a glimpse of them his first day here.

The small pack by his feet contained a ration of dried meat and some water. He'd eat when the sun went down. His eyes flicked briefly toward the sun, but his body remained still. He figured he had less than an hour before it started to get dark. Plenty of time to watch for Silence.

His eyes burned with the need for sleep, but rest eluded him these past nights. Every time he closed them, he dreamed of her. His sweet Silence with her large, violet-blue eyes and kissable lips.

Sweat trickled down his back, but he ignored the discomfort. He could still feel her soft skin beneath his palms, her slender body taking him as he drove into her again and again.

Swearing softly, he shifted slightly to try to alleviate the growing pressure on the front of his pants. His dick had a mind of its own and remembered all too well the way Silence's pussy had gripped it tight.

Closing his eyes, he swallowed hard. Days later, he could still smell her unique fragrance, taste her exotic honey on his lips. His eyes blinked open and he narrowed his gaze at the compound across from him.

Lies. All of it lies. And why not? He'd kidnapped her and held her captive for several days. Why wouldn't she turn him in to the security force? If anything, he figured she'd bring Adrian and the rebels down on him. But maybe she'd been ashamed of the way she'd given her body to him and hadn't wanted anyone else to know. Handing him over to General Caruthers would make that possibility disappear forever.

He refused to believe that the emotions swirling within him were anything but anger. There was no room for disappointment or disillusionment. Silence had betrayed him. There was no other possibility.

As though his thoughts had drawn her, Silence appeared in the entrance of the building. She looked left and right as she hurried away from the compound, keeping to the shadows. He couldn't actually see if it was her, but he *knew* it was. It was in the way she moved—careful and deliberate. She seemed to map out her path in her mind before she took it to get maximum speed while retaining her place in the shadows.

She was good. But he was better.

Reaching down, he lifted his pack and slid it over his shoulder. Dusk was moving in quickly as a light layer of fog began to blanket the outer city. Moving swiftly and silently, Tienan slipped from the building, following Silence.

Twice they came across packs of roving outlaws that roamed the streets when the sun went down. His heart thundered in his chest at the thought of Silence being captured by them. They would rape and kill her in a heartbeat.

He had to force the muscles in his arms and shoulders to relax. He would kill them all to save her if he had to. No one was going to harm her but him. He ignored the contradiction. Silence was *his*.

But true to her name, she was quiet, waiting until the threat had passed before moving forward. He frowned when she turned down a dark alleyway. She was headed back to the ruins where he'd held her.

Curious now, he followed, keeping a wary eye on his back trail as he did so. It wouldn't pay to get careless. Silence crept through the downed beams and over the rubble until she got to the door of the basement. It was closed now.

She hesitated but squared her shoulders and slowly pulled the door open. It made no sound as she pushed it aside. He'd oiled the hinges himself to keep them from making any unexpected noise. Silence disappeared into the dark void. Night had almost fallen and only a faint shimmer of light followed her into the basement.

Tienan could see almost perfectly, but he knew she could not. Skirting several piles of rubble, he stopped at the top of the stairs and listened.

"Tienan?" His skin tingled at the sound of her voice and his cock flexed, a reminder of his weakness for this woman.

He heard her sigh. It was so soft, he thought he might have imagined it. He sensed her coming and moved back, secreting himself behind several blackened pillars. She stepped out into the darkness, a slender creature that he could break with his bare hands. His fingers flexed, curling into fists. His knuckles turned white beneath the pressure. He stared at his hands. He'd never doubted his resolve before. It was what had kept him alive this long. But he feared what he would become if he punished Silence as she deserved.

As he watched, she walked around in a circle, which grew larger with each turn. She was obviously searching for a trail. But whose?

He clenched his jaw tight. Maybe she'd found out he'd slipped through the net the police squadron had cast for him. Perhaps she was back to find him so she could make sure they got it right this time.

Determination filled him. He would have answers.



He ghosted around the ruins coming up behind her. She stiffened, slowly raising her gaze from the ground. "Tienan?"

He froze, cursing the connection she seemed to have to him. No one, not even Logan was able to sense him the way Silence could. He ground his back teeth together to keep from calling out her name. She seemed to be alone, but he wasn't taking any chances.

She shook her head and trotted toward the end of the alleyway. She was on the move and he was right behind her. Turning right, she hurried back toward the rebel compound. He wasn't having that. It might be days before she stepped outside its protection again and Tienan couldn't wait. His body burned for her, his mind was tortured by her motives.

Picking up speed, he came closer to her. She glanced over her shoulder several times but didn't stop. Silence moved so quickly, he would have missed her if he didn't have such acute vision. Ducking into a building, she hid from sight.

Smart girl. She knew someone was tailing her, but not who.

Playing the odds that she'd wait a while before she moved, he circled the building and found another way in. It was slow going because he wasn't familiar with this particular place, but using all his senses, he crept into position. She was a few feet in front of him now, hunkered down behind a partial brick wall.

Tienan surged forward. At the last second, she whirled around, throwing up her hand. He saw the flash of metal and knew she had a weapon. Closing his fingers around her wrist, he squeezed. A low sound of pain broke from her lips, but he didn't let up until the knife fell the ground at her feet.

He loosened his grip then but didn't release her. It had taken him too long to get his hands on her. There was no way he'd risk her slipping away again. "Going somewhere?"

Silence froze, then did the unexpected. She didn't scream, didn't struggle. Instead, she threw herself into his arms, whispering his name over and over.

He was forced to release her wrist and wrapped his arms around her instead. Her short hair tickled his nose as he leaned down to inhale her fresh, womanly scent. There was no perfume, no artifice, simply clean skin. But it was more potent than the finest aphrodisiac.

Even as he cursed his weakness, he gave himself permission to indulge his needs and hold her close to his heart. She sank against him, her small breasts pillowed against his chest. Placing his hand on her ass, he pulled her closer, cushioning his erection against her cleft.

For a brief second, he allowed himself to forget her betrayal and savored the feeling of belonging to someone, of having someone who only belonged to him. Then she spoke, shattering the silence.

"Where have you been? I thought for sure the security force got you."

"I'm sure you did," he replied evenly. It was hard to do, but he forced her away from him. Keeping his touch impersonal, he patted her down, searching for concealed weapons.

She shoved his hands away. "What are you doing?" she whispered.

He pocketed a knife he found strapped to her belt before bending down to retrieve the one he'd made her drop earlier. When both of them were safely stored away in his pack, he grabbed her wrists and bound them together with a short length of rope.

"Tienan?" He could hear the worry and doubt in her voice as she struggled to get away from him.

Knowing he had to keep her quiet, he took out a piece of cloth he'd cut from an old T-shirt and swiftly gagged her. Her eyes widened and she began to fight in earnest. He subdued her easily, reminding her of his superior strength. The look of betrayal in her eyes fired his anger. How dare she act as though she were the injured party.

Leaning down so close their noses almost touched, he stared into her eyes. "What am I doing?" She nodded vigorously. "Why, Silence, I thought it was obvious. I'm kidnapping you."

Silence could hardly believe what was happening. She'd been in hell the past few days, buried in the depths of despair that Tienan had been taken by the General's troops. She'd berated herself daily, telling herself she should have done something to warn him. Better to die fighting with him than to live with the guilt and remorse of letting them take him.

Still, nothing could have prepared her for this.

She'd decided that she'd cried and grieved enough. The time for action had come. Silence needed answers and the only way she was going to get them was if she went out and found them herself.

Adrian had been watching her like a hawk the past few days, but she'd managed to slip out of the compound when he'd been called away on pressing business. Silence was determined to find Tienan's tracks and uncover the truth about what had happened to him. Deep in her heart, she didn't believe he'd been captured. She couldn't. If she imagined him being tortured and killed at the hands of the General, she'd go mad.

It hadn't been easy making her way back to the building where she and Tienan had spent so much time. She'd been a prisoner at first, but it had become so much more. At least for her.

She thought she'd sensed him several times. A tingling sensation had crept down her spine. It reminded her of the days when she and Tienan had played cat and mouse around the outer city. She'd looked for any sign, any clue that it was him, but finally dismissed it as wishful thinking.

After a while, it got too great to ignore. Like a warning bell clanging, she knew someone was following her. Ducking into a building and hiding seemed prudent. Her plan had been to wait and see who was shadowing her and take action from there.

The hairs on the back of her neck had risen and instinct had her pulling her knife and whirling around to meet whatever threat was there. Shock had held her immobile

when Tienan grabbed her wrist and squeezed until she'd dropped her weapon. It had been almost a carbon copy of their original meeting. Except this time she knew him.

All the agony and pain she'd been through over the past few days fell away as she threw herself against his chest. He'd caught her, holding her close against him. Silence had said a silent prayer to whatever deity was listening, giving thanks for Tienan's safety.

Then everything changed.

He'd pulled away and not just physically. She'd felt his emotional withdrawal as well. Before she could question him, he'd tied her hands together and gagged her.

Tienan was kidnapping her. Again.

The world flipped upside down as he hoisted her over his shoulder. She should be terrified, should be fighting him. But she couldn't. Deep down, she trusted Tienan not to hurt her. She hoped her instincts wouldn't be the death of her.

Breathing through her nose, she tried to ignore the jostling her body was taking as he climbed over rocks and rubble. She tried to talk to him but all that came out was a muffled sound. He smacked her sharply on the butt. "Be quiet or I'll knock you out," he growled.

Silence squirmed as her ass stung. He hadn't hurt her, but he hadn't exactly been gentle either. Tienan put one large hand on her ass, holding her in place. The heat from the sting and his palm penetrated her heavy canvas pants, sending a shiver up her spine. Uncomfortable with the fact that his touch, any touch, seemed to elicit an erotic reaction in her body, she focused on where they were going.

Squinting, she tried to place landmarks as he carried her through the darkened streets. Once, he had to wait in the shadows until a trio of men passed. His hand tightened around her thigh in warning, but she could have told him she wouldn't make a sound. She didn't recognize the men and wouldn't try to gain their assistance even if she did. She wanted to know what the heck was going on with Tienan.

Sweat broke out on her forehead the longer she spent draped over his shoulder. It was getting harder to breathe through her nose. Her stomach was beginning to roil and throwing up and choking was becoming a real possibility. She made a sound of distress in her throat. Almost immediately, Tienan flipped her down and cradled her in his arms. The ease and swiftness with which he did so was a sharp reminder of his strength and keen reflexes. The position eased the strain on her stomach. Silence concentrated on drawing in deep breaths of air through her nose.

"We're almost there."

Silence took hope from his words, counting from ten to one and then back up to ten again. Over and over, she repeated the exercise to calm herself and her breathing. Now that she was in no immediate danger of choking, she glanced around, orienting herself. They weren't too far from the rebel base.

Tienan turned suddenly, heading down a dark alleyway. She caught a glimpse of several lights filtering from broken boards in several buildings and knew that groups of people and families were hunkered down in their fortified homes for the night.

Continuing past them, he made several more twists and turns before heading into a building whose entire bottom floor was open. Thick metal beams supported the upper two levels of the brick building, which looked none too stable.

Not pausing, he walked straight to the back of the ruins to a set of rickety steps. "Don't do anything to upset my balance." With that, he started straight up the steps, skipping some and stepping lightly on others. Silence closed her eyes and tried not to breathe. The man was insane. If they fell, they'd be injured, if not killed outright.

"You can open your eyes now." Silence could hear the touch of amusement in his voice and hit his chest with her bound hands. Resting against him as she was, she couldn't get much power behind the hit. He didn't laugh, but one corner of his mouth did turn upward. For Tienan, that was as good as a smile.

It quickly disappeared, replaced by a stone mask of indifference. Now that they'd reached their apparent destination, Silence struggled in his arms. He pulled away the hand beneath her thighs, letting her legs fall to the floor.

She staggered, but he kept his other arm around her shoulders until she was steady. Reaching up with her bound hands, she yanked at the binding over her mouth. When it was loose enough, she spit out the cloth. Her mouth was dry.

"What the hell did you do that for?" She wanted answers and she wanted them now.

Ignoring her, Tienan turned to a small table. She heard a telltale scratch and then a light flared before settling down to a slow burn. The dim light of the candle was barely enough to penetrate a few feet. She was sure that was intentional.

Tienan walked slowly toward her. The weak light was enough to remind her of just how big he was. His broad shoulders blocked out most of the light as he loomed over her. Swallowing was difficult, but she managed. "Why?"

He shook his head and kept coming. Silence backed up, her knees hitting a hard surface. She toppled back into a chair, biting her bottom lip to keep from crying out in fright. Tienan was trying to intimidate her and he was doing a hell of a job. But why?

Casually, he untied her hands, bring each one to rest on the heavy wooden arm. Quick as a flash, he cuffed them to the chair with leather bindings. This was beginning to feel all too familiar.

Crouching down beside the chair, he wrapped another binding around her stomach. His hands were warm as he pushed up her shirt so the strap rested on her bare skin.

Silence knew she could scream and yell and it wouldn't matter. No one would come even if they happened to hear. People minded their own business. It was safer that way.

Adrian didn't even have any way of knowing she was missing. She'd told several people she was going out on patrol with one group. Then she'd told a few other folks

she was going out with a different patrol. By the time Adrian missed her, which he would, he'd have to wait for both patrols to return to find out for sure which one she was with. By the time he found out she wasn't with either one it would be too late. Tienan would have done whatever it was he was going to do.

"Tienan." She thought he might have flinched when she said his name but decided she was mistaken when he glared at her a moment later. Their eyes were level and she'd never seen his green eyes look so cold, not even when he'd first captured her.

Worry crept through her soul. What did she really know about his man she'd fallen in love with? Nothing. He'd said once he might kill her. Was he planning on fulfilling that promise now?

Catching her chin between his palm, he turned her head until she was facing him. He said nothing as he watched her. Silence had the feeling he was trying to see all the way into her soul.

His thumb traced the curve of her jaw, the tender caress at odds with the anger brewing in his eyes. The mask was still in place, but she could read the emotions stirring within him.

"Why?" He spoke so low she had to strain forward to hear him.

The restraints brought her up short and frustration gnawed at her. *Patience*, she reminded herself. "Why what?"

"Why did you betray me?"

## **Chapter Six**

Tienan watched as confusion and then anger flared in her eyes. Silence tried to keep her emotions contained, but they showed on her face. She frowned and gave him the denial he expected.

“What are you talking about? I didn’t betray you.”

How he wanted to believe her. Even now, he wanted to free her from the restraints and whisk her over to the pallet in the corner and lose himself in her soft, hot depths. Only the memory of the nightmarish hours he’d spent eluding the security police stayed his hand. Someone had told them his location and Silence was the only person, besides Logan, who’d known where to find him. And Logan’s loyalty wasn’t in question.

His fingers tightened around her face and he forced himself to relax them, not wanting to bruise her porcelain skin. Which was stupid. He wanted answers and he’d do whatever it took to get them. But hurting Silence wasn’t the way to get what he wanted.

Even now he could sense the rise in her body temperature, see the way her nipples pebbled beneath her shirt. With her jacket hanging open, there was no way to hide her reaction to him. Silence wanted him.

Letting his hand slide down the side of her face, he wrapped it around the slender column of her neck. She swallowed but said nothing. Her eyes looked enormous against her pale skin. The long, black lashes touched her cheekbones when she blinked. So soft and beautiful, yet deadly.

The tips of his fingers trailed down her neck, eliciting a shiver. Fear or desire, he wasn’t quite sure. Probably a combination of the two.



Her lips parted and her chest rose and fell quickly as her breathing increased. Her hands clasped the arms of the chair, her knuckles white. Leaning forward, he caught the sensitive lobe of her ear between his teeth and bit it. Not hard enough to hurt her but with just enough force to remind her he was there. Then he released it and gently blew.

"Then how did the security force find me?" Not giving her a chance to answer, he swirled his tongue around the delicate shell of her ear. Silence rewarded him with a seductive moan of pleasure.

Planting a trail of hot, open-mouthed kisses along her neck and jawline, he crouched between her legs, shoving them wide to make a space for himself. Gripping the hem of her shirt between his hands, he ripped the material. The sound echoed in the mostly empty space. Peeling back the edges, he stared at her bare breasts.

He loved the fact that she didn't wear a bra. The small, plump mounds were unfettered and free. Her nipples were puckered into tight buds. Red, juicy berries just waiting to be tasted.

Capturing her breasts with his hands, he held them as he leaned forward and opened his mouth over one. He sucked her nipple into the wet cavern, using his tongue to press it against the top of his mouth.

Silence gasped, her entire body stiffening as he flicked his tongue leisurely around her nipple. Sweet. She was so damn sweet. He could eat her up from head to toe and go back for more.

His cock was fully erect and pressing against the front of his pants. It was painful, but he welcomed the pain. It kept him focused on the task at hand. Pulling back, he released her and then blew on her damp skin. Goose bumps rose on her chest and she squirmed helplessly, thrusting her chest toward him.

Running his hands over her ribs, he noted that she seemed slimmer than before. She was slender and couldn't afford to lose any weight. Her delicate rib cage led to a tucked-in waist and flared hips. He made quick work of the buttons on her pants and tugged them down.

Silence stiffened. "This isn't a good idea. You should stop."

"This is a very good idea," he countered, ignoring her request that he stop. He could smell her arousal, the musky perfume that enveloped him as he rubbed his cheek against her belly. She wanted him and he planned to take her.

Resolved, he tugged her pants down her hips, taking her thin panties with them. He had to move back so he could get them over her legs. They caught on her boots and he impatiently unlaced them, tossing them aside. When she was naked from the waist down, he stared at her. Kneeling before her, he had a perfect view of her pussy. Although the light was dim, his enhanced eyesight allowed him to see the slick, red folds.

"Your pussy is already wet." Resting his hands on her thighs, he pushed them open until her legs were splayed wide. "Don't move," he commanded as he let his hands slide higher. He could feel the heat from her core. This at least was real.

Using his thumbs, he held her open, marveling at her sweet little clit just peeking out from its protective covering. Unable to resist the lure, he lowered his head and circled the bud with his tongue.

Silence moaned, her hips tilting forward. Strapped to the chair with her legs spread wide, she could barely move, but she did what she could.

"If I touch your cunt, you'll drench my fingers with your honey, won't you?"

"Yes." Her reply was little more than an intake of breath.

"Hmm. Let's see." Keeping her spread wide with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand, he circled her slit with the index finger of his right. "Wet for sure. But how about inside?" Without further warning, he plunged his finger deep.

Silence stiffened, a tortured groan coming from her parted lips. Her body began to shake as he slipped his finger out and rimmed her. This time, he plunged two thick fingers into her core. Her cunt was hot and wet, squeezing his fingers tight. He wanted it to be his cock but for now contented himself with touching her, controlling her passion.

"Do you want to come?" he whispered as he withdrew his fingers. Silence moaned, her hips pumping forward as far as the belt around her waist allowed.

"Tienan," she cried.

"Answer me, Silence." He trailed his fingers over the tops of her thighs, avoiding her pussy. "If you want to come, then you have to ask for it."

"I want to come," she gasped.

He could tell she was so far gone, so on edge, she'd do anything for him. Now was the time to ask her about the betrayal. "Tell me what you want," came out of his mouth instead. "Do you want me to eat your pussy? Or maybe you want me to finger-fuck you until you scream." His fingers grazed over her heated flesh, teasing her clitoris but not exerting enough pressure for her to come.

She was sweating now, her skin covered in a light dew. Her breasts swayed with every breath she took and her nipples looked even redder and tighter than before. She was at the peak of arousal.

"Maybe you want my cock in your hot cunt." Sitting back, he opened his pants, releasing his erection. His shaft was rock hard, the bulbous head red and angry and wet.

Silence watched, swallowing hard as she nodded.

"You haven't earned my cock yet." Standing, he moved to the side of the chair, thankful it was fairly low. The tip of his cock was level with her mouth. "Suck me."

Silence was burning up. She'd almost died of a fever when she was twelve and she hadn't been as hot as she was now. It enveloped her entire body, gripping her in heat that could only be extinguished by Tienan.

She frowned. Something was very wrong with Tienan. His accusations rang in her ears and beat at her heart. He believed she betrayed him, brought the military to his hiding place. The very thought of it cut deep. How could he believe such a thing?

Or did he? Would he be touching her with such care, bringing her such pleasure if he truly thought she'd delivered him to the security police?

The head of his cock nudged her lips, dampening them with the pre-cum that seeped from the tip, distracting her. She tried to order her scattered thoughts.

She'd denied it. He must have accepted her word. Their lovemaking was a reaffirmation of their relationship, whatever it was. Silence wasn't quite certain. All she knew for sure was that she loved Tienan. Explanations would come later. Now she couldn't think beyond what he was doing to her.

Her pussy ached. It was empty, the muscles contracting around air now that he'd removed his fingers. Her skin felt tight, stretched over her frame. Her nipples hurt, her breasts were swollen. A deep-seated need permeated every cell in her body.

She was still tied to the chair, but she no longer felt threatened by that. Tienan liked being in control. It turned him on. She already knew that. Memories of the hours of pleasure they'd shared rose up within her.

Now he was standing beside her, waiting for her decision.

Silence parted her lips and Tienan slid the tip of his cock inside. He tasted salty and musky. She circled the bulbous head with her tongue, running it along the ridge at the base. He groaned, his hips flexing, driving him deeper.

His cock was thick so she opened her mouth wider, wanting to take as much of him as she could. She wanted to touch him, to feel his erection pulsing beneath her palm. Later, she promised herself.

Right now, she did what she could, stroking him with her tongue and sucking him deep. Tienan began to rock, pulling back so the tip barely remained inside her mouth. Then he pushed forward. Silence gagged once or twice as his cock filled her mouth.

"Relax your throat," he crooned. "You can take more of me. You know you can."

His hands cupped her head, holding her steady for his thrusts. She glanced up at him, expecting his eyes to be closed and his head tipped back. Instead he was staring at

her mouth where his cock slipped in and out between her lips. His green eyes blazing with desire and need.

He continued to fuck her mouth. The light from the candle illuminated him, making his olive-toned skin seem even darker. He was like a statue she'd seen once in a burned-out museum. Cast from bronze, it had been a thing of power and beauty. Tienan seemed larger than life, carved from stone. But he was very real. His skin was covered with a sheen of sweat and his abs rippled with each thrust.

She could feel his shaft swell, sense a change. He was close to coming. She expected to feel the hot spurt of his orgasm. Relaxing her mouth and throat as much as she could, she prepared to swallow his essence. Again he surprised her by pulling back. He pulled his cock out of her mouth with a wet pop.

Growling, he reached for the bindings that secured her wrists. The moment he freed her, she cupped his balls in one hand and circled his cock with the other. His skin was hot, his shaft pulsing heavily against her palm.

"Fuck." Grunting his pleasure, he yanked on the belt still tying her to the chair. It took him some time to get her free. She didn't care, caressing his swollen flesh, she teased his hard length and massaged the heavy sac that hung below it.

Suddenly he stepped away from her. She gave a cry of disappointment at losing contact with him. Before she could protest he yanked her into his arms. She was free from the chair but still held captive in his embrace.

They were across the room in three strides. Tienan fell to his knees and lowered her back to the pallet. He pulled his shirt over his head and tossed it aside. Neither of them spoke as he hooked his arms beneath her legs and spread them wide. Planting his hands on the floor, he fitted the wide head of his cock to her slit and drove forward.

Silence arched her back, crying out as the sensations of pain and pleasure warred within her. She was tight and he was very large. Her inner muscles contracted and relaxed, fitting themselves around him.

Tienan didn't give her time to accustom herself to his invasion. Pulling back, he thrust deep again. "Take me. Take all of me."

Reaching up, she gripped his biceps, her nails digging into his slick skin. There was nothing else to anchor her as she was buffeted by wave after wave of desire. Only Tienan. His thrusts were hard and deep, tinged with an edge of desperation. Silence felt it too, wanting to hang on to this moment forever. Not knowing what would happen when it was done and the real world invaded their private world of passion.

He shifted positions, gripping her around the waist, holding her steady as he pounded into her. It was too much and Silence lost control. Her inner muscles rippled as a blast of heat washed over her. Her limbs trembled. Crying his name, she came. The orgasm was intense. She lost all sense of time and place.

Tienan continued to fuck her, his jaw clenched, his eyes practically glowing. The muscles of his arms flexed and rippled as he thrust. He cried her name as she felt the hot spurt of his cum fill her.

He collapsed, falling on top of her, his body covering hers like a blanket. He was heavy, but she didn't care. He shifted slightly so she could breathe, but other than that, he didn't move.

A deep sense of calm and relaxation flooded her. Tienan was all right. He was better than all right. Smiling to herself, she combed her fingers through his long black hair. The strands were soft, a sensual caress against her skin. He let out a sound much like a purr as she continued to pet him. Satisfaction filled her and she curled her toes.

Like some great beast, Tienan gathered himself, levering his weight off her body. With his hands planted flat on the pallet, it pushed his lower body against hers. Silence let out a silent moan. Tienan was still hard inside her.

He flexed his hips and she gasped as he grew harder. Her eyes flew to his. His face was grim, his eyes flat. The passionate lover from moments before was replaced by the hardened warrior.

Clasping his face in her hands, she stared into his eyes, trying to read his emotions but finding nothing. "What's wrong?"

Tienan reached up and caught one of her hands with his and lowered it to the floor. His fingers wrapped around her wrist like a manacle. Then he did the same to her other hand. The heat from moments ago faded, replaced by a cold that went all the way to her bones.

"Why did you betray me?"

Silence closed her eyes as his words shredded her heart and soul. He'd made love to her all the while believing she'd betrayed him. No, she corrected. He'd fucked her. The love was solely on her side.

Shivering, she opened her eyes and stared up at him. There was no point in fighting him. He was so much stronger than she was and in this position she was at a complete disadvantage. All she had to offer him was the truth. "I never betrayed you." She licked her lips, tasting Tienan on her tongue. His cock flexed inside her, a reminder of just how intimately they were still joined. "Can you get off me?"

"No."

He offered no other explanation, made no move to leave her. It was torture having him inside her knowing how he really felt about it. It made her feel dirty and cheap and used.

Anger raced through her, its burning heat driving back the cold that threatened to encase her. "I got up, got dressed and left. If that's a betrayal, then I'm guilty." His fingers tightened almost imperceptibly around her wrists.

"I'd planned to tell Adrian about you." She willed him to understand. "I had to."

He continued to watch her. She was beginning to feel like a rabbit pinned to the ground by a large predator who was deciding whether to kill her or release her. "As I was slipping away, I saw a few security police. By the time I realized it was a full squadron it was too late for me to go back. They had the place surrounded. I raced back

to the compound for help. It took me quite some time to get Adrian to agree to help." Frustration filled her voice.

Tienan's silence was beginning to unnerve her and she found herself rushing to fill the void. Even though she knew it was an interrogation technique, her love for him kept her from holding back. Tienan had trust issues. She understood that even as his mistrust flayed her. She had to be brave enough to tell the truth. For both their sakes. What he did with that knowledge was up to him. Silence had never been a coward and she wasn't about to start now.

"I love you. I would never betray you."

A look of cynicism crossed his face. "We had sex." He ground his pelvis against hers, pushing his cock deep. "That's not love."

"No," she agreed. "It's not. But it's more than that. You live by your own code of honor. You're strong, you're smart and you're so alone you make my heart ache."

"I don't need your pity."

She shook her head. "It's not pity. It's understanding. Even though you kidnapped me, I wasn't afraid. Okay, I was at first, but not after I got to know you better. You could have tortured me, chained me to a wall. Instead, you made sure I had food and was warm. You listened to me when I talked. Ever since I first started tracking you I felt the connection between us."

"Human chemistry and biology. It means nothing."

Tears threatened, but she blinked them back. She wouldn't cry in front of him. He'd probably accuse her of trying to manipulate him if she did. "That might be all it is to you, but it's much more to me."

There was nothing left to be said. He didn't believe her. It was obvious by the blank expression on his face and the stiff way he held his body. She lay there, trapped beneath his bulk, which had been a sheltering haven not long ago. Now it was a prison.



He stared at her for a long time. She stared back. She'd given him her side of the story, the truth. It was up to him what he wanted to do with it.

Tienan released her wrists slowly and sat back. His cock slid from her sheath and she had to bite her lip to keep from crying out. She felt empty, bereft that he was no longer a part of her. Standing, he hitched up his pants and fastened them. He grabbed his T-shirt from the floor and yanked it over his head.

"Get dressed." His words were flat as he turned away from her. She noticed that he didn't quite turn his back on her, keeping her in his peripheral vision. Silence was still wearing her jacket. Her shirt was ripped down the center in the front. She grabbed the ends, tying them together. There was nothing else she could do.

Her underwear and pants were crumpled on the floor beside the chair. Silence felt more naked than if she hadn't been wearing anything at all as she crossed the floor and picked them up, shaking off the dust. She was sticky between her thighs and smelled of sex, of Tienan. As fast as she could, she pulled on her underwear, ignoring the clammy feeling of the cotton against her sex. She felt better when she had her pants and boots on.

Fully dressed, she turned to face him. Where did they go from here?

"Hands in the air or I'll blow your fucking brains out."

Silence jolted at the rough command. Tienan lunged toward her. A bullet caught him high in the shoulder, jerking him back. Blood spattered his T-shirt, but he kept moving. She screamed and stepped toward him.

Adrian surged from the shadows, inserting his body in front of hers and blocking her way. A wicked-looking handgun held steady in his hand. His finger was on the trigger. "I should kill you."

Tienan came to a halt, his eyes glued to Adrian and the gun in his hand. He seemed totally unconcerned by the growing bloodstain on his shirt. Silence started to go around Adrian, but he caught her with his free hand and shoved her behind him.

"Maybe you should." There was a hint of challenge in his voice.

"Perhaps later." Adrian kept the weapon trained on Tienan. "Right now, I want to know who the hell you are and why my sources tell me the General has security forces combing the outer city looking for two escaped fugitives from within the inner city. I get the distinct feeling that you're one of them."

"There's probably a reward for turning me in."

"No," Silence gasped. She grabbed Adrian's arm. "You can't do that, Adrian. You promised me you'd help me find him, not hurt him."

Adrian never relaxed his stance, the weapon trained on Tienan's midsection. "Seems like he found you just fine."

That begged the question. "How did you find me?" she asked.

Adrian shook his head. "I knew you wouldn't let it go. Knew when I wasn't looking you'd go out searching for the bastard. I had Mouse follow you."

Mouse was a teenager who'd been with them since he was a baby. Small and quiet, he was almost as good a tracker as she and Adrian.

"He lost you for a bit but picked up your trail again. He came back to base immediately and brought me here." Adrian's finger caressed the trigger of the gun. "Give me one good reason I shouldn't blow your guts out for what you've done to Silence."

It had been a faint hope that Adrian wouldn't notice her sorry state, but there was no hiding the fact that her shirt was knotted to hold it together. Plus, the unmistakable musk of sex permeated the air. Not to mention the mussed pallet in the corner.

Adrian's gaze darted to the chair and the restraints and his eyes narrowed. "One good reason."

Tienan relaxed, his hands hanging by his sides. "I'm an Alpha, just like you."

## **Chapter Seven**

Blood dripped down his shoulder and forearm, but Tienan didn't take his eyes off the man standing in front of him. His muscles were coiled and ready to react at a split-second's notice, the gun was steady in his hand and his eyes promised death. This was Adrian, the man he'd wanted to meet. Even if Silence hadn't called him by name, he would have known. It was in the way he moved, in the way he held himself. This man was a leader, a killer, an Alpha.

Tienan had no doubt he knew how to use the gun in his hand. The way he held it spoke of familiarity. The bloody gash in Tienan's shoulder was little more than a flesh wound. If Adrian wanted him dead, he could have easily killed him. Which meant that Adrian had questions.

Tienan ignored the pain, burying it in the recesses of his mind as he'd been taught. It was more of a dull ache really, a reminder that he had to do something about the bleeding eventually. He'd take care of it later. If he was still alive, that is. Right now, he figured the odds were about fifty-fifty.

His body was injured but his mind was reeling with the revelation that had come crashing down on him. He'd done something he'd been trained never to do.

He'd made a mistake.

He could justify it by saying it was due to the emotional upheaval Silence had caused in his life, but it didn't matter. The fact remained that he'd made a mistake. A big one.

From what Adrian said, Silence had been telling the truth. She hadn't turned him in. She had gone searching for help. However the security force had found him, it hadn't been because she'd betrayed him.

His blood ran cold as he thought of how close she'd come to being captured by the squadron. If she hadn't left when she had, they might not have escaped. Alone, he had a chance to evade them. With her to protect, it wouldn't have been as easy, if possible at all.

Regret, sharp and hard, punched him in the gut. Silence wasn't looking at him now, her gaze on the ground as she realized Adrian knew they'd had sex. If what Tienan suspected was true, Adrian would have easily smelled the aftermath of sex in the air. And there was no way the other man hadn't noticed her rumpled state. Hell, he'd probably seen her getting dressed and waited until she was fully clothed before announcing his presence.

Shit. He'd not only hurt Silence, he'd alienated the very man he'd wanted to meet.

Now that he'd seen him, Tienan had no doubt that Adrian was a product of the same program that had birthed him. Adrian's reflexes were extremely fast and his ability not only to make his way past the booby traps Tienan had set below, but also get the drop on him was nothing short of a miracle. That meant he was enhanced. A man, but more than a man. Just like Tienan.

He was a tough bastard. His stance never relaxed as he continued to train his weapon on Tienan. Not by a twitch or a blink did Adrian betray his thoughts about Tienan's bold statement. Then again, if he'd survived one of the earlier terminations by the Piedmont Corporation, Adrian had to be resilient. Add that to living in the brutal outer city for years, then he was an extremely dangerous man, and one you wanted on your side.

"What do you mean, Alpha? What is he talking about?" Silence was watching Adrian as she asked her question, but Tienan answered. He wanted her to look at him. She was disheveled and very subdued. Not her feisty self at all.

"Project Alpha was launched about thirty years ago by the Piedmont Corporation. Their goal was to create super-soldiers, a special unit of men with enhanced senses,

their brains part computer, allowing them to quickly work through the scenarios of any situation and find the solution."

Eyes wide, she stared at him. He could see the disbelief on her face. "That's crazy."

"Maybe, but it's true. They wanted to create a breed of soldiers who were smarter and faster and wouldn't quit until the job was done. The perfect assassins. Cold-blooded killers without conscience."

"That's not Adrian." He noticed she never denied he was a cold-blooded killer. Not that he could blame her. That's exactly what he was. But he was discovering that he was also much more than that.

Tienan shrugged and stiffened as his shoulder screamed in pain. Deciding that if Adrian was going to kill him, he would have already done so, Tienan carefully pulled off his T-shirt. Silence gasped, but he ignored it as he went to work on a makeshift bandage. Grabbing the hem, he ripped. The material gave way and he tore several long strips. Taking the remainder of the shirt, he folded it into a pad and placed it over the wound. It was awkward trying to tie the strips around the pad but he was determined.

"For the love of god." Silence started toward him but Adrian grabbed her upper arm, stopping her.

She glared at Adrian. One corner of Tienan's mouth turned up. He wasn't the only person she was pissed at. For some reason that made him feel better.

"Let go of me. If Tienan wanted to hurt me, he could have killed me a hundred times over."

Adrian hesitated but dropped his hand, releasing her. "Keep to the side so I'll still have a shot."

Muttering under her breath, she stalked toward him. An ominous crack split the air. Tienan saw her eyes widen and her face pale as the floor suddenly disappeared from beneath her feet. One minute she was there, the next she was gone, plummeting through the opening in the rotted floor.

Tienan lunged forward, all thoughts of his wound forgotten. Fear swamped him as he threw himself to the floor and grabbed for her. He caught the sleeve of her coat and held on. Her hand clamped over his wrist, her fingernails digging into his skin. "Don't you let go," he ordered. His shoulder screamed in pain, blood pulsing from the wound.

Her face was completely white as she stared up at him, her body swaying in the void. Below her were piles of rubble, stone and twisted metal. He'd let himself bleed to death before he'd release her.

"Give me your hand, Silence." Adrian was across from him, his body flat against the floor.

"Silence." Tienan reached for her with his free hand, willing her to take it.

She stared from one man to the other, the tension growing thicker with each passing second. Her breathing was shallow, her skin dotted with perspiration. He knew the weight on her shoulder and arm had to be excruciating. She made no sound, but her skin was pasty white.

"Silence." Both men called her name at the same time. Tienan glared at the other man, but Adrian wasn't paying any attention to him. All his focus was on Silence.

Swallowing hard, Tienan gathered his strength and lifted her, praying the material in her jacket was strong. The ripping sound was ominous. Her grip slipped. Tienan worked faster, yanking her upward.

Blood continued to pump from the wound. He was growing weaker by the second. Grabbing her arm with his free hand, he pulled harder.

Adrian swore and scooted around the edge of the hole on his belly until the two men were side by side. Getting a grip on Silence, Adrian pulled. In seconds, Silence was on the floor beside him. Panting hard, he drew her into his arms and held her tight. He could feel her heart hammering against his chest, smell the fear that clung to her skin like a second layer.

He'd almost lost her.

Cupping her face in his hands, he kissed her. Hard. He tasted salty tears as their lips met. Tienan plunged his tongue into her mouth, needing the intimate connection. Her hands slid up his chest, digging into his shoulders.

He winced and Silence pulled away. "Omigod. You're bleeding. How could I have forgotten you were shot?"

"It doesn't matter." He sat up and began to run his hands over her shoulders and arms. "Are you hurt?"

"Tienan." She shoved his hands aside and scrambled away. He sat on the floor, no longer caring if he bled to death. His callous acts and accusations had driven her away. Hell, he'd almost killed her by keeping her in this deathtrap.

It was ironic that he'd finally figured out that he loved her. Watching her disappear into thin air, thinking she was falling to her death was the worst thing he'd ever experienced in his life. Much worse than any torture the General could devise. He knew that if she'd gone through the hole, he would have gone after her, hoping to catch her and block her fall with his body.

"Hold this." Her brisk voice broke up his bleak thoughts. Yet her touch was gentle as she knelt beside him and held the pad he'd made of his shirt over the wound. As he covered it, their fingers touched.

Silence jerked her hand away and began to wrap the strips around the pad to hold the bandage in place. "Thank you." His voice was soft but she heard him. He could tell by the way she hesitated for a brief second before continuing.

"I should be thanking you." Her blue eyes were brimming with tears as she tied off the ends of the bandage and looked at him. Her skin was still far too pale for his liking.

"It was my fault you almost died. I should never have brought you here." Normally he didn't look back. It made no sense to do so. What was done was done and you had to deal with it. But for the first time in his life, he found himself questioning his actions. He'd lost all his senses when it came to Silence.

"Actually, it wasn't your fault." Adrian crouched by the hole, gun in one hand, while he traced the edge of the broken boards with his other. "Not unless you sawed most of the way through the floorboards."

"What?" Climbing to his feet, Tienan circled the hole, stepping carefully before putting his full weight on any spot. Hunkering down beside Adrian, he saw what the other man was talking about. The boards had been weakened. Any one of them could have fallen though. It was a miracle it hadn't happened earlier. Silence had had the misfortune of being the one to step on that particular spot.

"This isn't possible." He'd gone over this site himself several days ago. He would have noticed something like this. As impossible as it seemed, someone had breached his security. Which meant this place was no longer safe. "We need to leave. Now."

Standing, he went to his pack in the corner and yanked out a clean T-shirt. He pulled it on, ignoring the throbbing ache in his shoulder. "Someone else has been here."

"You seem to have enemies." Adrian got to his feet, weapon in hand as he scanned the room and the shadows beyond.

Tienan snorted. "I've got plenty of those. Get in line."

One corner of Adrian's mouth kicked up. "I can see we have more than one thing in common." He tilted his head toward Tienan's shoulder. "We have a doctor who can take care of that for you."

Tienan slung his pack over his good shoulder and met the other man's steady gaze. "Why?" It was tantamount to an invitation to the rebel compound. This from a man who was ready to kill him minutes before.

Adrian shrugged, lowering the hand with the gun back to his side. "I may not like it, but Silence obviously cares about you." He paused and glanced at the gaping hole. "And, contrary to some of your actions, it seems as though you care for her too."

Silence was busy gathering the bedding into a roll for transport, but he could tell from the way her body stiffened, she was listening to every word they were saying.



"I would have died rather than let go of her." He laid all his cards on the table in front of Adrian. It was dangerous to admit a weakness to a foe, went against thirty years of training, but Tienan no longer cared.

Was he a man or a machine? He'd asked himself that question dozens of times, especially the past five years as he'd felt his humanity slowly being drained from him by the Corporation's tests and the General's assignments.

The question had continued to haunt him since he and Logan had broken out of the prison they'd been held in their entire lives. He existed day to day by focusing on the next task at hand. The assignment he'd given himself was to find and meet Adrian, the mysterious leader of the Resistance.

Then he'd met Silence and everything changed.

From the first moment he'd seen her, she'd engaged his curiosity. From the first moment he'd touched her, he'd wanted her. The first time they made love, he knew she'd changed him forever.

Adrian nodded and Tienan knew the other man understood what he was saying. "As I said, we have more than one thing in common."

"We ready to go?" Silence walked over to stand halfway between both of them, her arms wrapped around the bundle of blankets.

"We're ready." Adrian pointed the barrel of the gun toward him. "You lead. I'll bring up the rear. Silence, you'll stay between us. I'll take over once we're back on the street."

"Stay close." Tienan wanted to tuck Silence under his arm where he knew she'd been safe. But her stiff posture told him now was not the time to press his luck. He was going back to the rebel compound. He'd have time to talk to her there. He'd make her listen, even if he had to kidnap her yet again.

Adrian passed in front of him, his eyes flashing a warning. "Don't make me regret this."

Ignoring the implied threat, Tienan moved to the stairs. "Put your feet exactly where I put mine."

Silence felt as though she'd been turned inside out. Men were insane. She'd thought that for years, but she finally had proof. Adrian was acting totally out of character. One minute he was shooting Tienan, the next he was inviting him back to their compound.

And Tienan. Well, she didn't really want to think about him. Not yet. As though he sensed her gaze, the object of her thoughts turned his head and glanced at her. "You okay?" She nodded. He stared at her a moment longer before returning his attention to leading them out of this crumbling building.

He moved like a cat, all sleek muscle and strength. Almost seeming to glide down the stairs. Silence moved more carefully, testing each step before putting her weight on it. She didn't care that Tienan had just walked on it.

Her legs felt like jelly and her insides were still quivering from the fall. It might be a cliché, but her entire life had flashed before her eyes. She could still hear the crack of the wood, feel the nothingness beneath her feet. Shivering, she wrapped her arms tighter around the bundle of blankets she carried. The world had simply disappeared from beneath her feet, leaving nothing to support her.

She could still see the disbelief stamped on Tienan's face. Hear his cry as he lunged toward her. She still had no idea how he'd caught her. But he had. His grip had been unbreakable, determination emanating from the very fiber of his being.

Was it because he cared about her? She'd like to think so but was no longer certain. Regardless of what he thought of himself, he was a good man. A hard man. A dangerous man. A man capable of killing without a single regret. But underneath that was a man with a strict code of honor. He wouldn't let her die. Not if he could help it.

Still, he'd put himself at risk for her. That had to count for something.

And she was grasping at straws. He'd saved her because it was instinct. Nothing more. If he had an alternative motive, perhaps it was because saving her would put Adrian in his debt.

She nibbled her bottom lip as she watched Tienan carefully climb over a pile of rocks, his movements sure and graceful. The man looked as good from behind as he did from the front. He had the finest butt she'd ever seen.

Obviously, she was losing her mind. Shaking her head, she moved her gaze upward. That helped but not much. His shoulders were broad and strong but not too bulky.

Shivering, she clutched the blankets even tighter. Her shoulder and arm ached. She felt cold and hot at the same time and her body wouldn't stop vibrating.

"It's the adrenaline crash." Adrian wrapped his arm around her and hugged her. "Just let me know if you feel weak. I'll carry you."

"I'm fine." She reached up and patted his hand where it rested on her shoulder. There was no way she'd let him carry her. She'd been through this before during battles with the security police. All she could do was ride it out until they got back to safety. Then she could crash in her bunk for a few hours. A shower and a good meal would straighten her up and bring her back to her normal self.

"Everything okay?" Tienan was beside her, looking concerned. She ignored the warm tingles on her skin as his arm brushed against hers.

"Everything is perfect, except for the fact that there are security police combing the outer city for you, someone breached your security, you've been shot and I almost plummeted several floors to my death." She tried to inflict sarcasm in her voice but was very afraid she ended up just sounding pathetic. She took a deep breath and tried to find calm. "I suggest we debrief at a later date, gentlemen. Right now, we need to get moving." That sounded much better. Calm. Competent. Tough.

Tienan whirled around and, once again, led the way. In minutes they were on the street. Both men were totally focused on their surroundings, their intensity palpable.

Their eyes never rested as they scanned up and down buildings and alleyways. Every now and then, one of them would cock their head to one side. The other would immediately stop and listen. She had no idea what they heard. She heard nothing beyond the normal sounds of the outer city.

They kept to the back lanes and the shadows as they worked their way toward the compound. Silence knew the way so well she could find it in her sleep. Because she didn't need to concentrate so much, she had time to think.

*Alpha.* What did that mean exactly? Yes, Tienan had given her the short version of the story. If she believed it, he and Adrian and others had been created in a lab and reared to be assassins. Powerful weapons to be aimed and discharged by the General, mostly in political assassinations or those who opposed the Ruling Council. It was terrifying to even think about.

What kind of toll did that take on a man?

It had taken Adrian years to trust anyone and, even now, she was the lone person he trusted. He kept everyone else at arm's length. Of course, she was no better. Life on the streets had taught her the brutal reality of life. You had to look out for yourself because no one else was going to do it.

But Adrian had. And so had Tienan. Adrian had saved her life when she was a child, giving her a place in the world, a family and a purpose. Tienan had wormed his way into her heart so fast she hadn't been able to stop him. Like the warrior he was, he'd found her weakness and exploited it to the max.

Well, too bad. She'd learned her lesson. It wasn't too late to harden her heart and repair the damage he'd done to it.

*Liar.* She ignored the soft voice in the back of her mind that knew better. After everything that happened, she still loved him. Would always love him.

That was her burden to bear. She'd get over it. Eventually.

Tienan was too much like Adrian. Too much of a loner. He didn't trust her. Had immediately jumped to the conclusion she'd betrayed him. He'd even kidnapped her again just to question her.

She shoved aside all the heated memories of them making love again. No! Having sex. That's what it was. Nothing more.

A sound pierced her thoughts and she froze, sliding deeper into the shadows. She'd allowed her mind to drift too far, depending on the men's skills to warn her of any danger. Stupid. That was just plain stupid. Not paying attention could get them all killed.

The streets were always a perilous place to be. Patrols of security police, as well as various groups of criminals, roamed the outer city, always on the lookout for easy pickings.

It was different beyond the boundaries of the outer city. People had traveled there years ago in search of a better life and some of them had managed to get a foothold on the barren land. They'd worked tirelessly for years to find ways to make it a home that would support them. There were actual communities where people worked together to raise animals and crops. Where they spun cotton and wool to make clothing. Anything that was needed from candles to herbal medicine, they made it.

The communities were closed to outsiders, for the most part, and heavily fortified against raiders and thieves. Armed groups of men occasionally ventured out from the communities to trade with representatives from other communities and those who came from the outer city to purchase food and goods. The security police rarely ventured that far, having their hands full with the Resistance and those who called the outer city home. She sometimes wondered what it must be like not to have to live in fear every single day.

A movement caught her eye, pulling her from her thoughts. A child scampered out from a doorway. Froze and then took off like a jackrabbit. Silence wanted to call the child back, but it was too late. She couldn't even tell if it was a boy or a girl. And even if

she had called out, the child wouldn't have come. She put the child's age at around seven or eight. Old enough to have learned to stay away from anyone you didn't know.

Sighing, she glanced at Adrian, who was watching the shadows where the child had disappeared. He turned, saw her watching him and shrugged. She wasn't fooled. She could see the despair in his eyes. The lost children always hit him the hardest. Perhaps because he remembered when he was one. When they both were.

Tienan was a silent wraith behind her. He hadn't said a word, but she knew he hadn't missed the child, or their reaction. "We need to move." He kept his voice low but she could hear him perfectly. He was so close his breath made the hair on the back of her neck flutter against her skin.

Her nipples pebbled, brushing against the thin fabric of her top. She was suddenly very glad for her coat and the bundle of blankets she was carrying. It made it easier to pretend she was unaffected by his nearness.

Adrian flowed down the alley on silent feet and Silence followed him. With every step she took, she was very aware of the large man following close behind her.

## **Chapter Eight**

"Take it easy on that shoulder for a week or two." The doctor washed his hands in a basin of water before drying it with a threadbare towel of indeterminate color. The towel might have looked grungy, but it was clean. Doc Smith, as he called himself, was meticulous with cleanliness. Tienan appreciated that.

"Thanks, Doc." The doctor had made quick work of stitching the flesh wound. It had bled quite a bit, but it hadn't done any real damage, for which he was thankful. This wasn't the first time he'd been shot in that same shoulder.

Doc Smith shook his head. "I don't know why I bother. You'll ignore my good advice and do whatever it is you want to do. Just keep the damn thing clean and don't tear the stitches. I don't want to have to waste any medicine on you. Antibiotics are in short supply."

"No problem. I heal fast and I don't get infections."

The doctor gave a bark of laughter. "I can believe that. You look the type to tell everyone what to do and expect them to fall in line. Even yourself."

Tienan bit back a grin as he yanked on the clean shirt that had been left for him. "Like I said, I don't get sick." He knew that the wound was already healing, the skin fusing together at an accelerated rate. It was one of the perks of being an Alpha.

A heavy thump sounded on the door a second before it was shoved open. The man standing in the doorway was about five-ten and built like a brick wall. His neck and arms were thick with muscle, but Tienan knew there was more to the man than that. The intelligent gleam in his dark eyes was unmistakable. Derrick was Adrian's second-in-command. You didn't get a position like that by being stupid.

"You ready?"

Tienan slid off the table where the doctor had performed the minor surgery. "Yeah."

"Adrian wants to see you." Turning, he walked away, not looking back to see if Tienan was following.

Tienan arched a brow. The doctor saw his expression and laughed again. "Adrian gives the orders and expects everyone to do exactly as he says." He tucked his tools back in his battered leather bag and closed it tight. "And since he's always right, they do. Plus, he's not a man you want to cross." The doctor gave the friendly warning as he headed out the door.

"Neither am I, Doc. Neither am I." Grabbing his jacket and pack, he strode out of the room. Derrick was waiting at the far end, a frown on his face. Sighing, Tienan gave in to the inevitable and started toward him.

He and Adrian needed to talk, to establish some kind of ground rules for their association. They were both Alphas, but they weren't friends, and that made for a dangerous situation. They were both natural leaders, not followers, and would butt heads if they weren't careful. It was inevitable.

What Tienan really wanted to do was find Silence. She'd slipped away when he was led to the room that acted as their infirmary. He wanted to take her in his arms and strip her naked just to make certain she hadn't been hurt in the fall. She said she was fine, but he wouldn't expect her to admit to a physical weakness. She had too much pride for that.

Then he wanted to spread her silky, white thighs and drive himself into her hot pussy. He sucked in a breath as his cock jerked, growing larger by the second. He could almost feel her hot, damp sheath gripping his shaft tight. He'd fuck her until she screamed with pleasure, flooding his cock with her juices. Only then would he let himself come.



"This way." Derrick jolted him out of his pleasant daydream, a sharp reminder for him to pay attention to his surroundings. He wasn't too worried. His subconscious was always on alert for any threat. Still, he needed to get his head back in the game.

He hoped that Silence was at least resting. She'd been through an ordeal, most of which he was responsible for. The kidnapping, the threats and hot, mind-blowing sex had been followed by Adrian's discovery and her near-death. The adrenaline rush alone from her fall would have left her feeling weak when she finally came down from it.

No one had told him where she was. Not that it mattered. He'd find her. As soon as he talked with Adrian.

He could use a rest himself. He'd lost a hell of a lot of blood and wasn't feeling as steady on his feet as he'd like. Not that he'd let on to anyone that he was less than one hundred percent. That wouldn't be smart.

A good meal and a few hours of solid sleep would go a long way to letting his body get on with the task of healing itself. That wasn't going to happen until this meeting was over, so the quicker it was done, the better.

The abandoned building where Adrian and his people were currently staying was large and built with brick. Surprisingly, most of the outer walls were intact. Inside, there was a cavernous room on the ground floor where they'd set up a makeshift kitchen and a supply area. Both were heavily guarded.

Upstairs on the next two floors were individual rooms on either side of a narrow corridor. The infirmary was on the far end of the second floor, but they were headed up.

Derrick pushed open a door and started up a dark stairwell. "Keep to the right."

Tienan followed instructions, keeping right. A few cracks in the walls let in some light. If his vision hadn't been enhanced, he would have been hard pressed to see at all. Thankfully, the stairs had been swept free of debris.

At the top of the stairs, Derrick pulled open another door and started down the dingy hallway. It was morning. Barely. The sun was peeking over the horizon and shining through a dirty window at the end of the hallway. Tienan barely suppressed a

yawn. He'd slept in short snatches over the past few days and it was beginning to catch up with him. He might be enhanced, but he was still human.

He shook off his tiredness as Derrick turned into a room in the middle of the hallway. Tienan approved. Much safer than a room on either end of the building, which were more susceptible to an explosive device or random gunfire.

"Tienan is here, as requested." Derrick stood across from Adrian, who was seated behind a battered metal desk.

Adrian put down the papers he was studying and nodded. "Thank you." The dismissal was obvious from the tone. Tienan could see the curiosity in Derrick's eyes, but he turned and left the room, no questions asked.

"Impressive." Tienan strode to the desk and sat down in a rickety wooden chair, taking care not to put all his weight on it until he was certain it would hold him. The chair had originally been blue in color. Bits of paint still clung to parts of the legs and back.

Adrian sat back in his much sturdier chair and linked his hands over his stomach. "Derrick's been with me for ten years now. He knows I'll fill him in on everything he needs to know later."

"Everything he *needs* to know." Obviously, Adrian didn't tell his second-in-command everything.

Stretching his legs out in front of him, Adrian shrugged, ignoring Tienan's not-so-subtle prod. "How's the shoulder?"

"I'll live." Tienan settled back in his chair and studied Adrian. "How did you escape?" The time for feeling one another out had passed. It was time to get down to business.

"I didn't." The words were flat. Adrian didn't speak for several minutes. Tienan was patient. He knew it was no good to rush the man. Adrian would tell him what happened, or he wouldn't. Nothing Tienan could say or do would change that.

"I was slated for termination in the spring of 2121. Too unpredictable. Not advancing as quickly as some of the others. They cut the number of Alphas down by fifty percent. Budget cuts. They couldn't afford to waste time on subjects who weren't deemed satisfactory."

Tienan felt the old anger stir inside him. The bastards at the Piedmont Corporation had always treated them as less than human. Lab rats to be studied and taught and tested.

"They didn't want to waste resources needed to do it humanely." Adrian gave a bark of laughter. It was tinged with bitterness and barely suppressed anger. "I have to thank them for that." He was still sprawled in his chair, but he was anything but relaxed.

"How?"

"How did they kill us? They took us out through an opening in the Gate. It led to one of their garbage dumps. They lined us up and shot us. That way they didn't even have to go to the trouble of disposing of the bodies. We were already there."

"Fuck." Tienan's hands gripped the arms of the chair so tight the wood began to crack. He forced himself to relax his grip, but it wasn't easy. That could just as easily have been him and Logan. "How many?"

"There were twelve of us. Most of us had never met. You know how they do things."

Tienan did know. They kept them separated for the most part, only allowing them contact with the other Alphas when they were training or had to go on a mission together.

"One of them was my brother. We looked enough alike, we had to be brothers. I thought that was the end, but the bastards who shot us didn't bother to check to make sure they'd completed their job."

That was fortunate for Adrian but extremely unwise on the part of the men who'd done the job. An Alpha would have given the target a head shot and a chest shot. And then, if possible, he would have personally checked to make certain.

Adrian's gaze was turned inward as he relived the events. "The stench is the first thing I remember. That and the flies. They were everywhere, covering me and the others. I dragged myself to my knees and checked each man, but I was the sole survivor. I almost lay back down." He glanced at Tienan. "But I couldn't. You understand."

He did. It wasn't in an Alpha to give up. They'd keep going until they literally dropped. They didn't know any other way.

Adrian sighed. "I nursed myself back to health, got acclimated in the outer city and put all my resources toward destroying the Gate. The disparities between the two worlds are appalling and unnecessary. The Ruling Council has to be brought down and resources used to make life better for all."

Tienan knew there was a hell of a lot more to the story than what Adrian told him, but that was all he was getting. He wanted to know about Silence and her relationship with Adrian but knew better than to ask. She'd told him some things, but he wanted Adrian's version of the story. He suspected she'd sugarcoated much of what she'd told him. Her life hadn't been an easy one.

"Now tell me how you escaped. It's occurred to me that this all might be a ruse to kill me. How better to track me down than with another Alpha. I'm sure the General has wondered on more than one occasion if I'm one of his botched experiments."

Tienan conceded Adrian's point. It would be a brilliant plan, if the General had thought of it. "He wouldn't have trusted me or Logan to do it. We were the last two Alphas and we were scheduled for termination."

"The last two." Adrian shook his head and sighed. "I'd hoped that more had survived."

"You'd know that better than I would. I've been in a virtual prison for thirty years. I've only been free to roam for the past few months."

"You were scheduled to be terminated," Adrian prompted.

"The scientists have finally developed a robotic soldier they find more easy to control and much harder to kill. They didn't count on Kathryn Piedmont." A smile crossed his face as he thought about the determined redhead.

"Piedmont's daughter," Adrian spat.

Tienan sat upright, not liking Adrian's tone. "She's nothing like her father. She was involved in the project for years, always objecting about our treatment. When she realized the full scope of what her father and the General planned, she risked her life to get us out and hide us."

"Where is she now?" Skepticism tinged Adrian's voice. "I'd like to talk to her."

"She's gone." That was as much as Tienan would say about that. "She risked everything to save us. The General interrogated her personally." Tienan wouldn't have Kathryn's reputation tarnished in any way. She was a hero in his eyes and deserved recognition.

"I'm sorry."

It was his turn to shrug. "She's better off."

Silence stood out in the hallway, her hand pressed to her mouth. She knew she shouldn't be eavesdropping, but when she'd come up the hall and heard the men talking she hadn't been able to stop herself.

She'd washed and changed her clothing but hadn't been able to sleep. After tossing and turning on her pallet for half an hour, she'd given up. There was no way she'd rest until she knew how Tienan was.

The first place she planned to check was the infirmary. When she found it empty, she headed upstairs. Adrian would know where Tienan was. It even occurred to her

that they might be together. Adrian would have a lot of questions. And only Tienan could provide the answers.

It was second nature for her to creep down the corridor without making a sound. They'd been here a while, so she knew every board that creaked. Dust motes floated in the air, illuminated by the sunlight just breaking over the horizon. Such a nice day was rare and usually she enjoyed it. But even the sunshine couldn't erase the darkness creeping over her heart.

Tienan loved another woman.

It was obvious in the way he spoke about Kathryn Piedmont. His voice grew hard when he thought Adrian was criticizing her and soft when he spoke of her. She rubbed her hand over her chest, but the ache wouldn't abate.

She'd known he didn't love her but deep in the back of her mind she'd still had hope. *Stupid!* There was no way to compete with a ghost, a memory of a woman who'd risked her life to save him. And Kathryn Piedmont was an educated woman. Something she wasn't.

Adrian had taught her how to read and write when she was a teenager. She'd never been to school. Hell, she'd never had a permanent home, finding refuge wherever she could.

Her earliest memories were of picking through the garbage dumps used by the inner city. It was dangerous, smelly work, but food, clothing and other useful items could often be found. Silence thought the people inside the Gate were a wasteful bunch. Out here, you never wasted food and you wore your clothes until they fell off your body. Then you used the scraps for bandages or washcloths or some other purpose.

"Where are you situated?"

They'd resumed talking, so she leaned against the wall and listened.

"We have safe houses all over the outer city. We move around, never staying in one place too long."

"I'd like to meet Logan." Silence nodded in agreement. She'd like to meet Logan too. She wondered if he was anything like Tienan.

"That's his choice." Silence thought Tienan sounded tired. He'd been shot and lost a lot of blood saving her life. He should be resting. He probably hadn't even eaten anything.

She knew she shouldn't care, but she couldn't help herself. Love, it seemed, didn't die easy. Even though she knew it was one-sided, she still cared about him. Loved him.

Biting her lip, she wrapped her arms over her chest, hugging herself. Even though she was standing in a sunbeam, she felt cold. And tired.

"I assume you have a plan?" She could hear the interest in Adrian's voice. It occurred to her that this was the first time in years he'd talked to someone like him, someone who understood him in ways that no one else could, even her. For that reason alone, she'd forgive Tienan for hurting her. Adrian had been her protector, her family for years. If talking to Tienan gave him some comfort, she was grateful.

"Kill the General. Destroy the Piedmont Corporation." Tienan gave a rough bark of laughter. "Not really a plan, more of a goal. We're still trying to get our bearings and the lay of the land."

"I can help you with that."

Silence was surprised Adrian made the offer. Yet, she wasn't. Both men had the same goals. Adrian was obsessed with ending the brutal regime of the Ruling Council and destroying the General. Now she knew why.

"I can't stay here. You know that." Tienan's words were like a knife through her heart. He was a loner and always would be. It was sheer folly to think there might be room for her in his life.

"Two Alphas don't make for a comfortable situation." Acceptance tinged Adrian's voice.

“Logan and I get along, but we’ve been together for a long time. First as sparring partners during training, then on assignments, now as friends. We know when to walk away from one another and when to stick close.” She could hear the affection in Tienan’s voice for his friend. “We keep apart because it’s safer. The General would love nothing more than to capture us both in one fell swoop.”

“When will you leave?”

“Soon.”

“We can give you some basic supplies if you need anything. I’d like to set up some sort of communication system so we can share information.”

“No offense, but I don’t trust your people.”

Silence cringed, expecting Adrian to object and defend them.

“Neither do I.” Adrian’s soft spoken words crushed her. He didn’t trust them. Any of them. That included her.

She must have made a sound of some sort because Tienan was suddenly beside her in the hallway. “Silence?” As he watched her, she gathered her tattered pride around her. She belonged nowhere. Her illusion of having a place, a family had just been shattered. She trusted Adrian with her life but he didn’t trust her.

“Silence, how long have you been here?” Adrian was standing next to Tienan, both of them staring at her with worry in their eyes. She wasn’t buying it.

She knew she should be embarrassed for being caught eavesdropping, but she didn’t care. “Long enough.” She pushed away from the wall and stared at them. Her eyes were dry and she ignored the ache in her chest. She’d get through this like she had everything else in her life. She might not be educated or own anything of value, but she was a survivor.

Adrian started to speak, but she did something she’d never done before—she cut him off. “We have bigger worries. Obviously, someone found Tienan’s hiding place. I’ve been thinking and it occurred to me that if you had Mouse follow me when I left



the compound, maybe someone else was following me too. Everyone knew I was tracking the mystery man around the outer city. What if someone else wanted to find him too? Wanted the reward. I'm damn good, but I'm not arrogant enough to believe no one else has superior tracking skills."

"What about Mouse?" Tienan asked.

"I trust him." She stared Adrian in the eyes when she gave her answer. His gaze didn't flicker, his expression never changed, but she knew she'd made her point. She turned to Tienan. "I trust him with my life and with yours."

"Good enough. That still leaves an entire compound of people. You're too big an operation to be able to vouch for everyone personally. This is a hard world and the temptation of a reward might be too much for someone to resist."

Silence was stunned by Tienan's easy acceptance of what she'd said. Because she trusted Mouse, he did. Or maybe he was humoring her. The problem with that theory was that Tienan wasn't the type of man to humor anyone. He was nothing if not brutally honest.

"I'll start asking around, talking to the few people I *do* trust."

She ignored Adrian, figuring he was just saying that because she was standing there. She knew what he'd said in private and that was more telling than anything else he could say.

"If you don't need me for anything, I think I'll go get some shuteye." Fatigue was pulling at her. If she didn't rest soon, she'd fall asleep on her feet. Plus she was afraid she might start crying any second and that just wouldn't do.

"Fine." Adrian looked as though he wanted to say more to her but refrained. "We'll talk later." He headed back inside his office, tossing a comment over his shoulder to Tienan. "Let me know when you're leaving."

Before she could even take a single step away, a heavy hand came down on her shoulder. "We need to talk."

## **Chapter Nine**

She sighed and squared her shoulders. "So talk."

"Not here." Tienan jerked his head toward Adrian's office. "Somewhere private."

"Come with me." Not giving herself time to think, she headed to the stairwell. The only place they'd have even a modicum of privacy was her room. She didn't often have her own space. None of them did. But when the structure of the building they were currently housed in allowed, she and Adrian both had their own rooms, always side by side.

For her protection, Adrian had always told her. And she'd believed him. Now she wondered if it was because he didn't trust her.

It was just all too much to think about. Frankly, she was tired of thinking. She needed rest before she decided what she was going to do. There weren't many choices open to her. The only safety to be found was if you belonged to a group.

A woman alone in the outer city was fair game for the unsavory characters who roamed the streets. Some would simply rape and kill her. Others would keep her as a slave, selling her body to whoever had something to barter. Then there were the ever-present military patrols, searching for resistance fighters. They tortured whoever they captured until they had extracted all the information that person had.

She shivered. She'd rather be dead.

"Are you cold?" Tienan wrapped his arm around her, offering his warmth.

She shrugged away and pushed through the door that led to the stairs. "No." She couldn't allow herself to depend on his comfort. He was leaving. She had only herself to depend on. "Keep to the inside."

Silence concentrated on making her way down the stairs without tripping. Her eyes filled with tears, but she blinked them back. She had no time for self-pity. It was a useless emotion.

Tienan walked behind her, a silent presence. She could practically feel his impatience as she pulled open the door and walked down the narrow hallway to her room. She went inside and kept going until she was standing to one side of the window. Peering out over the city, she waited for him to speak.

From here, she could see the edge of the inner city beyond the Gate. It was distant, but it was there, a constant reminder of the disparity between them. The Gate itself glowed like a sun fallen to earth. It was beautiful and it was deadly. One touch and you'd electrocute yourself. There were four entrances into the inner city. All heavily guarded. The Gate was not quite opaque, but it wasn't translucent either. Something in-between.

As a child, she'd often stood on the edges of the garbage dumps staring at the pristine road just inside the Gate. There was even grass and she'd heard the air was clean, not thick with pollutants as it often was outside. They had artificial sunshine in the inner city that allowed them to grow fresh vegetables, something not easily done outside.

"What's it like?" She hadn't planned to speak first, but the question popped out of her mouth.

She could feel Tienan standing behind her, his chest almost touching her back. "What's what like?"

"The inner city." She wanted him to touch her, but she didn't want him to touch her. Barely smothering a sigh, she gave herself a mental shake. She had to get a grip on herself. "Never mind. It doesn't matter."

He pressed closer. She could feel the heat radiating from his body. She had to get away from him before she gave in to her yearnings and leaned against him. The second she made a motion to move, he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her back

against him. Resting his chin on top of her head and his hands on her stomach, he answered.

"It'd cold and sterile, much like the people who inhabit it. It's all about gaining power and money."

"Not so different from out here."

He rubbed his chin against her scalp, sending tingles racing down her arms and legs. "In many ways it's not that different. It's clean and there is grass and flowers and the air is fresh. You can suck in a big mouthful and it doesn't burn your lungs or taste bad."

"I saw some incredible flowers once. I found them in the dump as a child. Someone had thrown them out, but they weren't dead. I took them home and kept them alive a week before they finally withered. An old lady I knew back then grew some herbs and plants, but they were nothing like these. She told me they were roses." She could still remember their intoxicating perfume and feel the delicateness of their petals. "They were so soft."

"Food is plentiful," he continued. "It's fresh too. That was the one good thing about being held at the Piedmont Corporation. They fed us very well."

"I'm sorry." Gathering her courage, she turned her back on the golden city she knew she'd never live in and faced Tienan. "I'm sorry for what they did to you. To Adrian. To all of you." Living inside the city came with a price—freedom. The Ruling Council had it. Everyone else followed the rules or soon found themselves dead, imprisoned or living outside the Gate.

Tienan lifted his hand and traced his fingers over the curve of her cheek. Her body responded immediately to the intimate caress. Her breasts seemed to swell, her nipples puckering. She ached inside, but it was more than sexual need. Silence wanted all the empty spaces inside her filled. She wanted love and companionship and trust. She wanted forever.

It was as elusive as the inner city.

She took a step back and his hand dropped back to his side. "You said you wanted to talk. So talk."

He was staring at her in a way that made her want to squirm but she stood firm. His green eyes seemed to penetrate her very soul. Adrian sometimes stared at her like that. The difference was that Adrian didn't have the same effect on her Tienan did. Tienan's stare left her panties damp and her breasts feeling tender.

She crossed her arms over her chest and his gaze dropped to her breasts. There was no way to hide the fact that her nipples were poking against the fabric of her T-shirt. Heat crept up her cheeks, but she ignored it. Her body had a mind of its own where Tienan was concerned.

"About what happened last night."

"You saved my life. Thank you for that."

For the first time, he showed a sign of impatience, raking his fingers through his hair. It made her feel better that he wasn't quite as calm and composed as he normally was. "Before that."

"Before or after you fucked me even though you thought I'd betrayed you."

The look in his eyes flickered slightly. If she didn't know better she might have thought she'd hurt him. Almost immediately, his expression hardened and he became the man she'd first laid eyes on—tough and all business.

"I didn't fuck you."

She snorted. "Excuse me, but I was there."

"We made love."

"We had sex. There was no love involved."

"You said you loved me." He was back to being calm and logical again. She hated it. She felt totally out of control and at the end of her rope.

"So? You don't love me. I'm not certain you even like me. You certainly don't trust me." Her heart was pounding and her palms were damp but she wasn't backing down.

They were having this out once and for all. He'd be leaving soon and she'd be left to pick of the pieces of her shattered life. "I wish I'd never tracked you in the first place."

She turned away, not wanting him to see the pain in her eyes. Silence was whirled around and shoved back against the wall so fast it made her head spin. His lower body pressed against hers and there was no mistaking the rather large bulge rubbing against her belly. Tienan had a hard-on.

"Too bad." He grasped her jaw, turning her face until she was looking at him. "You found me."

Her breath was coming faster now. Deep in her heart, she knew Tienan wouldn't hurt her. Not now. There was no reason to. He'd threatened her from the moment he'd first captured her, but not once had he physically hurt her. Even now, he was careful of her shoulder and arm, which was slightly sore. The man was very aware of his strength and tempered it accordingly.

She tried to shrug, to appear unconcerned. "I found you," she agreed. He seemed to relax slightly. "But you're leaving soon. Don't let me stop you."

Every muscle in his body tensed and a growling sound came from low in his throat. "Damn you," he muttered as he slammed his mouth against hers. She kept her lips shut tight, not wanting to give in to weakness. If he managed to break down that barrier she was lost. Tienan had become an addiction in her blood. One she wasn't certain she'd ever recover from.

He changed tactics, softening the kiss, teasing her lips with his tongue. He stroked her mouth and left gentle kisses on each corner.

Silence sucked in air through her nose but it wasn't enough. She opened her mouth and Tienan took immediate advantage, slipping his tongue inside. Groaning, she admitted defeat, tangling her tongue with his. He tasted as he always did—hot and masculine. Every cell in her body was parched and he was water. She clung to his biceps, holding on tight.

Raising her left leg, she draped it over his hip. It brought her pelvis in contact with his, brushing his erection against her mound. She moaned as he shifted closer, rubbing his chest against her aching breasts.

Heat raced through her like a fire out of control. This was probably the last time they'd ever be together. Once he was gone, their meetings would be few. He'd soon forget her, but she'd never be free of him. There would never be another man for her. No other man could ever live up to the standard Tienan had set. He'd spoiled her for any future relationship she might have had.

Anger and passion collided, exploding with a force that left her stunned and breathless. She twisted her head, tearing their mouths apart. "Fuck me." She ground her hips against his, mimicking the act of sex.

"No." He nuzzled her neck, leaving stinging bites as he moved lower. "I'll make love to you."

"I don't care what you call it as long as you do it."

He jerked his head up and his eyes narrowed. Grabbing her ass, he lifted her. She wrapped her legs around his waist as he carried her to her pallet, stopping long enough to lock the door.

Falling to his knees, he lowered her to the thin pallet. "I wish I could lay you on a thick mattress of feathers with silk sheets and soft blankets."

"Is that how you made love to Kathryn?" She could have smacked herself the moment the words were out of her mouth. Why couldn't she leave it alone?

"It wasn't like that with her." He easily supported himself on his arms, keeping the bulk of his weight off her while still covering her body with his. Her nipples tightened with each breath she took. His erection was thick and hard and made her pussy throb with need.

"You can't tell me you didn't make love with her."

He shook his head. "I won't lie. We did have sex. But it was only one night."

"Don't tell me it didn't matter to you. I won't believe you." She'd heard the way he'd talked about the other woman. It was illogical to be jealous of a woman he'd known before he met her, a woman who was no longer here. But Kathryn Piedmont had possessed something she coveted. Tienan's love and trust.

Tienan rolled off her, stretching out beside her. A muscle jumped in his jaw. The dark stubble covering it made him look even more fierce than usual. And that was saying something because Tienan was the most intense and dangerous man she'd ever known.

"It did mean something. It was special but I knew it wasn't meant to be. I loved her, yes, but she wasn't for me."

"I'm sorry." Silence started to sit up. The desire of moments before cooled as he talked of his former love.

"I am too." He placed his hand on her stomach, not letting her move. "Where are you going?"

Was he crazy? "You honestly don't think we're going to have sex after you telling me you love another woman, do you?" She could see a blood vessel beneath his left eye jerk.

"Loved her." He leaned over her and planted his right hand on the floor, caging her in. "She treated me like a real person, risked her life for me. Of course I loved her."

Silence felt crushed by the truth. She should have kept her mouth shut. Closing her eyes against the sting of tears, she felt one lone drop slip down her temple and disappear into her hair.

"Loved," he whispered, catching the next tear with his thumb. "But it was more of the idea of her. Look at me."

Silence wanted to keep her eyes shut but she knew Tienan would stay as long as it took for her to obey his request. Opening her eyes, she met his gaze. He was slightly blurry because of the tears filling her eyes. She sniffed and bit her bottom lip to keep from bawling like a baby. She felt pathetic.



"Even when all the evidence pointed to the fact you'd betrayed me, I didn't want to believe it. I waited and watched this place for days wanting a glimpse of you. I kidnapped you again because I had to have you. You're in my blood, warming all the cold, dark places."

She was listening now. Completely still. She didn't even blink, not wanting to do anything that might make him stop talking.

"The fact that you could get up, dress and leave from where I first held you was the true sign. If I didn't trust you there was no way you'd have been able to do any of that without waking me. I've been too highly trained to make that kind of mistake. That's what made it all the worse when I thought you'd betrayed me. I'd never trusted anyone else as much as I trusted you. I never held a woman in my arms at night, not wanting to let her go."

Several more tears drifted down her temple and her nose itched. But Silence didn't dare sniff. She didn't want to distract him. She stared into his tortured green eyes and saw a reflection of herself.

"And when I saw you fall through the floor, I thought my life was over." He traced his thumb over the curve of her cheek and skimmed his thumb over her lips. "If I hadn't caught you, I'd have gone through the hole after you."

Her heart stopped. When it resumed beating it was a hard and painful thump against her chest. "No." The single word was torn from her lips. "You could have been hurt. Killed."

His face looked as though it had been carved from stone. There was no softness in his hard jaw or strong features. "I wouldn't have mattered. As long as I could have caught and cushioned your fall, protecting you."

She shook her head.

"Yes," he countered. "It was then I understood what I felt for Kathryn was pleasant, a dream of something good. What I feel for you is dangerous and powerful and never-ending."

Silence could barely swallow past the lump in your throat. "What does that mean?" She needed the words from him. After everything she'd gone through, he owed her that.

"It means that I won't be an easy man to live with. I've made the unfortunate discovery that I'm possessive and jealous. I'll kill any man who dares to touch you." His eyes narrowed, daring her to disagree. "You're mine and I'm keeping you. Forever. If you have a problem with that, too bad. You told me you loved me and you can't take it back."

She saw it then. The slightest bit of uncertainty. He was so confident and such a loner, it had never occurred to her that he might be as lonely as she. The ache in her heart lightened. "I won't take it back," she promised.

Tienan closed his eyes and let out a deep breath. She could sense the tension seeping out of him. Opening his eyes, he stared into hers. "Now I'm going to make love to you."

He hadn't said he loved her, but she knew his choice of words was deliberate. That was enough. For now. Raising her arms, she wrapped them around his neck. "I can't wait."

Tienan felt the corners of his mouth turning up in a smile. The action was so foreign it took him a moment to realize what it was. Silence did that to him. Made him feel emotions he'd never really experienced before. And right now she was making him a very happy man.

He meant what he'd said. He'd kill any man who dared to touch her. Silence belonged to him. She was lying next to him, staring up at him with love and trust shining from her eyes. He wanted to be worthy of that. Never wanted to see pain and suffering etched on her face again. Unrealistic, maybe, but it was something to shoot for.

"Let's get you undressed." His fingers shook ever so slightly as he reached for the hem of her shirt.

Silence grasped a handful of the front of his shirt and yanked. "You too."

Their arms got tangled as they dragged clothing off until they were both naked from the waist up. The sun pouring through the window wrapped Silence in its golden glow, making her skin shimmer. Her breasts were pale, plump mounds that his hands itched to hold. Her nipples were the palest pink and very delicate. Her arms were slender, yet sleek with muscles.

"You are so beautiful." He traced a thumb around one tender areola, smiling as he felt a shiver of pleasure rush through her. A blush crept up her cheekbones. She wasn't used to compliments, his little warrior.

"So are you."

Tienan laughed, the sound low and unfamiliar. "Men aren't beautiful." He let his hand slip down her slender rib cage. He frowned at the fragile feel of her. She could do with a few extra pounds. He'd have to see about obtaining some more food for her.

"You are," she insisted. Her fingers tangled in the ends of his hair before skimming down his nape. Her nails teased the sensitive flesh. His cock jerked, pressing harder against the zipper of his pants.

The urge to strip her pants and slam into her pussy was overwhelming. She was hot and ready. The scent of her arousal was evident in every breath he took. But he wanted to take his time. Savor every touch, every sigh and moan of pleasure. Prove to her he could be gentle.

Her hand slid down his shoulder and landed on his biceps, squeezing. "You're so strong. Deceptively so."

"Genetic engineering."

"Does your shoulder hurt?" She bit her lower lip as she stared at the pristine bandage wrapped around his shoulder.

“Not at all.” And it didn’t. He felt strong and alive, the pain from his shoulder nothing but a whisper in the background. He didn’t want to talk about him. He wanted to touch her.

Sitting up, he unlaced her boots one at a time, pulled them off and put them to one side. Her socks followed. He returned to the waistband of her pants, slipping buttons open until they were all undone. Sliding his hands beneath the fabric, he pushed them down one inch at a time, revealing her long, slender legs.

Her large violet-blue eyes watched him as he stripped her, leaving her naked on the pallet. “You next.” She reached for him, but he shook his head.

“If you touch me, I’ll come.” His words were blunt, but they were nothing short of the truth.

“Really?” Her delight was obvious.

He didn’t know whether to laugh or groan at the mischievous look on her face. She reached out to touch him, but he caught her hand and shook his head. “I’m so on edge that it wouldn’t take much to push me over. And I’m not ready to do that yet.”

She arched her back and batted her eyelashes at him. “What do you want to do?”

Tienan was utterly charmed and captivated by this new playful side of Silence. He brought her hand to his mouth and nipped at the pad of her hand before licking away the sting. “I want to do all sorts of things.” He trailed his tongue over her index finger before sucking it into his mouth.

Silence gasped, her eyelids fluttering half closed.

He swirled his tongue around her finger before releasing it. “I want to taste your sweet nipples. I want to spread your legs wide and eat you until you come. I want your juices on my fingers and mouth.” He nipped the tip of her finger. “All that and more.”

Air was in short supply. At least that’s what it felt like to Silence. Tienan was obviously aroused, but he was intent on taking his time. Being the focus of such intense scrutiny was a bit overwhelming, but it was also an incredible turn-on.

Her body felt incredibly alive, every nerve snapping and firing on all cylinders. Her skin was flush with pleasure and anticipation. All she needed to do was say the word. "Take off your pants first." She needed him to be naked too.

His lips firmed but he quickly unlaced his boots, removing them and his socks. She watched, unable to look away as he slowly pulled down the zipper of his pants. His cock jumped out, full and thick and ready. The head was a reddish-purple, engorged with blood. Liquid seeped from the slit, making the head slick.

Silence licked her lips, drawing a groan from him. His hips jerked in her direction. He quickly shucked his pants and lay beside her, throwing one muscled thigh over her legs to hold her in place. His erection was pressed against her hip and she could feel her skin getting damp from his arousal. His hair flowed around his face, touching her skin as he leaned down and kissed her.

It was filled with tenderness and caring and brought tears to her eyes. This was not a man to whom gentleness came easily, which made it all the more special. The kiss changed quickly, becoming more intense. Tongues teased, breath mingled, teeth clinked and mouths clung. Her fingers tangled in his hair, not wanting him to stop.

The man certainly knew how to kiss. Cream flowed from her core as he continued to do nothing but kiss her. Soon it was no longer enough. She needed more.

Skimming her hands over his shoulders, she marveled at the sculpted muscles. His chest was hard and warm. Her fingers grazed his flat nipples, drawing a growl from him. She loved that low, raspy sound he made when he was aroused and she did something to please him.

Tienan was busy kissing his way down her neck. He dragged his tongue over her collarbone before dipping lower. Cupping her breasts in his hands, he lapped at the turgid peaks, leaving them damp. Then he blew gently on them.

Silence moaned as the caress made her throb low in her belly. Her legs moved restlessly.

He teased both nipples with his thumbs before sucking one into his mouth. He drew hard, making her cry out with pleasure. Her hips came off the floor, searching for his cock to fill her. "Tienan." She wanted to yell his name but could only manage a raspy whisper. God, how she needed him.

"Hmm," he replied as he kissed and licked a path from her breast to her navel. His tongue dipped inside, swirling around. He moved, shifting his body between her legs, spreading them wide.

She held her breath, wanting him to touch her but afraid that she'd come with the first stroke.

He combed his fingers through her pubic hair. The damp curls clung to him, as though trying to hold him there. He used his thumbs to open her. "Your pussy is so wet." He leaned close and inhaled deep. "You smell like honey and musk." The tip of his tongue touched her clit.

She tipped her hips upward. "Touch me."

"How?" He circled her clit, making her squirm. "Do you want me to finger-fuck you? Or maybe you'd like me to suck this sweet nub until you scream."

She licked her lips, which were suddenly dry, and nodded.

His thumbs moved up and down her labia, teasing the sensitive flesh. "Maybe you'd like me to do something different." He stroked his fingers over her, letting her cream cover them. Her hips jerked upward and he let his thumb slip inside her sheath. It wasn't as long as his finger, more of a tease than anything. His middle finger stroked the crease of her bottom, rimming the puckered opening of her ass.

She froze.

"No man has ever touched you here, has he?" Tienan removed his thumb from inside her but continued to stroke her back entrance.

She shook her head.

Smiling, he lowered his mouth again, sucking her clit between his lips and teasing it with his tongue. Silence was breathless. Then he pushed his finger past the tight muscles of her ass until the tip was inside. It felt slightly uncomfortable but not painful. He pushed a little deeper as he continued to suck her clit.

Having him touch her like that felt wicked and sensual and left her wanting more. Her pussy clutched on air, wanting his cock filling her.

"I'll fuck your ass someday." His finger went all the way. "Damn, you're tight. We'll get you used to this first." He kissed the inside of her thigh and slid two fingers into her core. She felt full, but it still wasn't enough.

Whimpering, she bucked her hips, needing him deeper than his fingers could go. She was balanced on the edge, needing something to push her over. Always in tune with her body, Tienan took her clit between his lips and sucked hard.

Silence felt her entire body tense. Then it exploded. Her hips bucked and she slapped her hand over her mouth as she cried out, hoping the noise didn't bring anyone running to check on her. Pleasure washed over her. Tienan didn't let up, extending her orgasm until she couldn't take it anymore.

"Stop," she pleaded.

"Never," he promised as he shoved her legs wide, pressing the head of his cock to her opening. Her pussy spasmed at the thought of having him inside. His shoulders were slick with sweat, every muscles delineated in his shoulders, biceps and chest as he held himself over her. Waiting.

In spite of what he'd said, he was waiting for her okay. Her heart seemed to swell in her chest. If she didn't love him already, she would have fallen head over heels at this moment. "Yes."

The word wasn't even out of her mouth before he slammed home. She cried out as he filled her. Her inner muscles, swollen from her orgasm, clutched him hard. His hips pumped fast and furious, driving him even deeper. With each stroke, he angled her hips so his pelvis rubbed her clit.

She dug her fingers into his biceps, holding on. She was afraid if she shattered, she'd never find all the pieces of herself again. Tienan's head was thrown back, his thick neck corded with muscle as he fucked her. His lips were pressed together, his chest expanding and contracting with each breath he sucked in.

He wrapped his arms around her and rolled. She shrieked as her position changed and she was suddenly on top. He planted his feet on the floor and clasped his hands on her hips as he pushed up. His green eyes were practically glowing as he watched her. "Fuck me."

Bracing her hands on his thick chest, she raised herself up. Inch after inch slipped out until only the head of his cock was inside her. She slammed back down, taking him deep. They both groaned.

"Again," he encouraged.

She liked this new position, liked being in charge. With his hands on her waist to guide her, Silence did it again, finding a rhythm that pleased them both. Heat was building inside her and she knew she was close to coming again. It should have been impossible after the intense climax she'd already had, but there was no stopping it.

It struck like a bolt of lightning. A flash of heat went through her. Her legs trembled and a shiver went down her spine. Tienan tightened his grip and began to fuck her harder and faster. He arched his hips and her legs left the pallet. Only his hold on her kept her from falling.

He called her name and she felt the flood of heat as he came. Boneless, she fell forward. He cradled her against his chest, his massive arms wrapped around her. Tremors shook his body and his heart thundered in his chest. Sighing, she closed her eyes and snuggled close.

She was just drifting off when he whispered in her ear. "I love you." She smiled and started to return the words to him but yawned instead. He chuckled, the sound reverberating in his chest. "Sleep." That was the last thing she heard.



## **Chapter Ten**

Three hours later, feeling refreshed from a bout of amazing sex and a nap, Silence was washed and dressed again. Tienan was right behind her as they headed downstairs to the main living area to find Adrian.

She'd awoke with Tienan's big body wrapped around her, his erection nestled in the crease of her ass. He'd cupped her breast as he'd slid his cock into her, rocking them both to another orgasm.

She shook her head. The man was insatiable. And so was she. She grinned, glad he couldn't see her face. Shaking her head at her wayward thoughts, she focused on the task ahead.

They'd talked and had decided they would leave the group. Tienan wanted to work with Adrian and the rebels, but he knew that he wouldn't be able to live under the other man's command. There was room for only one leader here and they both knew it was Adrian.

She felt funny about leaving. Her stomach was in knots. Her home with Adrian was all she'd known since she was twelve.

Tienan rested his hand on her shoulder, stopping her descent. "We don't have to do this. I'll find some other way to work things out if you want to stay here." He didn't say "with Adrian" but it was implied.

She shook her head. The man always seemed to know her thoughts. It was disconcerting to say the least. "No. We have to do this." Silence understood both men very well. They'd come to loggerheads over leadership in no time, no matter their good intentions. It was the way they were made. Neither was meant to follow but to lead.

"I'll take care of you." He stepped down beside her.

"I know." She covered his hand with hers. For better or worse, this was her destiny. She and Tienan belonged together. All they could do was take one day at a time. That's what she'd done her whole life. At least now she'd have Tienan beside her.

"We'll see him often. At least once a week," he promised. They'd already discussed various ways of setting up meetings and dropping information to one another.

"I know." But it wouldn't be the same and they both knew it.

Tienan dropped a quick kiss on her lips and then the lover disappeared before her eyes and he became all Alpha, tough and dangerous. "Let's go."

When they got to the bottom of the stairs, she scanned the cavernous room. The group was fairly large, about a hundred. There would be another fifty or more on patrol and another group sleeping. They did everything in shifts. For such a substantial group, they were quiet. Everyone went about their business, talking in low tones. Even though there were sentries posted outside, no one wanted to do anything to draw any unwanted attention their way.

She finally spotted Adrian off to the far left talking to Nadine, the woman who was in charge of their food detail. "Over there." She glanced at Tienan as she spoke, but he was already watching Adrian. When she turned back, Adrian was staring at them. He finished his conversation with Nadine and headed their way.

Several feet behind Adrian, she caught a glimpse of Sandor, a fellow tracker, as he left the building. She usually avoided him. He was good at what he did, but the way he watched her made her uncomfortable. He'd chased her for a few months, making it more than plain he wanted a sexual relationship with her. He was handsome enough with his mahogany brown hair and gray eyes, but the spark just hadn't been there. Plus, she hadn't been able to shake the feeling that he'd wanted her not simply for sex, but because it would bring him closer to Adrian, and the power he wielded.

"What is it?" Tienan leaned close, his mouth touching her ear.

"Nothing." No way was she telling him about Sandor. He'd accepted her rejection with good grace and had soon gone on to another woman. That had been six months ago. It was the past and she intended to leave it there.

Adrian strode toward them, purpose in every step. His gaze flicked from her to Tienan and the corners of his mouth turned up slightly. Silence frowned. "You're leaving." He spoke to Tienan.

"Yes. Silence is coming with me." There was a hard note in his voice, as though he was daring Adrian to object.

"I expected that."

Silence's frown deepened. "How could you know? I didn't even know myself until a few hours ago."

Adrian cupped her face in his hand. "I witnessed him saving your life. If I looked at a woman the way he looked at you, there is nothing in this world that would keep me from her."

Heat climbed up her cheeks and she glanced at Tienan. As usual, his features gave away nothing. But his eyes were a different matter. His green eyes blazed with a sensual promise that heated her skin and other more intimate areas.

Adrian cleared his throat. "What's your plan?"

She half listened to the men as they talked. She'd been over the plan with Tienan. Her gaze drifted over the group. They were a loyal and hardworking bunch of people but she wasn't really close to anyone. How much of that was her fault? All of them came from hard pasts. It was part of what joined them together.

Still, she'd miss many of them. Nadine, who always managed to make their meals tasty even when she had little or nothing to work with. Derrick, with his quiet, watchful ways. And especially Mouse. He might only be a teenager, but he was an old soul. He'd seen too much death and destruction in his short life. They all had.

As though she conjured him with her thoughts, Mouse came running in through the door, glancing frantically around. He caught sight of her and Adrian and started toward them.

"Adrian." The tone of her voice made him stop and turn her way. She jerked her head toward Mouse, who was almost upon them.

"They're coming," he gasped. The teenager gripped his hands together, glancing over his shoulder as though he expected a squadron of security police to burst in at any second.

"Who?" Adrian gave a shrill whistle and the place went silent. Men and women rolled out of sleeping pallets. Others began to break down their camp and gather their belongings. Derrick spoke to several men and began to head their way.

Mouse caught his breath. "I was returning from scouting and I saw Sandor leave." Mouse chewed on his bottom lip. Silence could tell he was weighing his words, wondering how much he should say.

"Keep going." The edge of command in Adrian's voice made the boy jump.

He swallowed hard. "Something about the way he was acting made me follow him. He kept looking over his shoulder instead of watching where he was going. So I followed him." The last was said defiantly.

"Good man," Adrian praised.

Mouse straightened his shoulders. "He met with a man and he was wearing a security police uniform. He was a captain. I recognized him. We've had several close calls with him the past few months."

"Did you hear what they said?"

Silence held her breath and felt Tienan's arm wrap around her waist. She leaned into his strength.

"The captain was really mad that they hadn't caught the stranger." He glanced at Tienan and then pulled his gaze back to Adrian. "Sandor told him it was his own fault.

He'd given him the location. They'd let the Alpha slip away." He paused. "At least that's what I thought they said. I'm not sure what they meant by that."

"I am." Adrian's voice was grim. He stood with his hands on his hips, legs braced apart, muscles tense. They'd been betrayed by one of their own.

Tienan's hand tightened around her waist. He now knew who was responsible for his near-brush with the security police. He had a name but not a face to put on the man who had brought such pain to both of them. He didn't say a word but she could almost hear his thoughts. Sandor was a dead man. He just didn't know it yet.

"He told him where we were. Sandor, that is. The captain wouldn't know where we were unless someone told him." Mouse was talking so fast he was starting to hyperventilate.

"Take it easy, Mouse." Adrian put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Sandor gave the captain our location?"

"Yes."

Derrick was standing beside Adrian, awaiting orders. From the look on his face, he wanted to kill Sandor too. So did Adrian. It was simply a matter of which of the three men found him first. Silence was betting on Tienan. He didn't have the same restrictions as the other men did, wasn't responsible for anyone but himself. She didn't count as a responsibility, at least not in her mind. She could take care of herself.

"We need to move and not to any of our known locations. We have to assume they've all been compromised."

"Where do we go?" Derrick asked. "You can't hide a group this large just anywhere."

"To the southeast of the river is a group of warehouses," Tienan offered.

"They're not safe," Derrick snapped.

"No, they're not," Tienan replied evenly. "Except for the second to last one on the end. It looks as bad as the rest but the roof and walls are sound. There are some leaks in the roof, but it will work as a temporary shelter until you can scout some new ones."

Adrian nodded. "Do it." Derrick glanced at Tienan but said nothing, nodding at his leader. He headed toward the group, who were mostly assembled and ready to move. He turned to Mouse. "Can you find the groups on patrol and tell them where we're going?"

Mouse nodded. "I know where at least two of them were headed and I'll find the others."

"Be careful and don't get caught."

For the first time since he entered the building, Mouse grinned. At that moment, he looked like the teenager he was. "I won't." He scampered off, full of purpose.

"Why?"

She glanced up at Tienan. He had a thoughtful look on his face.

"Why would Sandor betray us?" Adrian shrugged. "Who knows. The promise of power? Money? Revenge?"

"It's me." She couldn't keep silent any longer. "I think it's my fault. It's why he found Tienan and now betrayed this group." She swallowed the lump in her throat. So many people could have been killed because of her.

"Why do you think it's your fault?" Adrian's voice was gentle. "There is nothing you can say that will convince me you betrayed any of us. Your loyalty is unquestionable."

She knew he was responding to what she'd heard earlier today, making a point. She appreciated it, but it didn't negate the truth. "It is my fault," she insisted. "Sandor pursued me for several months." Silence wrapped her arms around herself, trying to keep from shivering. "He wanted sex. But mostly I think he wanted to get closer to

Adrian and the way to do that was through me. He was probably following me when I went out alone, which is how he discovered Tienan."

Tienan said nothing, but she felt the blast of emotion emanating from him as solidly as though he'd bellowed in anger. Heat poured off him in waves as he leaned down and captured her face in his hands. "Did he force you?"

She tried to shake her head but it was impossible with Tienan holding her so tight. "No. I just spent several months being very careful never to be alone with him."

"I'll kill the bastard," Adrian spat.

"He's mine." Those two words sent a shiver down her spine. There was a wealth of promise in them. This was not a man anyone wanted as an enemy. Tienan would be ruthless and brutally efficient.

"You have a week."

Both men stared at one another and Tienan nodded. "Fair enough."

"I'm sorry," she offered. "This is all my fault." There were no words to convey how heartsick she was over this betrayal.

Tienan bent down and placed a kiss on her forehead. "No, it's not," he countered. "You're not responsible for the actions of someone else." A deep-seated anger flowed through his veins. He used it. Channeling it to make his senses sharper, his mind faster. He needed a safe place for Silence. She was coming with him. He wouldn't trust her safety to anyone else.

Derrick came jogging over, a large duffle bag gripped in one hand and Tienan's satchel in the other. He dropped them beside her. Both bags landed with a thump, raising a cloud of dust. "These are your belongings." He turned to Adrian. "Your things are packed and waiting by the door." With that, he was gone again.

People had already left in small groups of about ten or twelve, many carrying boxes or pushing small carts filled with supplies. Tienan knew they'd all take different routes to their new location. It was easier to avoid detection that way. It's what he would have

done in Adrian's place. The group moved so easily and efficiently, Tienan knew this wasn't the first time they'd had to evacuate a location quickly. Everyone knew what to do and what they were responsible for.

Adrian tugged her away from Tienan's side and gave her a hug. "It's not your fault. You have to go. Now. It's only a matter of time before a huge security force is mounted to destroy this place."

Although he knew Silence thought of Adrian as a brother, he didn't like seeing the other man holding her. Irrational, to be sure, but the emotion was there. He resisted the urge to tear her out of the other man's arms. Barely. Thankfully, it was over quick.

"I'll contact you in a few days," Tienan promised.

"Take care of her. Anything happens to her and I'll kill you."

Tienan expected nothing less. "If anything happens to Silence, you won't have to worry about it." The implication was that he'd be dead too. That was the only way he'd let any harm come to her.

Adrian nodded, turned swiftly and strode away. He didn't even slow down as he scooped up a large knapsack and slung it over his shoulder. Then he was gone. He didn't look back.

Silence was stiff and still beside him. "We need to go." He grabbed both their bags, wrapped an arm around her waist and urged her toward a side door he'd seen when he'd first arrived.

She went easily, naturally quiet and careful with her steps as they left the warehouse behind them. Tienan was worried about her. She'd had so much thrown at her in the past week, from her original kidnapping to almost dying to finding out a scorned man had betrayed all of them.

He kept an eye on her as they traveled through the streets and back alleys. They hid and watched as five security patrols went by, obviously all headed toward the warehouse they'd just come from.



Silence gave a small gasp when one group passed. Tienan scanned all the faces, recognizing one. The slender man in his early twenties who he'd seen coming and going at odd times when he'd been watching the resistance camp for a sign of Silence. From her reaction, Tienan knew this had to be the betrayer—Sandor. Tienan committed the man's face to memory.

Perhaps the General would do them the favor of killing Sandor himself. He didn't tolerate failure and this would be one of massive proportions. Most likely, he'd send Sandor back to infiltrate the resistance camp again. As far as they knew, no one knew about Sandor's betrayal. They had Mouse to thank for that.

Night had fallen by the time they reached a two-story brick building. Tienan scouted the perimeter security he'd set to reassure himself that no one else was in the building, nor had anyone been near it since he was last here.

He retrieved a ladder he'd hidden, hoisting it into place. It wasn't stairs, but the next best thing. "Up you go."

Silence stared at the ladder, seemed to gather herself and put one foot on the bottom rung. She clasped the sides and started up. One rung at a time, she climbed with him close behind her. When they'd reached the top, he pulled the ladder up behind them, setting it aside.

"You've been here before." It wasn't a question but he answered her. It was the first time she'd spoken in hours.

"Yes. I've got places like this all over the outer city. When the heat dies down, I'll show you all of them." He dumped their packs on the floor beside a rickety table and went to pull out a box of supplies. There were blankets, water, candles and food enough for at least two days.

"You're very prepared." It was almost an accusation. Silence stood beside the table, arms folded over her chest, chin tucked down. She'd closed herself off from him. He wasn't having it.

He lit the candle, mostly for her. He could see easily but knew she couldn't. He unrolled the blankets and set out the food and water. "Are you hungry?"

She shook her head, still staring at her feet.

"I am."

Her head popped up and she looked at him, mouth wide open.

Tienan walked toward her, sliding off his battered leather jacket and tossing it over the end of the table. His shirt followed. Her eyes widened, her pupils dilating as she stared at his bare chest. She licked her lips and his cock jumped to attention. One look from her, one whiff of her sweet scent and he was painfully aroused. He knew it would always be like this for as long as he lived. Silence had been made for him.

"Come here, woman." He pulled her into his arms, unable to tolerate the separation any longer. "Are you sorry?" Tienan couldn't bear the thought that she regretted loving him, being with him.

Her arms wrapped around his neck, gripping him tight. "Never." Her voice was filled with fierce longing. But more than that, it was filled with love.

"Then nothing else matters." He captured her mouth with his. Her lips parted eagerly, her tongue twining with his.

Desire exploded. He didn't remember moving them to the pallet or removing their clothing but they must have done so. Next thing he knew they were both naked and he was buried balls-deep in her silken sheath. Her pussy squeezed his cock tighter with each thrust.

"More," she gasped. "Harder."

He gave her everything she wanted and more, pounding into her until she cried out. He covered her mouth with his, capturing her cry of completion. It took two more thrusts to find his own. Hot semen flooded her slick channel as his cock jerked within her.

Tienan wrapped his arms around her waist and rolled onto his back, being careful not to dislodge himself from her heat. He wanted to stay connected to her as long as possible.

“Love you,” she whispered. Her fingers made damp circles on his chest just over his heart, which now belonged to her.

“Love you too,” he whispered. He knew she’d heard him because she gave a sigh of pleasure, snuggled closer and drifted off to sleep.

He held her like that for several hours. Finally, he knew he had to move. Sliding her to the pallet, he waited as she snuffled and rooted around before finally finding a spot she liked. Minutes later, when he was certain she was asleep, he stood, making sure the blankets were tucked around her before he dressed.

Blowing out the candle, he gathered his weapons and went to the far end of the room. There was a hole where another set of stairs used to exist. Tienan crouched and pushed off on the balls of his feet, grabbing beams and exposed brick as he climbed down. His feet hit the floor without a sound. It was time to go hunting.

It was the cold that woke Silence and told her she was alone in her bed. Tienan always kept her nice and toasty. She lay there listening to the moan of the wind as it blew through the cracks and holes in the building. It was dark, but she wasn’t afraid. Tienan wouldn’t have left her here if she wasn’t safe.

She knew where he’d gone. Silence didn’t want to think about it too deeply. Sandor deserved to die for betraying his people. He’d given them all up to the security police. There was no reason that could justify that.

Still, she didn’t want to think about what Tienan would do to him before he killed him. Tienan would interrogate the traitor, finding out how deep his betrayal went.

Shivering even more, she huddled beneath the blankets. She was hungry, but she didn’t have the energy to get up, light the candle and eat. She stayed awake for hours, staring into the darkness, finally falling asleep just before dawn.

When she woke again, she was toasty warm. Tienan's big body was curled around hers and his strong arms held her against his chest. This was home. This was safety. This was love.

She turned in his arms until she was facing him and opened her eyes, tilting her head up so she could see his face. He was wide-awake, watching her out of bottomless green eyes.

"You went out last night."

"You don't need to worry about Sandor anymore."

She knew then that the traitor was dead, knew Tienan would tell her no more. "Adrian needs to know."

"Already done."

That meant that Tienan had found out something, some pertinent information that he'd felt Adrian needed to know immediately. Or maybe he just wanted to assure Adrian that the security breach had been taken care of. Either way, it was done. "Is he and the rest of the group safe?"

Tienan nodded.

She rested her cheek on his chest, absorbing as much of his heat as she could. A part of her felt sorry for Sandor. His death wouldn't have been an easy one. Tienan the warrior was very different from Tienan the lover but she loved all of him. Both aspects made him the man he was.

He caught her chin between his thumb and forefinger applying enough pressure to make her lift it until she could see him. Slowly, he lowered his mouth to hers. Her entire body clenched in anticipation.

He hesitated just before their lips touched. "You're mine." The low, raspy tone sent goose bumps down her arms. Her nipples puckered into tight nubs. "I'll do whatever it takes to protect you."

Knowing he needed the words as much as she did, she responded in kind. "And you're mine. I'll do whatever it takes to protect you."

He smiled then. A full smile with nothing held back. It was breathtaking. Then he kissed her.

They needed to talk. But that would come later.

Much later.

## About the Author

N.J. Walters worked at a bookstore for several years and one day had the idea that she would like to quit her job, sell everything she owned, leave her hometown and write romance novels in a place where no one knew her. And she did. Two years later, she went back to the same bookstore and settled in for another seven years.

Although she was still fairly young, that was when the mid-life crisis set in. Happily married to the love of her life, with his encouragement (more like, "For God's sake, quit the job and just write!") she gave notice at her job on a Friday morning. On Sunday afternoon, she received a tentative acceptance for her first erotic romance novel, *Annabelle Lee*, and life would never be the same.

N.J. has always been a voracious reader of romance novels, and now she spends her days writing novels of her own. Vampires, dragons, time-travelers, seductive handymen and next-door neighbors with smoldering good looks all vie for her attention. And she doesn't mind a bit. It's a tough life, but someone's got to live it.

N.J. welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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