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Misled

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MISLED

Sylvia Day

Dedication

This story is dedicated to two fabulous women—Tawny Taylor and Jordan Summers. Tawny for holding the "Some Like it Hot" contest where it became a finalist, and Jordan for reading the contest entry, getting in touch with me and becoming a dear friend. Both women gave me a much-needed dose of confidence at the start of my career. Thank you both.

Prologue

Sable Taylor was going to jail for sure this time.

And Derek watched the events leading up to her arrest with a slight smile.

Leaning back, he rested a broad shoulder against the wall and crossed his arms. Sable was no more than a blur to the humans who milled around Windemere Court's Palladian-style City Hall, but his vampire sight caught her movements without any trouble at all. The bounty hunter raced along the white stone walls, her lithe body moving with little strain as she chased the murderer they were both pursuing.

He could help her, he supposed, but Sable wouldn't appreciate it. Despite his job as a Special Task Force agent, he was the enemy to her, direct competition in the capture of wanted criminals. He did it for justice, she did it for money, but he didn't think less of her. She'd earned his respect, in addition to more carnal interest. An interest she returned, but refuted at every opportunity.

When they'd first met he'd been a rookie and he'd learned a lot by watching her in action. He'd see her in a flash, a brief moment of sharp recognition, before one of them, usually him, made off with their quarry. Every time he saw her she was more beautiful than he remembered. Sable honed her body with hard training and a diet of blood. Her hair was jet black, deeper in color than his own raven locks and completely straight, a long curtain of silk. Her skin was as pale as starlight and just as luminous. And her eyes – he dreamed about her eyes. They were a rich blue so startling the sight of them always caught him off guard.

He'd lusted after her since the moment he'd first seen her. He had smelled her lush scent and heard the barely there beat of her heart, and he'd known she was one of his kind. The last two years of watching Sable work – admiring her skill, her daring and her bravery – had only made him want her more. Their work, by nature, was a lonely

existence. Always in pursuit, hunters never stayed in any one place long enough to become attached to anything. Or anyone. She knew what his life was like, because she lived one similar to it. That commonality gave their inevitable pairing a common thread he looked forward to exploring.

But first they had to get through this capture.

They were hunting Jared Ione, one of their kind who'd crossed the line between drinking to live and drinking to kill. Jared was a vampire in his physical prime but he was barely staying ahead of Sable, whose physical stamina made Derek's jaw ache and his fangs descend. Imagining all that energy in his bed was enough to make his cock hard. Just once he'd like a lover that gave as good as she got – an equal, his match.

He expected it would take another minute at most before the authorities in City Hall put an end to the chase. Windemere had a law against vamps using their superhuman abilities in public buildings. It was considered too dangerous to the humans to be in the path of vampires running at full speed. A straight-on collision was often deadly. But Sable was known for ignoring any laws that got in her way. With her uncommon beauty and blatant, innate sex appeal, she could usually talk her way out of any scrape. But this time, Derek was going to step in and apprehend her before she had the chance to do any sweet-talking. He was tired of waiting for her to come around to his way of thinking, which included a couple of weeks and his four-poster bed. Two years, damn it. He'd spent two years lusting for her.

Today he was going to get what he wanted.

As he'd predicted, two Windemere officers stepped into view and one of them took aim with a net gun. The built-in tracking device locked onto the racing vamps and the officer fired, encasing the two straining bodies in a single net. With a stunning crash they fell to the floor, both of them growling in near-deafening frustration. Startled humans scattered with piercing screams. Derek pushed off the wall and strolled to the rescue, flashing his badge with a smile.

"Hello, officers," he greeted.

"Damn you, Atkinson!" Sable yelled, fighting futilely against both the entrapment and the vamp locked with her. With a low snarl, she reached for her blaster and neutralized Ione.

It took a few minutes to untangle her, then another minute more to cuff the unconscious vamp and hand him over to the waiting officers.

"He's my catch!" Sable complained, setting her hands on shapely hips and glaring at him. Dressed in a black sleeveless bio-suit, every ripe curve was displayed to his view.

Derek licked his fangs which had descended, as they did whenever a vamp was hunting...or lusting. It was part of the mutation brought on by the virus. *Damn, she was hot*. Long legs and curvy in all the right places, with full breasts and a lot of attitude. He really liked the attitude. She was one hundred percent pure alpha female. "Turn around."

"What?" She stood her ground.

"I've got to cuff you."

"What?"

He stepped closer and breathed her in, his body instantly waking to full arousal. It took everything he had to fight off a hard-on. Her scent called to him on the cellular level, stirring his blood and then sending it straight to his cock.

"What the hell are you doing, Atkinson?"

He reached around her waist and set the cuffs against her wrists. They measured the circumference automatically and secured with a soft click. "Saving you from a month in jail."

With her breasts pressing into his chest, Derek didn't want to move. But he had to get her out of Windemere before the authorities changed their minds and decided to keep her. Since he had no intention of letting her out of his grasp, that wouldn't be

good. For a variety of reasons, he didn't need to attract trouble from headquarters. But he'd do it for Sable.

He wanted her bad enough.

Derek set his hand on the curve of her ass and prodded her down the main hallway, then off to the transport bays. They weaved through the fluted columns, skirting the crowd that had gathered to watch the arrest.

"They can't see us now," she said in a furious whisper. "Let me go!"

He laughed. "That's all the gratitude I get for saving that sweet ass of yours?" He gave a firm squeeze and then pushed her up the ramp of his waiting Starwing, following directly behind.

His gaze dropped to her seductively swaying hips and he was lost. Totally and completely consumed by lust. He hit the lock and the ramp lifted behind him. The sudden vacuum of the ship amplified her appeal. Finally, they were enclosed together, tucked away from the rest of the universe. Free to catch their breath and get to know one another. In every way possible.

Two damn years. He should have lost interest, but he liked her too much. She was unique. In all of his centuries, he'd never met a woman like her.

Sable's eyes narrowed as he unzipped his bio-suit. Her fangs descended as she hissed at him. "I'm grateful, but I'm not *that* grateful. You just cost me one hundred and fifty thousand credits, that's payment enough."

Her frame was stiff, her glare unwelcoming but the scent of her arousal permeated the air. Sweet and ripe like cherries, it was intoxicating. The hard-on he'd avoided before swelled with a vengeance, his cock hardening instantly and painfully.

"If you'd shown a little patience, Ione would have left City Hall eventually."

"I can't afford to have patience, Atkinson, when you're hunting the same bounty as I am."

Derek let his suit drop past his hips to pool on the deck. He watched with satisfaction as her eyes darkened at the sight of his rampant erection.

"Stay away," she said in a choked voice.

"Come on now, baby. Be honest. Staying away is the last thing you want me to do."

Sable backed away warily. "You may be thinking about your dick, but I'm thinking about my accounts. And right now they're in need of a credit infusion." She tried to race past him to the cargo bay door, but he'd anticipated the move and easily blocked her exit.

"Since you took Ione right out from under me, I need to capture Castle," she snapped. "He's worth almost as much. I don't have time for this if I want to pay my bills."

Derek reached out and slowly lowered the zipper of her suit, giving her the opportunity to wrench away, if that's what she truly wanted. He growled his approval when she didn't move and then shuddered as the lush valley of her cleavage was revealed to him.

"We'll get our man, baby," he assured her in a voice made husky with desire. "I have it on good authority that Castle will be at Deep Space 12 in two days. We'll catch him then. In the meantime, we have some time to spend together."

His fingertip drifted across the soft swell of her breast. "I know you feel it, too," he breathed, "this need between us. We've got two days, we're going in the same direction, why shouldn't we have a little R&R and burn this thing out. I don't know about you, but it's starting to affect my job. I can't think about work when I'm thinking about you."

"My ship –"

"I'm towing it," he said quickly, jumping on that telltale bit of capitulation.

"You planned this!" she accused.

"Now how could I know you'd break the law in Windemere?" he pointed out innocently. "Don't blame me for taking advantage of an opportunity you presented me with."

As he studied the creamy beauty of her exposed skin, his voice lowered further. "Can I help it if watching you work makes me hot?"

She swallowed hard, her blue eyes wide. "It does?"

"Hell, yes. All that power and stamina. You think fast and act faster. It turns me on."

"I've known men who are threatened by my work."

"You've known idiots."

He stepped closer, suppressing a smile as she continued to hold her ground. Sable was staying put because she wanted to, not because he was making her. He'd tried in the past to use his sensual call on her, a vampire survival mechanism that helped them subdue prey so they could feed. He was much older than she was and therefore more powerful, but she was always able to throw off his calling with ease. He didn't mind, it meant she was seduced by *him* and not the vampire within him.

He, in turn, was seduced by everything about her.

Sable was too much of novice in the ways of vampires to know how to use her calling, but she had it just the same. Swirling around her like a thick fog, she radiated sex and desire. As he stepped closer, he was pulled into her sensual spell, pulled into her until he could think of nothing else. Wanted nothing else.

His hands reached out and tangled in the long silk of her hair. Clenching his fists, Derek pulled her head back, exposing the ivory column of her throat. He could hear her blood flowing and could see it pulsing the large vein under the nearly translucent skin. He leaned over her and stroked it with his tongue in a slow, deliberate back-and-forth glide. Sable moaned softly, her pose almost one of supplication, if not for the predator's fangs that betrayed her true nature.

It was her very nature that most appealed to him and in celebration of that, his mouth moved upward over her jaw. He licked her lips and then her fangs, growling when her tongue reached out and brushed against his.

With a quick tap on the cuffs they released and fell to the deck. He reached between the open flaps of her suit, slipping his hands over her shoulders and pushing the biosuit down her arms. The touch of her skin burned his palms and he knew she would scorch him alive when he fucked her. The mere thought of it made sweat mist upon his skin.

"Tell me to stop now," he groaned. "If that's what you want."

She bit her lower lip, her fangs causing tiny droplets of crimson to appear. The scent of her blood drove him to madness. The rest of her suit came off in shreds as his mouth lowered to hers.

Consumed by his frenzy, Sable gripped his shoulders and returned his kiss with equal passion. Her nipples, hard and peaked tight, stabbed into his chest. He pulled her closer until she spread her legs and rubbed the slick heat of her sex along the length of his cock. The warmth of her body, the sultry scent of her arousal, the sweetness of her blood, all combined to make restraint impossible. But he didn't need restraint. This was Sable, a vampire with the heart of a warrior and a body to back it up. He didn't have to coddle her. She wouldn't let him even if he wanted to.

"Touch me," she said into his mouth, and Derek realized he stood frozen and achingly aroused. Sable undulated against him, her thighs a firm cradle for his erection. He was covered in her cream and about to come from the sheer wonder of her cunt stroking back and forth across his cock.

Almost afraid to touch her and lose control, he placed his hands at her waist, his fingers gliding over her soft skin. Her tongue was fucking his mouth in the most erotic dance and Derek shuddered, loving how she took what she needed without hesitation. This wasn't just for him or just for her. They were in the moment together, something he'd anticipated but still found wonderfully unexpected.

Sable placed her hands over his and directed them to her breasts, pressing the hard, tight tips deep into his palms.

"Sable..." He groaned, his eyes closing as he kneaded the breasts he'd dreamed of for years, awed by how full they were despite how lean she was. Bending over, he lowered his head and took her in his mouth.

She gasped and arched into him. "Suck harder."

Derek trapped a ripe nipple against the roof of his mouth and suckled her, his cheeks hollowing on every drawing pull. Sable begin to quiver and then progressed to outright shaking until her legs gave way and he held her suspended in his arms, arched over his forearms, his mouth working her toward orgasm.

"Don't..." she gasped.

He lifted his head. "Don't what?"

"Don't make me come like this." Arching her hips, she ground her pussy into the root of his shaft, her short nails digging into his biceps. "Give me your cock."

Tightening his grip on her torso, Derek leapt, pinning her against the bulkhead, their feet dangling as he plunged into her creamy pussy and sank his fangs deep into her throat.

"Derek!" she screamed in surprised pleasure and pain, bucking against him in a way that made rational thought impossible.

Her tight cunt clung to his aching shaft, warm and welcoming. Her legs encircled his hips, pulling him inside with the physical strength he so admired. She melted around him, his cock clenched in a slick fist and bathed in the juices of her arousal. And she tasted liked heaven.

Sable had never called him by his first name before and somehow the simple familiarity touched him in a way he hadn't experienced in centuries. Raw, carnal need burned through his veins as her blood gushed down his throat, settling heavy and insistent between his legs. He slid out of her, his cock drenched with her cream, and she

whimpered, a soft sound of protest that urged him to fuck her with slow, deep plunges. Her moan reverberated through the metal confines of his ship.

Derek gripped her thigh, opening her so he could fuck her pussy with steady, rhythmic pumps of his cock. *Damn you*, he thought, awash in pleasure he knew would be addicting. The feel of her cunt as he circled his hips and screwed deep into her was dizzying. He felt drunk on her, intoxicated by her taste and scent.

Her left cheek rested against the cool bulkhead, giving him access to her lovely throat and the elixir that flowed in the veins just beneath the surface. Her eyes were closed, her mouth parted. "Derek," she said softly, her voice slurred. "You feel so good..."

He was glad they had two days, because it would take at least that long before he had his fill.

He tore his mouth from her throat with a curse. "I need to fuck you. Hard."

"Yes."

His jaw clenched tight, Derek abandoned his leisurely pace and fucked her like the animal he was, pounding into her tight, hot pussy with such force he shoved Sable up the bulkhead and onto the ceiling. The sensations were too much, coming on too fast – her full breasts pressed to his chest, her cunt milking his cock rhythmically, her breath gusting across his ear as she moaned his name in a primal chant of mindless pleasure.

"Take me," he growled, offering his throat to her. His eyes slid shut as her fangs pierced his skin, flooding him with heat and burning desire. He was going to come, he couldn't hold it back. His balls drew up tight, heavy with the semen he was about to empty inside her.

He reached out with his calling, establishing a mental connection. Normally he kept his thoughts to himself when his orgasm was upon him. He considered it a personal moment, not something he shared beyond his outward appearance of pleasure. Sometimes he eavesdropped on his partner's thoughts, just to make certain he was pleasuring her as much as possible, but his release was his own.

But this joining was different. He was so profoundly satiated by the act of fucking Sable that he felt almost...*grateful*. And he hated that he was so aroused, his balls rock-hard, his swollen cock aching, that he wasn't going to sate her in return.

In seven centuries, he'd never finished before his partner. Never. So he decided to share his pleasure with her, hoping she would find some satisfaction simply from giving so much of it to him. He also wanted to know her, to see into her thoughts and ascertain the pureness of her motives, because suddenly he didn't want to be just another fuck to her.

She was writhing over him, pinned between him and the ceiling, purring like a wildcat as she fed. He gripped her thighs and spread them wide, pumping his cock deep inside her.

The lushness of her body completely overwhelmed him. Sex wasn't meant to be like this, making a man mindless with need and out of control. This was deadly, ensnaring. He'd never get free.

Her silken pussy gripped his shaft in decadent ripples and he came, howling in rapture so intense it was painful. Derek poured the excess of sensation into her mind, showing her the dazzling blindness of his orgasm until Sable stiffened against him and burst into her own release, an orgasm so powerful, she gripped his cock like a vise, holding him inside her as if she never wanted to let him go.

He didn't want to let her go either.

He had two days to convince her to give him a chance. After two years of waiting Derek didn't hold out much hope, but he'd try his best. Thankfully his best was pretty damn good.

Firm in his intent, he lowered them to the floor and carried Sable to his bed.

Chapter One

Sable had found her prey. She could smell the fear pouring from him in misty waves, even over the odors of stale beer and cigarettes.

He knew she was hunting him.

Her mouth curved in smile so feral the men who watched her with lusty eyes looked away, their interest doused instantly. Stepping further into the dimly lit bar in the Deep Space 12 concourse, her hand dipped automatically to the lasersword held in the holster on her thigh. It was illegal to use weapons in the concourse, it was illegal even to carry a weapon but she had docked in the waste removal bay, affording her the opportunity to slip past security.

Scowling, she sniffed the air to check on her fugitive, Butch Castle, but also to search for another scent—one so masculine and virile it drove her to madness. In fact she could still smell it on her skin and it was keeping her hot and horny, distracting her when she needed to be the most focused. She forced herself to concentrate, tuning out the background music in the small bar and the paging of flight information echoing in the terminal behind her. Her focus narrowed, a huntress closing in for the kill.

Her shoulders relaxed when she confirmed she was the only vampire in the room. Still, Sable knew she didn't have long before Derek caught up with her. The handcuffs she'd used to shackle him to the bed would hold, but the bedposts wouldn't. She'd be damned if she'd let him steal another fugitive from her, even if he was the best fuck she'd had in over a century.

She stepped further into the bar...

"You know," purred a deep velvety voice behind her. "A guy could take it personally when his woman fucks him senseless and then leaves without a kiss goodbye."

Heat pooled instantly at the top of her spine and spiraled downward. Shocked, Sable spun around. "What the hell?"

Derek Atkinson stood barely an inch away, his strong hands gripping his narrow hips as he eyed her with his silver stare—a stare still molten with desire for her. "I wasn't done with you yet. I was just taking a power nap before we started again."

A shiver went through her body at his words. His raking glance stripped her of her clothing and left her naked to his view. *He'd wanted more of her? After two days straight of mind-blowing sex?* The man was an animal.

Her nostrils flared. Standing this close to him she could finally smell his delicious scent buried under the overwhelming smell of herself. No wonder she hadn't detected him sooner.

His eyes danced with devilish amusement. "I thought I was in pretty good shape, but I guess not if I'm falling asleep and you still have the energy to get up and chase my fugitive."

That arrogant comment penetrated her astonishment. "He's not your fugitive!"

He cupped her cheek with a warm hand. Instantly her skin grew hot, her pussy wet, her nipples hard. Even after two days straight of Derek's addicting carnal attentions she was still ready fuck him again. Immediately. Her fangs slid downward in anticipation.

"Sable, sweet." He smiled, his sensual lips curling upward to reveal pearly white fangs even longer and more deadly than her own.

Her mouth dried instantly.

His voice lowered and she knew he smelled her arousal. "You're a talented hunter, baby, no doubt about that. But your operation is small and you're often ill-equipped. If you just let me - "

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Butch Castle edging toward the exit to the main concourse. Faster than the human eye could see her, she leapt over the tables

between her and her prey. She tucked the man, easily twice her body weight, under her arm and left Derek without looking back. She heard him shout after her as she crawled along the wall to the traffic-free ceiling and ran to her ship. And then she couldn't hear anything with Butch screaming in terror as they flew through the concourse upside down, his human eyes unable to see more than a blur.

Sable could sense Derek swiftly gaining ground and cursed under her breath. She was no match for him physically, as he'd proven on several occasions in the past, and she was weighted down with the screaming human. She saw her turn coming up but maintained her lightning speed, feinting to the left at the last possible moment. Derek blazed past them. The ruse bought her only a few seconds but it was long enough for her to enter her transport and shut the cargo bay. Just as the portal locked with a hiss of air, she felt a thud as Derek slammed into the door. He'd probably dented the damn thing.

Sable shoved Butch Castle into the brig. "Take a shower," she ordered. "Wash the stench of fear off you. I'm hungry, so after we take off I'll be back to feed." She saw his eyes widen in dismay and smiled. "Don't worry, you'll enjoy it. Humans always do."

Moving to the deck, she sat in her captain's chair and secured the five-point harness. Then she activated the exterior communication link. "Move away, Derek. I'm about to take off."

"Damn it, Sable," he growled. "You bitch! Didn't the last two days mean anything to you?"

She swallowed hard. Mean *anything*? They'd meant *everything*.

What an idiot she'd been to give in to her longing to have him. *Burn this thing out,* he'd said, and she'd leapt at the excuse to have him even though she'd known deep inside that it would only get worse.

Glancing up, she saw him standing in the loading bay, one hand plunging through his thick raven hair in frustration. He was undeniably gorgeous. Tall, broad-shouldered and thickly muscled, he took up her entire view screen from the chest up. Her heart

pounded against her rib cage and her chest grew tight. "Don't play me, Derek," she said in a voice that betrayed her with its hoarseness.

He glanced up sharply and bore his metallic gaze into hers through the video screen. He couldn't see her, but his gaze still searched for answers. "It seems to me that I'm the one being played. Was I just a convenient fuck for you, baby? A couple dozen orgasms and I've outlived my usefulness?"

"Go to hell," she bit out, even as she shivered at the memory. "You were going to do the same to me, I just beat you to the punch. Now back off!"

He backed away a few steps, affording her a clear view of the massive bulge of his cock straining his suit. His handsome face was set in harsh lines, his gaze piercing in his fury. "If you believe that, Sable, after all the time I spent inside you, you don't know anything about me at all."

Sable closed her eyes for a moment, willing away the burning behind her lids that would prevent her from seeing her way out of the narrow docking bay. *If only things could be different*.

"Goodbye, Derek," she said softly as she terminated the audio. When she opened her eyes and looked at the screen he was gone.

And with a skilled tug on the controls, so was she.

* * * * *

Derek sat on the deck of his ship the *Viper* and watched Sable's sleek new model Starwing burst into lightspeed and disappear. The ship suited her perfectly. She liked new toys—the faster and more powerful the better—which was probably why she was so hot for him.

His lips twisted wryly. The last forty-eight hours had been the most pleasurable of his life. Considering how old he was, that was saying something. He'd never experienced anything as powerful as being with Sable; his cock had been painfully hard almost the entire two days.

He waited until it was clear for him to follow, set the navigation for the jump and went to take a shower. As he stepped under the spray of water, the unmistakable scent of hard sex rose from his skin to dissipate in the steam. Derek closed his eyes and rested his forehead against the cool metal of the shower stall. It wasn't hard to picture Sable as she'd been only a few hours ago, imprinting her smell on him in a way that he knew would never leave him. She was the fuck of the century, several centuries actually. He groaned a low tortured sound. It would probably take several more before he burned her out of his blood.

Now that he'd actually had her...well, he wasn't sated yet. Not by half.

Derek sighed as he finished rinsing his hair and then stepped out of the shower, his mind weary and heart heavy simply because Sable was no longer with him. She'd become a complication in a way he should have seen coming.

Entering his cabin, he paused at the sight of his rumpled four-poster. Sable had been astonished and then delighted at the sight of the bed. It was a luxury he indulged in because he spent so much of his time in pursuit. He'd tied her to that bed, draped her over the edge of it, fucked her on the floor beside it, taken her standing against the posts at the foot of it. He knew he would never look at that bed again without thinking of her. And wishing she were in it.

That damned impossible woman. She was going to get herself killed. Sable was too reckless and too impatient to study the rules of the worlds she invaded in search of her prey. Derek had attempted to offer his assistance, but every time he'd brought it up, Sable had silenced him with her body until he was too exhausted to keep trying. Part of him was grateful to put off the conversation, feeling a strange desperation to enjoy what he could, while he could. Then he'd woken up this afternoon and found himself handcuffed to the bedposts, her ship no longer trailing behind his.

Apparently, she didn't know how powerful a Master as old as he was could become. He'd dissipated into mist and followed her easily. She'd looked so astonished

to find him behind her in the concourse bar. Astonished and instantly aroused. Whatever her reasons were for leaving, it wasn't because she didn't want him anymore.

Derek knew she was headed back to the Gamma Sector to turn in Castle and collect her bounty. There were field headquarters in every sector, but she seemed to prefer the one in Gamma, which was his. She'd collect the updated list of fugitives, settle on the one worth the most credits and then immediately take flight again in the hopes of avoiding him when he docked for the same reason.

She was running from him, but he wasn't fool enough to take it personally. He hadn't missed the regret in her voice when she'd said goodbye or the emotion in her gaze the last time they'd made love. Despite her fierceness, Sable was a tender and giving lover and she'd worshiped his body in a way that had to mean something to her. It sure as hell had meant something to him.

But he knew she wouldn't let her personal feelings get in the way of her plans. She was very good at her job. He'd have to be better if he hoped to catch a hunter of her caliber.

So the hunt was on.

And Sable was his prey.

Chapter Two

Impatient, Sable tapped her boot in rapid staccato against the floor. Detained for almost an hour in the captain's office of the Interstellar Council's Special Task Force, her nerves were on edge. The Gamma Sector field office should feel like home considering the amount of time she spent there, but Captain Hoff didn't like vamps. He didn't trust them and he'd lobbied hard to get them removed from the Force. The field office was his bastion and because of his anti-vamp sentiments she didn't like being there.

Groaning with frustration, Sable looked at the framed picture on the desk for the thousandth time since she entered the room. She was sick of looking at the redheaded captain with his pretty brunette wife and two red-haired kids. She'd give him another minute or two to show up and then she was leaving, whether he liked it or not.

Suddenly, she stilled, wondering if Derek had comm'ed ahead and arranged this delay.

As quickly as the thought came to her, Sable wrote it off. She knew how deeply she'd pleasured him—how could she not when he filled her mind with it?—but Derek Atkinson wasn't just known for his skills as an agent. He was also known for his prowess in bed, a singular skill he had no trouble sharing freely. She refused to believe she meant any more to him than the thousands of other women he'd screwed over the last six or seven hundred years.

But, damn, he knew how to fuck well. Sharing his bed had been so good, she couldn't regret it. There was something to be said for a man with several centuries' worth of experience in seducing women.

Okay. Who was she kidding? There was a lot to be said.

She'd always admired Derek's dark good looks and amazing body, but he'd been no more than that, a gorgeous man to drool over. She hadn't known anything more

personal about him than she could gather from gossip and a few lines of text in a thin personnel file. Now she knew him as a man, in every way possible.

Derek was beyond amazing as a lover, sometimes wild and animalistic, other times tender and reverent. His mind, which she knew as intimately as his body, was clever and intelligent. He had a deep sense of honor and a desire to give meaning to his endless life with the worthwhile pursuit of justice. In short, he was all the things she admired in the male half of her species.

Sable wished she could have found something wrong with him, any little thing that would have made him less appealing. But she hadn't and because he was everything she wanted, she'd fallen for him. Hard. When he'd looked into her eyes the last time he slid inside her, she couldn't make it impersonal, couldn't make it just sex. He'd built the mental connection between them and they'd made love. Just the remembrance of it made her ache for him.

But she couldn't have him.

The door opened behind her and she rose. "Captain," she greeted with relief, thankful it wasn't Derek and grateful for the respite from her thoughts.

Hoff's tall, lanky form dominated the doorway. "Have a seat, Special Agent Taylor."

Sable sank back into the chair as the captain took his place on the opposite side of the desk. Behind him was an expansive window with a view of space beyond. "Good work bringing Castle into custody."

"Thank you, sir."

"Were there other agents in pursuit when you caught him?"

"Only Agent Atkinson." Sable's cheeks heated just from saying Derek's name. She hoped the perceptive captain didn't notice.

"You seem to run into Atkinson quite a bit. Do you think he suspects you?"

"No way." She knew that for certain. Derek would never have fucked her if he'd known she worked undercover for Internal Affairs. Instead he'd have looked at her with disgust and considered her a rat for hunting fellow agents. Her chest tightened painfully at the thought. Losing his respect would be too much to bear.

"Have you discovered anything new since last I talked with you?" he asked.

She wrinkled her nose. "You know I can't share IAB information with you, Captain. Not while the investigation is still underway."

Hoff's pale blue eyes narrowed. "When you make your arrest I want to be the first to know. I can't believe one of my agents is selling information to the Federation. You've been undercover for two years now and you haven't turned up anything incriminating. Maybe IAB is wrong about the leak coming from this field office."

Sable kept her face impassive. She knew IAB wasn't wrong. Within the last two days, the informant from this office had sold false information that she'd planted in the database. While she hated to have missed the opportunity to apprehend the traitor, she was relieved to exonerate Derek without a doubt. He'd been in bed with her for the last two days. And the shower. And the dining table. And the...

Damn, best not to think about that.

In any case, he hadn't gone anywhere near the controls of his ship to access the main computers.

"IAB is rarely wrong," she said with confidence. "There's a leak. And I'll find it." She stood.

As she made her way toward the door, the captain called after her. "You're dismissed, Agent Taylor."

She rolled her eyes.

Stepping out into the hallway, she crashed into a rock wall. At least it felt like one.

"Watch it," she ground out, as the wall steadied her. She looked into fiery silver eyes and bit back a groan. "Dere – er, Agent Atkinson."

Derek wore his dark blue STF uniform and she could barely catch her breath at the sight of him. She'd always been a sucker for a man in uniform and Derek made it look especially yummy.

He slid his hands down her arms, burning her skin and causing heated ripples of awareness to pool in her core. "Hello, Sable." His voice was rich and warm and filled with sensual promise. "In trouble with the captain again? What did you do this time?"

She scowled and shrugged off his touch, digging deep for the strength she needed to walk away. "I entered the docking bay a little too fast," she lied. Circumventing him, she headed down the hall with rapid steps.

He fell into step beside her. "Who are you tracking now?"

"None of your damn business," she snapped, trying not to look at his handsome face with its sexy smile and angry gaze. He was obviously still pissed about her leaving him at DS12 two days ago. In a way, she was glad. It showed that he cared, if only a little.

"Fine," he said smoothly, but she heard the frustration in his tone. "Is my come still dripping down your thighs?"

She halted abruptly, her mouth agape. "What?"

He shrugged and tried to look innocent, which was impossible. "That would be my business, wouldn't it? I mean if *my* bodily fluids are in *your* – "

"Shut up." Arms akimbo, Sable was certain she'd never been as furious in her life, which was exactly what Derek had intended with his outrageous question. He was not a man who took well to being ignored and he fought back with no holds barred.

He mimicked her posture and raised a raven brow. Despite his fury, he looked like heaven, *her* heaven, but she couldn't do a damn thing about that as long as she was undercover in his field office.

Sable loved his smile and his body, his silky hair and piercing fangs. She admired his strength and his control. He was cool and levelheaded when she was hot and brash.

He was pulled together and quick on his feet, when she was falling apart and frozen in place. He complemented her in every way that mattered.

Except she wanted him forever and he wanted her for right now.

She used to love her job, used to love knowing she kept the Task Force clean and free of dirty officers. Now she hated it. She'd hated it ever since she met Derek two years ago, because her job prevented her from having him for however long he'd give her his attention. She was enough of a glutton for punishment that she'd be willing to take what she could get when it came to Derek Atkinson.

Sable closed her eyes and released a long, slow breath. When she looked at him again, she was much calmer and not as angry. "Listen, Derek. The time we shared was great, I have no regrets -"

"That's something, I suppose," he muttered.

"But it can't happen again. It really shouldn't have happened to begin with."

He snorted and his full lips tightened with displeasure. "How can you say that? I know you felt something."

"Maybe I did. But we both know you're not a long-term relationship kind of vamp—"

"How the hell would we both know that?" he growled.

"How old are you?" She arched a brow. "Several centuries old at least. And yet you've never been married, never been engaged."

"Maybe I hadn't found what I was looking for," he argued.

"Maybe you never will."

"Maybe I have."

Sable shook her head, squelching the flutter in her stomach, and started down the hallway again. "Whatever, Derek." She dismissed his statement with a wave of her hand. "It was fun, but now it's over. Let's not ruin the memory by arguing."

"Are you finished?" he ground out.

"Definitely." She kept walking as he slowed.

"Good."

He gripped her elbow and dragged her into an interrogation room on the left. Before she realized what was happening, he had her pinned to the wall, his mouth on hers, his tongue thrusting through her parted lips.

His long fingers moved through her hair, cupping the back of her head to position her as he wanted. The man kissed the way he fucked, deep and possessive, with a skill that stole her ability to think or move. His hips pressed hers to the wall, his erection hot and heavy against her lower belly. All around him she could smell his desire, heady and overwhelming, pure and gratifying.

Sable melted into him as his tongue stroked the inside of her mouth and his hands caressed her body with centuries' worth of devastating knowledge. He tasted so unbelievably good, like sin on a stick, and she wanted more. Much more. Her job was so lonely, her work all-consuming. Only Derek understood the rigors. His body offered a solace she had found nowhere else. Touching him, holding him was a much-needed respite and an intimacy unlike anything she'd known before. It was wrong to want him and hopeless, but she couldn't help it.

Tearing her mouth from his, she tugged his head lower, bared her fangs and sank home in the powerful expanse of his neck, claiming him, because he'd claimed her. Instantly the rich, intoxicating taste of his blood, aged like a fine wine, poured down her throat. She felt him probing her mind, coaxing and encouraging until she didn't care where they were. All she cared about was Derek, his big body and talented hands, the sinewy length of his muscles beneath her appreciative fingertips and the potent strength of his blood flowing into her.

Sable fed for long moments, writhing against him in an agony of lust. His blood should soothe her, calm her. Instead it heated her from the inside, making her skin tingle and her nipples peak tight. He caressed the length of her spine, holding her close, rocking his rock-hard cock against her clit. She ground her hips into that bulge, wanting

to come with near desperation. Feeding was, by nature, a sensual act, but with Derek it was so much more powerful than the physical need to orgasm. It was almost instinctual.

"You know," he breathed, his deep voice vibrating against her lips. "It's never been like this for me."

Was he talking about the lust? she wondered.

That too, but also the gifting. I've never really appreciated it before.

Reluctantly, Sable withdrew her fangs, lapping at the tiny punctures with her tongue to seal them. When she leaned back to look at him, Derek's silvery irises were swirling like molten metal.

Gifting—the exchange of blood between vamps. It wasn't for sustenance. It was a gift, an exchange of the precious fluid that was the center of their existence. To some vamps, it was no more intimate than a kiss. To others, it was a deeply personal act, more so than intercourse.

He lifted her and carried her, his sexual intent clear. The room was small, windowless and metallic. The only items inside it were the small table he set her down on, a single chair, and a very horny master vampire.

"Someone will come in here," she whispered, a token protest.

"I'll keep them away."

"How?" As soon as she asked, she knew, somehow, he could do as he said.

"Trust me, baby," he urged as he pulled her to the edge. "You're mine. I won't share even a glimpse of you with someone else."

Sable hiked up the short, flared skirt she wore and shimmied out of her thong while Derek hit the catch on his uniform and shrugged his torso out of it. He pushed the garment down to his thighs, releasing the magnificent cock that had driven her to insanity just two days before. It was long and impossibly thick, beautifully shaped with a thick roping of veins that pleasured her from the inside.

"I love your body," she groaned as he stepped between her spread thighs, his cock in hand and aimed for her creamy opening. His chest was broad and sculpted, wellformed muscles flexing as he stroked himself, making his shaft harder and thicker.

"It's all yours, Sable."

She bit her lip, trying to dull the possessiveness she had no right to feel. Derek leaned over and licked her lip.

"Watch me take you," he whispered, his free hand pressing her gently backward until she set her arms behind her to support her weight. He lifted her skirt to her waist, drawing her eyes to the glistening curls between her thighs and the ruddy cock that approached them.

Sable watched, mesmerized, as he entered her with exquisite slowness, the flared head breaching her, stretching her. Her eyelids grew heavy as Derek surged slowly inside, hot and hard, a silken instrument of sexual torment and ultimate relief.

She shivered and moaned as he slipped deeper, sliding through her cream, his impressive width and length like a warm inner massage. He buried himself to the hilt, his head falling back as a shudder shook the length of his body. He offered a soft smile, revealing wicked fangs and molten eyes made bright by the animal let loose inside him. He withdrew and then pressed forward again, his stomach rippling with muscle as he gave a long, deep plunge.

"So hot," he said hoarsely. "So tight and wet." He pulled out until only the tip remained inside her. "Look at all your cream on my cock. It's the most erotic thing I've ever seen."

She swallowed hard, her skin damp from the heat.

"Put your finger in my mouth," he urged.

Leaning to one side, she freed one hand and did as he asked. His cheeks hollowed as he sucked, drawing on her with a steady suction, the tempo of which was echoed in the clasps of her pussy on his cock. She gasped, so aroused she couldn't think.

"That's what you feel like to me. It makes me want to come, Sable. It makes my balls ache. Does it turn you on? Watching me fuck you? Feeling me stroke you?"

"Yes..." Sable stared, her nipples so hard they ached, as he pumped his cock into her cunt, his rhythm so slow, his hips swirling and then lunging.

Nothing had ever felt as good as this. She'd never have enough of it, never stop craving it. The sex got better every time.

And more personal.

With a growl, Derek claimed her throat with his fangs as his thrusts picked up speed, propelling himself deeply into her with soft blows of his hips to hers. His thoughts entered her head with a clarity she was learning to treasure. *I've missed this, baby. I missed you.*

Sable wrapped her legs around his waist, adding her strength to his, making his cock strike deep, so deep. Derek wasn't like other lovers she'd had. Everything he did, every move he made was planned for her pleasure. His greedy mouth tugged at her skin, building an ecstasy so intense she came, bathing him in a rush moisture. He slowed, savoring her orgasm, his touch gentle as if he knew her fears and longed to soothe them. She longed to let him.

"So good," she moaned, her body on fire, and Derek growled his agreement as he drank. She gripped his flexing buttocks, urging him deeper when there was no deeper to go.

Sable felt him everywhere. He permeated everything with a merciless penetration that brought her as much pain as pleasure. Belatedly, she fought off his invasion, trying to shield herself from the devastation his loss would bring.

He reached a hand between them and stroked her clit in time with the thrusting of his hips. *You can't hold back. Stop trying.*

As her body tightened with another orgasm, tears slipped free and dripped onto her cheek.

Don't, he begged. Don't cry. It's okay. I'm here with you. You're not alone.

"I'm always alone," she cried softly. "It's the nature of our beast."

And her job.

He hunched over her, caging her to table, thrusting hard until she came with a scream. He released her neck and arched his back, a guttural cry torn from his throat as he spurted his seed deep inside her.

* * * * *

Derek stirred slowly, reluctant to lift his head from the pillow of Sable's breast. He felt drained and yet omnipotent at the same time. His strength was steadily increasing as he spent more time inside her. Sable charged him in some way he hadn't known existed, hadn't known was possible.

Was that why he craved her?

No, that couldn't be the reason. He'd wanted her before. The rush he experienced being with her was just an added enticement. It must be the virus. Perhaps together, he and Sable created a synergy. Even if he didn't desire her so badly, that alone was worth exploring.

He turned his head and looked at the two-way mirror on the wall. He saw nothing but an empty room, their reflections absent from the silvered glass. Sable was right. It was the nature of their beast to be lonely, set apart from others not of their kind. But they'd found each other. Against the odds and all of the rules.

He should have been more circumspect before taking her to his ship and fucking her for days. He should have known the lust riding him so hard meant more than he was willing to admit. If he hadn't been so blind, he could have courted her, wooed her, instead of getting his way with his cock. But that was not the way it went down and despite his chagrin, Derek couldn't regret it. Sable was in his arms and he was deep inside her, soaked in their cream. They had the sexual part of a romantic relationship worked out to perfection. The rest would fall into place eventually.

He pulled himself upright, but remained a part of her. Sable couldn't deny their connection when they were so intimately joined. Reaching down, he brushed the silky stands of her hair away from her forehead. His touch was reverent and adoring, as was the stroking of her right hand against his hip. Closing her eyes, her breathing slowed to a soft pant.

"What are you doing to me?" she whispered brokenly.

His thumbs drifted along the impossibly long length of her lashes, brushing away the tears that clung there. "What are you afraid of, baby?"

"I'm not afraid." She sat up. To his surprise, she wrapped her arms around his waist and rested her head upon his chest. "But this can't keep happening. It has to stop."

"Why?" He pulled back to search her face. The sadness in her eyes arrested his gaze. He'd felt it during their mental connection and was frustrated by the wall she'd erected in her mind. She only let him see a tiny portion of who she was, keeping the greater part of herself tucked away.

What wasn't she sharing with him?

"There's more than lust going on here, Sable. I know you feel it too. You wouldn't be crying otherwise."

"There are things you don't know about me."

"I don't care what they are." He was startled to realize he spoke the truth. He was a curious man, which made him good at his job. "I can wait until you're ready to tell me. All I care about is us—you and me and the way I feel when I'm inside you. The way you make me feel when you look at me like you're doing right now."

Sable glanced away and he gripped her chin, pulling her gaze back to his.

"Don't turn away from me, baby."

"Don't push, Derek. Okay?"

Derek released her and ran a hand through his hair. "I've spent six hundred years

looking for this. I'm not about to let it go now that I've found it."

"Do you love me?" she asked bluntly, her sapphire gaze probing, invasive.

He choked at her directness and the questions it made him ask of himself.

"I thought so," she murmured without inflection. She shoved him backward, forcing his semi-erect cock from the shelter of her pussy, leaving him feeling bereft and rejected. She smoothed her short skirt over her thighs and slid off the table, pausing a moment to retrieve her thong. The wall between them was a tangible thing and it frightened him. And pissed him off.

"Damn it!" Derek tugged on his uniform, glaring at her. "Give me a chance to think."

"Forget it." Sable flew to the door before he could move. She paused on the threshold, her mouth thinned with determination. "Stay out of my life, Atkinson. Find another way to pass the time."

* * * * *

Sable sat in the cockpit of her Starwing and reminded herself that she was a strong woman who could handle anything. Rubbing her eyes, she leaned back in the captain's chair and wished she had roots somewhere, something that was hers, a place to call home. She'd taken possession of the highly desired ship compliments of a smuggler who'd been caught by Interstellar Customs. Almost everything she owned was confiscated goods from the impounds of half a dozen different law enforcement agencies. She had to have the best of everything to maintain the appearance of a moneyhungry bounty hunter. Unfortunately, it also meant that Sable Taylor had nothing of her own.

She looked out the cockpit window at the half dozen ships docked around her. They branched out on spokes from the slowly spinning center that was the Task Force field office for this part of the universe. Derek's ship was easy to spot. He drove a Starwing not much older than her own, but his ship was definitely more luxuriously outfitted.

Derek Atkinson had money—lots of it. Judicious investments made over several centuries would make anyone rich beyond measure. It was a testimony to Derek's character that he chose to work for the STF rather than spend his days idly, surrounded by willing women. His imperviousness to bribery made him the least likely of her suspects. She was certain that no amount of money could entice Derek to whore himself to the Federation.

So who was the traitor?

She'd pondered that question a hundred times over. Starting the engines, she glanced down at the readout on the console. Jeffrey Leroy was next on her list of agents to investigate. He was in the Delta Sector tracking down a smuggler, so that was her next destination. Disengaging from the docking bay, Sable pulled the required distance away from the field office before programming the jump to lightspeed. Then she stood, stretching muscles made deliciously languid from two fabulous orgasms.

Taking a quick shower, she tried not to think about what had happened at headquarters and failed miserably. How could she not think about it? She'd ignored every protocol of her job by getting involved with an agent. And she was definitely involved, no doubt about that. It would be so much easier to blame it on loneliness eased by physical pleasure, but that wouldn't be true and she had to be honest with herself. Otherwise, she'd do something stupid, like fuck him some more, which was exactly what had gotten her in this mess to begin with.

Sable shut off the spray and toweled her skin dry.

And what the hell had gotten into Derek? He'd almost made it sound like what they had was more than just sex for him too, but she knew better than that. His terrified expression when she'd said the word "love" had proven that point. Yeah, the sex was great, fabulous even, but it wasn't a good thing when one partner was coming undone and the other one just wanted to come.

With a weary sigh, she threw herself on her bed and glared at the ceiling.

She'd been a fool to fall for Derek Atkinson – a full Master vampire with a sensual call that turned every woman into a mewling sex slave. She would bet a million credits he'd never been in love in his life. He'd lived centuries as a bachelor and seemed to enjoy it immensely, if rumors held true. He left broken hearts in his wake.

Just like hers.

She closed her eyes and without even trying, she could smell him, the scent of his skin infinitely alluring. Her breasts grew taut and heavy as she pictured his hot gaze and luscious mouth. Reaching up, she squeezed the swollen flesh to ease the ache and wished she weren't alone.

"I miss you, Derek," she whispered into the still air.

I know.

Sable's fists clenched as Derek's voice sifted like smoke through her mind. "Get out of my head!" she growled to the room at large. With deep concentration, she shoved him firmly from her thoughts.

"You know, baby," he murmured. "We need to figure out how you throw off my call so easily."

Her wide-eyed gaze shot to the doorway, shocked to find Derek lounging there with casual arrogance. Her traitorous heart leapt, happy to see him.

"Damn you, Derek."

Chapter Three

Derek watched with rapt attention as Sable rose naked from the small bed and moved to the wardrobe. With the long fall of her dark hair and gently swaying hips, she was temptation incarnate. It took everything he had to maintain his casual appearance when the animal inside him longed to leap the distance between them and fuck her senseless. He couldn't help but wonder if he'd ever get enough of her. He wanted her as badly as if he hadn't just come his last drop a short while ago.

Tugging a short, sleeveless wrap off a hanger, she covered her lithe form and he bit back a groan of disappointment. When she turned to face him, her lovely face was studiously impassive, belying the rapid pounding of her pulse and the moisture he could smell pooling between her thighs. She was happy to see him, although she was trying hard to hide that fact. He hid a smile. She'd said she missed him.

"What are you doing stowing away on my ship?" she asked, walking past him.

"You can't run from me, Sable."

"I wasn't running." She growled in frustration as she realized they'd already made the jump to lightspeed. "Shit. What the hell am I going to do with you now?"

"I have a few suggestions," he offered helpfully. "Clothing optional."

She shot him an exasperated glance.

He strolled over to the captain's chair and made himself at home. He'd checked out the rest of the Starwing while she'd been in the shower. The entire ship had been stripped of every comfort. Obviously luxury was something she could live without. Or was forced to live without.

"How much trouble are you in?" he asked quietly.

She shot him a startled glance. "What?"

Derek waved his hand around the sparse deck in an all-encompassing gesture. "You're obviously in financial trouble. How deep are you under?"

"Why do you care?" Sable ripped the towel off her head and headed back into the bedroom.

"Who said I cared? Maybe I'm just trying to lighten my bank account."

He heard her snort derisively and he laughed.

"I don't want your charity," she grumbled.

"And I don't want your bullshit. Sometimes we get what we don't want."

Sable came back to the doorway, a reluctant smile curving her lips. It was the first time Derek had seen anything close to a smile on her face and he was awed by how it transformed her features from beautiful to breathtaking.

"Really, Derek. I don't need your money."

He frowned. "You'd tell me if you did?"

She laughed then, an enchanting sound that made him swallow hard. "No. I wouldn't tell you."

Derek pushed out of the chair with a curse. "Why the hell not?"

"I didn't fuck you for your money."

His eyebrows rose at the blunt statement. "Glad to hear it." Really glad, but then he'd never thought that anyway. Sable was too independent. He paused a moment and then asked the obvious question, damning himself for caring about the answer. "Why did you then?"

"For that massive cock of yours, of course." Her sapphire eyes glittered with wicked amusement.

When he scowled, she threw her head back and laughed with delight. The laughter poured from her, light and musical and before he knew it he was chuckling too. He was about to reach for her and pull her into his arms, when the ship rocked hard to the side, throwing her into his embrace. Alarms sounded.

"What the hell?" she gasped as she steadied herself against him. Her eyes went wide as she looked at him and he knew she was wondering how he'd saved them from a puddle of tangled limbs. She glanced down, noticing they hovered just above the floor. Her gaze was accusatory. "Is there anything you're *not* prepared for?"

He gave her a swift, hard kiss before moving to the captain's chair. They'd been so wrapped up in talking to each other, they hadn't noticed when the ship had fallen out of lightspeed.

"Shit! Hang on." He grabbed the controls, shut off the autopilot and activated the shields, before tilting them hard right. A phaser shot barely missed them.

Sable took the copilot's chair. "It's a Federation ship," she said in surprise after a quick glance at the console. She'd barely secured her harness before he was forced to make another evasive roll.

With grim resignation, Derek kept his eyes on the control panel in front of him and noted the second Federation ship approaching. "Now would be a good time to tell me what kind of trouble you're in, Sable."

"Me? Why does this have to be about me?"

He risked a side-glance at her. "Cut the shit. We're on the far edges of the Delta Sector. Why did you decide to drop out of lightspeed here?"

Her eyes met his for an instant, then she flushed and looked away. "To avoid you. I figured you wouldn't think to look for me here."

She punched a few buttons on the armrest and a visor lowered from the ceiling. Within seconds, the chair spun silently around as she watched their enemy through the visor and returned fire.

Derek shook his head. Damned impossible woman. "We're going to discuss your relationship issues later. Right now I want to know how two Federation fighter ships ended up deep in Council space at the exact remote location you decided to use."

"I have no fucking idea. I reported my intention to travel to Rashier 6, but not the

flight plan. No one knew I was coming out here."

Derek watched as the second Federation ship flew over them, followed by a rapid volley of phasers from Sable. She was good. The second ship was already badly damaged.

"Maybe we stumbled onto something by accident." She spun her chair to the left and fired on the first ship.

The Starwing shook with teeth-chattering force. "Yeah, a *big* accident. Shields are down to seventy-five percent."

Sable fired back with even more ferocity. "Can you get us out of here?"

"No. That first hit knocked out the hyperdrive and the comm link. Whoever these guys are, they don't like you at all."

"They'll have to take a number." Her next round of fire destroyed one of the Federation ships. "Turn around so I can get the other one."

He pulled up and over, coming in behind the remaining ship that continued to fire on them with enthusiasm. "Shields down to fifty percent and falling fast."

Sable spun around and cursed. The remaining Federation ship was gone. "They jumped."

"They timed that well," Derek noted. "They arrived and left before the border probe made its rounds."

She shook off the harness. The visor automatically rose out of her way. "Why didn't they finish us?"

"I don't know but I think they probably weren't expecting a fight and ran out of time."

She stood, her short robe twisted by the movement of the chair and the five-point harness until he could almost see her pussy.

He got hard instantly.

Shit. He shouldn't be thinking about that now. Frustrated, he bolted out of his chair.

"We have to repair the ship and get out of here before they decide to come back," he growled, raking a hand through his hair.

She shot him a quizzical glance. "Grumpy, aren't we?"

"Horny," he corrected and choked off a laugh at the grimace she made. She beat a hasty retreat.

"I'm going down to fix the hyperdrive," she shouted as she went below deck. "You work on the shields."

He could smell the arousal coming from her satiny skin. One word from him and her body was eager for his. Instead, she ran away.

Damned impossible woman.

* * * * *

Sable pushed her hair out of her face, and crawled on her hands and knees back into the maintenance shaft of the hyperdrive. She was eternally grateful that the repairs were almost done. The shaft was not designed for occupation, so the space lacked environmental controls, making it hot and uncomfortable. Only the upper half of her torso fit in the small space, leaving her hips bent at an odd angle.

She briefly wondered how much headway Derek was making on the shields. She trusted him to work on her ship, which spoke volumes about how much she respected and believed in him. A control freak, she preferred to see to everything herself so she knew a task was done to her satisfaction. She wasn't worried about that with Derek. He never did anything in half measure. Sable was relieved he'd been with her today. Without him, things could have been much worse. In fact, she might even be dead.

Derek was right. Those ships had been lying in wait for her. They'd disabled her hyperdrive, crippling her, but in the end had left her alive. Perhaps they'd meant only to delay her? But why? No one knew she was tracking down Agent Leroy besides IAB and that database was so secure not even the President of the Interstellar Security Council had access to it. So who could have known where she would drop out of lightspeed when she hadn't even known herself until she'd punched the coordinates? It didn't make sense. Why not kill her and get rid of the threat she presented all together?

Yes! Derek's triumphant voice filled her mind. *I fixed the shields. How are you doing down there?*

"Almost done," she muttered as she reattached the ground.

Need a hand?

"No, thanks. You're familiar with the layout of these ships. The maintenance shaft is tiny. I'm ass-up in here as it is and cramped as hell."

Okay, baby.

The voice in her mind fell silent and strangely she felt lonely without it. She was getting far too used to having him around and the realization pissed her off to no end. Her foolish heart was determined to be crushed into dust.

She finished and slowly started backing out of the maintenance shaft.

"Look what I found," came Derek's voice in a hot puff of breath against her inner thigh just before his tongue delved into her pussy.

Startled, Sable jumped, banging her head. "Oww, damn it! What the hell are you doing?"

"Isn't it obvious?" he growled softly. Parting her folds with gentle fingers, he continued to lick her with sinuous laps, stroking across her clit until it swelled and peeped out. "You said you were ass-up. I had to come and see for myself."

He plunged his hot tongue deep inside her cunt and groaned, keeping her hips still when she tried to move. "And what do I find? You, bent at the waist, waving a prized piece of heaven at me." He tongued her clit with rapid flicks. "How could I resist a little taste?"

Sable's entire body had begun to burn with the first swipe of his wicked tongue. Now she was on fire. "Derek..." she moaned, throwing her hips back at him, needed

more than his teasing torment.

His answering chuckle was filled with masculine satisfaction as he buried his mouth between her thighs with flattering enthusiasm. A moment before she'd been grumpy and frustrated. Now she was achingly, breathlessly aroused, her cunt creamy with lust and softening in eager anticipation of another wondrous orgasm. Derek lapped up her desire with deep licks and then dipped inside her, fucking her with the slow, steady plunges he knew she adored.

Sable dropped her head onto her crossed arms, tilting her hips upward to give him greater access to her drenched cleft. The man was unbelievably talented with his tongue, knowing just where to lick and when to slip deep. He lifted her higher, holding her hips aloft with effortless vampire strength. Openmouthed, he surrounded her clit and stroked it slowly with his tongue, back and forth in a wet glide, making sexy little groaning noises.

I missed this too, the taste of you.

She felt the smooth edges of his fangs against her labia and knew he was fully erect. The thought of his cock and the way it felt inside her made her whimper and drench his mouth. And still his tongue worked its magic, drifting back and forth across her exposed clit. *Out and in.* He was so skilled and he already knew her so well. Her short nails clawed futilely at the smooth metal beneath her.

"Derek...please..."

She screamed when she came, her voice echoing in the small confines of the maintenance shaft.

There was no time to catch her breath before Derek pulled back and then plunged his pulsing erection inside her, stretching her impossibly tight in her bent over position. He stroked his cock quickly, riding out her orgasm, making it last as long as possible.

I love being inside you.

"Yes..."

I love it when you scream and come for me. Do it again.

"Derek," she gasped, her entire body quaking with the force of his thrusts. He lowered her knees to the floor and pumped deeper, the heavy weight of his balls slapping against her clit with every downward stroke. "You're going to kill me."

He reached around her waist and between her legs, finding the spot where she stretched wide to accommodate him. *Come for me*, he ordered.

Sable couldn't even whimper when she came again. Her throat closed like a fist, as did her cunt, which clamped down on the massive cock riding her in an endless convulsion of pleasure.

Sable! Derek's stunned cry filled her mind, as he came hard and furious, his hands at her waist shaking, his breath heaving in great bellows, his shaft jerking violently inside her.

He collapsed against her back and her legs slid out from under them, shaking too much to support their weight. He pulled her from the hyperdrive shaft and rolled, spooning behind her as they both struggled to breathe.

Sable could have fallen asleep there on the floor, if Derek hadn't picked her up and carried her to the shower. Sated and tired, she leaned her body against his as he soaped her down and washed her hair. As his large hands glided over her skin, kneading in a way meant to soothe rather than arouse, she admitted she could get used to this kind of pampering.

"Does a good fuck always put you in such a generous mood?" she asked, as he rinsed her hair.

His lips curved in a sexy grin, but it was the tenderness in his gaze that stopped her heart. "Just good?"

"Okay, great," she amended.

"Just great?" he teased, as he began to soap his muscled chest.

Damn. Damn. Damn. He was so hot with his soapy hands caressing those beautiful muscles and water dripping from his raven hair. She really wanted to keep him.

"Fantastic, stupendous, mind-blowing," she said through suddenly dry lips. It was ridiculous how badly she craved him.

"Best sex you've ever had?" His silvery gaze probed too deeply for the question to be frivolous.

She shifted uncomfortably under the piercing silver stare and tried for levity. "With your libidinous reputation, I wouldn't think your ego would need any more stroking."

Derek's hands stilled and he frowned. "I don't mind telling you how much I enjoy making love to you."

Making love. Sable looked down, fighting the feeling of joy that wanted to well up within her. "You know I enjoy it," she said softly.

"Enough to be with only me? No one else?"

Her gaze flew to his in surprise. *Was he serious?* Suddenly very nervous, she leaned her back against the cool shower wall trying to create some distance between them. "What exactly are you asking me?"

"I want to try and make this work, Sable." Derek stepped under the spray to rinse off. "You and me. No one else."

Her eyes slid shut. He *was* serious. She wanted to laugh and cry at the same time. She knew what she should say, what her job demanded that she say. But she just couldn't do it.

"I'd like that," she whispered. Then she cried out in surprise as Derek pulled her against his chest and rewarded her with a quick, hard kiss.

"Thank God," he muttered with touching relief.

"I'm not finished."

He stiffened and pulled back to eye her warily.

Reaching up, she brushed his wet hair off his forehead with an affectionate caress. He had such strong features with his aquiline nose, stubborn jaw and firm lips. She felt safe with him, knowing how prepared he was for everything. Her life had always been

chaotic and she often faced ramifications for her rash choices long after they were made. "I don't want anyone else, Derek. But I can't become involved with you right now. There are some things I have to take care of first."

"Like what?" His hands stroked the wet length of her spine possessively.

She tried to explain. "There are things you don't know..."

"Then tell me."

"I'm not supposed – "

"I don't care."

"You won't like it."

"I'll get over it."

She gave a rueful laugh at his dogged persistence. "Derek, can't you just—"

"No." His full lips thinned with determination. "Damn it. Do you want to be with me or not?"

"Yes, but—"

He shook his head. "No waiting. It's been too fucking long as it is. Two years, Sable. What's holding you back? A husband you have stashed somewhere? A lover? Do you owe someone money?"

"No. Nothing like that."

He shrugged. "Whatever it is, we'll take care of it. Together."

Sable reached behind him and shut off the water. "All right," she conceded with a sigh. "I'm—"

An insistent beeping sound came from the cockpit. Derek growled in frustration at the interruption. "Ignore it."

"The hyperdrive is recharged," she said with a smile she knew didn't hide her relief. She wasn't ready to tell him yet. She didn't want to take the chance of ruining what they had, whatever it was. There was no doubt in her mind that she'd be better off having a husband to hide, than admitting she worked for IAB. It was the unspoken

code. Agents didn't rat on agents. They protected their own. They didn't hunt them down.

"It can wait," he said obstinately. "Tell me."

Sable tilted her head back and pressed her lips to his. It was the first time she'd ever made an advance toward him and when he shuddered, she realized just how much she really got to him. Her stomach fluttered. "That Federation ship might come back with reinforcements," she reminded him against his lips.

He tugged her closer when she tried to step away. "Kiss me again, baby. And give it your all."

Draping her arms atop his shoulders, Sable drew his mouth down to hers. She kissed him the way she'd always wanted to, with deep licks of her tongue along his until she felt the full, heavy prod of his erection against her belly. She laughed. "If we keep this up we'll never get out of this Sector and I won't be able to walk. I may be a vamp, but even I need a break."

"Okay, okay," he said with obvious reluctance. "Let's get the hell out of here."

Chapter Four

Derek rose from the copilot's chair and winced as his muscles creaked in protest. They'd been held in flight for over three hours, waiting for a docking port to open on Rashier 6. Sable had the ship well in hand, but he preferred sitting with her rather than occupying himself elsewhere. That thought had him smothering a wry laugh. Everything she did fascinated him, even sitting in a chair cursing at the control tower.

"Who are we hunting now?" he asked.

Sable stood and stretched as well, her full breasts straining the front of her bio-suit as she arched her back. "Don't you have to go back to work? And what about your ship? Your belongings? You don't have any clothes beside your uniform."

"Trying to get rid of me?"

"I didn't say that, Derek."

Reaching for her hand, he laced his fingers with hers. "I took a leave of absence and my ship is docked at the field office. It'll be fine. I'll buy what I need as soon we disembark and then I'll get out of this." He tugged on the front of his uniform with his free hand.

"I think you look sexy as hell in that uniform," she said in a provocative purr that heated his blood.

He smiled. She'd softened toward him considerably since they'd gotten out of the shower.

She pressed a swift kiss to his mouth. "Thank you for taking the trouble to come after me, even if you did stow away to do it."

He liked that. She was starting to reach out to him physically. Things were progressing between them and he felt a deep masculine satisfaction that their

relationship had developed so much quicker than he'd anticipated. She'd been worth the wait.

Sable tugged her hand from his. "We can't hold hands."

Derek stared at her, agape. Maybe he hadn't gotten that far after all. "Why the hell not?"

Her smile was almost...*sympathetic*. "We can't make it obvious that we're...that you and I are..." She winced.

"Dating? Fucking?" he suggested rudely. Damn it, it hurt that she wanted to hide him.

Her wince deepened. "Yeah."

"Fine." He walked away, his jaw clenched.

"Fine?"

He heard the wounded note in her question and smiled grimly. "Whatever you want, baby," he said baldly.

Derek hit the release for the cargo door and exited into the bustling terminal. He felt Sable following him and reached out with his mind, using stealth so she remained unaware of his probing. Her sadness was deep and almost tangible. Derek's chest tightened. He could deal with her anger—hell, he'd love a good screaming match right now—but her sadness ripped at his insides. That sharp flare of pain made him realize how much he cared for her.

Not that he was completely clueless. He'd known he liked her a great deal and wanted to spend some exclusive time to get to know her better, but he hadn't quite understood that she had the power to wound him, as well as arouse him. It was a risk he wasn't sure he was ready to deal with.

He stopped at the maintenance counter and made arrangements for repairs to be done to the damaged Starwing. Then he continued on to the taxi terminal.

"I'm sorry," Sable said in a whisper behind him. "I don't want it to be like this.

Please believe that."

Derek gritted his teeth. Why couldn't he have felt this way about a different woman? Someone open, with nothing to hide. Someone who wanted him as much as he wanted her.

He didn't speak to her again for hours.

Catching a cab, they worked their way through the multi-tiered traffic and headed toward the hotel they'd booked. The air and streets were clogged with tourists of all species. Riotous banners stretched from skyscraper to skyscraper just above the teaming transports. The overall effect of the city was one of prosperity and celebration, but the mood didn't impress upon him or Sable. After the closeness they'd just shared, this pained silence was like an ice water bath.

They reached the hotel and she blatantly ignored him as she checked in. She grabbed her keycard and left him staring after her as she ascended in the elevator without him. Just to spite her, he insisted on taking the room that adjoined hers. He'd be damned if he took a separate floor just to please her skewed sense of propriety.

Pissed off, Derek left the hotel and went shopping for clothes and toiletries. After changing in the dressing room of a clothing store, he sent his uniform and purchases back to the hotel and headed for a nearby telecomm café. Settling into a booth away from the large glass window and the prying eyes of the pedestrians on the other side, he inserted his identi-card and waited only a moment before his assistant appeared on the screen.

"Hello, sir," Charles Stein greeted with a smile. He glanced away from the monitor and then said, "On Rashier 6, I see. Great time of year to visit. They're in the middle of their Retro-bration, aren't they?"

"I have no idea," Derek said dryly. He hadn't been paying any attention to his surroundings because he was too angry at Sable. That was a sure sign that he was screwed. His entire life was centered on the need to know what the hell was going on around him. "I need all the information you can locate on a woman named Sable

Taylor. Namely service work or maintenance done on her Starwing."

"Just a moment." Stein frowned, then typed furiously on his keyboard. "Well, there's not much in the Council database." Distracted, his voice lowered as he read from the screen. "In fact, there is no record at all for Ms. Taylor prior to ten years ago."

Derek scowled. "That's not possible. She's a vamp, at least a hundred and fifty years old. I've checked her file before and it was a kilometer long." He tried to remember what he could about the contents of that file and then sighed at the realization that he'd been more interested in the photos than the details about her transportation.

Stein typed some more, digging deep into the Council's records. "Sorry, sir. Her file isn't hidden, it's been erased."

Erased? Impossible. It took the authority of the Interstellar Council's majority vote to delete information from the database. "What's left in her file?"

"Her name, address and bank account info."

"Her personal history is gone?" Derek asked. "No dating history, no family records, no next of kin?"

"Nothing at all of a personal nature."

"Shit." Derek rocked back in his chair. "Who was the last person to access her file?"

Stein checked, then whistled softly. "Marius Drake, President of the Interstellar Council General Assembly."

Derek nodded grimly, not the least bit surprised, but aching with the news just the same. "And one of the few people with high enough access to tamper with the database."

"That's true. It's still illegal, but he could pull it off, if his need was strong enough." Stein looked back into the monitor at Derek. "Why would President Drake have an interest in a bounty hunter? Whatever the reason, it can't be good."

"Yeah, my luck to get involved with trouble."

"Involved?" Stein blinked. "As in a 'personal' type of involved?"

"Don't look so shocked."

"I've known you a long time, sir, and in that time you've never been 'involved' with anyone."

"There's a first time for everything."

"While I won't disagree, I suggest perhaps you should leave this particular female alone. I don't like the looks of this."

"I wish it were that easy." Derek ran a hand through his hair. Sable was into something dangerous. Had he finally fallen hard for a woman, only to have to arrest her? He drummed his fingers on the table. If Sable were involved in a criminal enterprise it would explain her desire to keep their burgeoning relationship a secret. Her dating a STF agent could get them both staked. "Keep digging, Stein. I'll check back with you in a few days to see what you've turned up."

"Of course. Perhaps you should spend the interval asking Ms. Taylor about herself. If she feels the same way about you as you feel about her, she'll tell you the truth."

Derek nodded. "She damn well better."

* * * * *

Sable eyed the slinky, silver dress on the bed warily. It was Retro-bration on Rashier 6 and she had to wear the old-fashioned thing if she wanted to fit in—whether she hated it or not. No matter what, she needed to gain admittance to the RetroBall being held in the hotel later that evening. Jeffrey Leroy had reported that he would be attending the event in the course of his duties and she planned to shadow him until she could determine what he was up to.

Sighing in resignation, she shrugged to herself. Oh well. When in Rashier, do as the Rashiens do. Or something like that.

"Put it on."

She spun to face Derek, who leaned against the frame of the open adjoining doorway.

"How do you always sneak up on me like that?" she asked breathlessly, drinking in the sight of him. He'd been gone for hours and she was so happy to see him.

But he didn't look at all happy to see her.

"Your focus is always divided."

Looking past him, she saw the bed behind him. "You took the room next to mine?"

"You're the reason I'm here," he said in a dry tone of voice that betrayed his continuing anger. "It would be stupid to stay away from you."

Wincing, Sable acknowledged that he had every right to be pissed off. She'd treated him horribly earlier and she'd had some time to think about what she'd done. One of the reasons she'd hesitated to take him seriously was because she was afraid that he would hurt her. So what did she do? Hurt him first. It wasn't right. She needed to be honest with him and tell him who she was. If he didn't want to be with her after he knew, that's just the way things were. Better to know now. Hurting him to save her feelings wasn't the way to go about it. "Derek, let me explain." She held out her hand to him.

His silver gaze narrowed dangerously. "I'm not a fuck toy, Sable."

"I never said you were."

"That's how you treat me. The only time I can get anywhere near you is when I'm fucking you."

Obviously, she couldn't talk to him when he was this riled up. His hands were balled into fists and his jaw was clenched tight.

She licked her lips and watched his eyes smolder as they followed her tongue. "We can't talk when you're this tense." She strolled toward him with an exaggerated swing of her hips. The sudden, elevated tensing of his powerful frame was tangible. "Let me help you relax and then I'll tell you everything."

"Tell me now."

"You're not in the mood to listen to me. You want to pick a fight. I'd rather use that energy doing something a little more pleasant."

"An orgasm is not going to make me feel better," he growled.

"Are you sure about that? I hope you forgive me, but I'm going to touch you anyway. You see, once you hear what I have to say, you may not ever want me to touch you again. And if that's what's going to happen, I'll take what I can get now." She pressed a kiss to his pursed lips and then sank gracefully to her knees.

"Sable." His deep voice was dark with warning. "Damn it. If you tell me the truth, you won't have to worry about me leaving you."

"I will tell you the truth. I promise. When I'm done." She worked the fastenings of his trousers slowly, drawing out his anticipation. She watched his magnificent cock swell before her eyes. "I do miss the uniform, I have to admit. But I like you best naked. You have such a gorgeous body, Derek. And it pleases me so well."

He stilled her hands with his own.

She looked up at him with pleading eyes, her breathing rapid in near panic. She'd die if she didn't get this last time with him. "Let me suck you, baby," she said hoarsely.

"What are you hiding?" Derek's large hand cupped her cheek. "Why are you doing this?"

"Wouldn't you like to come in my mouth?"

His face flushed with reluctant desire. "I want answers. I want to know what kind of trouble you're in."

"If you trust me to tell you the truth now, you should trust me to tell you the truth later." She reached into his pants and tugged out his heavy shaft. Without hesitation, she licked across the plum-sized head and down along a ridged vein.

Derek's breath hissed out between his teeth and his hips bucked forward. "Sable..." "Shhh. I'm so sorry for how I treated you earlier. Just relax and let me apologize to

you properly. You can ask me questions later." A shiny drop of fluid graced the tip of his cock and she eagerly sucked it into her mouth, shivering at the taste of him.

"Fuck." His eyes slid shut. "I'm so screwed." Despite his frustration, his hands tangled in her hair, holding her still while he slipped his cock between her parted lips.

Sable moaned at the feel of his thickly veined shaft sliding along her tongue. The skin was soft and stretched tight over the pulsing hardness beneath. She cupped his ass, kneading gently, feeling his ass cheeks clench as he thrust deeper into her mouth. She began to suck as he fucked slowly through the circle of her lips, a steady, shallow rhythm accompanied by guttural cries from his throat. She shivered at the feel of her cunt creaming with desire – a desire created by the sheer erotic delight she received in concentrating entirely on his needs. He'd spent so many hours giving pleasure to her. It was long past the time when she should return the favor.

"Harder," he gasped, his fingers drifting into her hair. "Suck harder."

Tightening her lips around him, she hollowed her cheeks, gripping his hips to hold him steady. His stamina was amazing, his desire for her heartrending. And Sable didn't take his weakness for her for granted. It was a gift and she cherished it as one. She'd find a way to prove that to him.

Derek tensed, his breath seized in his lungs and then he cried out her name as his cock jerked against her tongue, spurting his come down her throat. Relishing his pleasure, she drank from him. Even when she felt his balls empty and his knees shake, she didn't cease the suction of her mouth.

"Enough," he groaned. "You'll kill me."

He sank to the floor in front of her, dragging her across him as he collapsed onto his back.

She folded her arms over his heaving chest and rested her chin upon them. She studied his features, darkened with passion and misted with sweat. With his eyes closed, he appeared younger, more vulnerable. Sable sighed.

"You're not just a fuck toy to me, Derek. It's never been about that."

"Liar," he retorted hoarsely.

"Well, maybe it's partly about that," she corrected with a grin. "Getting physical with you is...well, it's beyond words. But that's not all you're worth to me. Don't ever think that."

His breathing began to slow. "What the hell am I supposed to think, Sable? You're embarrassed to be seen with me, you..."

"That's not true! I'm flattered you want me. I'm amazed you stowed away on my ship just to be with me. I'm *proud* of you and a bit startled that I could catch your interest, let alone keep it."

Derek opened his eyes. "Is that what this is about? You think you can't keep my interest?"

"Isn't it a possibility?" she challenged.

He held her gaze for a long time before admitting. "I don't know what to think anymore. I know you can hurt me. I'm not sure how I feel about that."

She offered a sad smile. "At least you're honest."

"Because that's what I want from you in return, Sable – your honesty."

"And I'll give it to you."

Sable pushed off him and rose to her feet, despite his protests. Walking over to the dresser, she opened a drawer and retrieved her identi-card. When she turned back to him, he was sitting up, watching her with blatant curiosity and more than a touch of wariness. She held out her hand and he rose to take it, stopping only a moment to straighten his clothing.

He looked at the card and hesitated.

"Take it," she prodded. "All the answers to your questions are right here."

He accepted her offering while tossing her a sidelong glance. With obviously reluctant steps, he walked to the comm link in the corner and slid the card inside.

"Good evening, Special Agent Taylor," greeted the feminine voice of the comm link.

"You have no new messages in the IAB database."

Sable watched as Derek stilled, staring down at the comm link like he'd never seen one before. Then he turned to face her. His silver gaze was intent, searching. She tensed and waited for his condemnation.

"Is that what you've been hiding from me? That you're an IAB agent?"

She swallowed hard and nodded.

"Anything else you want to tell me?" he bit out. "Now would be the time."

"Well, my mission is –"

"No," he interrupted, lifting his hand. "You can tell me about your mission later. Is there any other reason why you don't want to be seen with me?"

She shook her head. "What else would there be?" She shifted nervously and confessed, "I'm crazy about you, Derek. Absolutely crazy."

"Oh, Sable." His voice turned deep and husky. "Thank God." He dissipated into mist and reappeared instantly before her, crushing her into his chest with huge hug.

She stood motionless in shock.

His large hands drifted into her hair and he pressed sweet, relieved kisses all over her face. "You have no idea what I thought... I was so worried..." He gave a crazed little laugh and picked her up, spinning her around.

"Derek?" she queried, a little worried. "You're not angry that I'm IAB? Disgusted?"

His eyes widened. "Of course not. It all makes sense now. You can't be seen with me, because it'll blow your cover."

Sable knew her smile must be radiant, because his face softened with such tenderness. "Most agents hate IAB. They don't trust us. Are you sure you really don't care?"

"Hell no, I don't care!" He laughed again. "Baby, I thought you were some kind of criminal. I was tearing myself up wondering what I'd gotten myself into." He kissed the tip of her nose. "I already knew, no matter what you were involved in, that I couldn't let you go."

Deeply touched, Sable felt her eyes tear up. Derek lived for his work and yet he'd considered setting aside his scruples just to be with her. It was a sacrifice that spoke volumes.

"Don't cry," he said hastily. "It's okay, I can help you. We'll solve your case, get you out of my field office and then we can get on with our lives. Together."

"You're so optimistic," she noted with a shake of her head. "And I'd always heard you were so cynical."

He shrugged. "We have a lot to look forward to. I can't wait until I have you all to myself for days at a time. I want the opportunity to get to know you better." His voice dripped with promise. "In every way possible."

With a gentle shove, she created distance between them and began to pace restlessly. "You may have to wait a long time, Derek." She didn't look at him. She couldn't. "And I can't ask you to do that. It wouldn't be fair."

"Wait for how long?" he asked, a frown evident in his tone.

"I've already been on this case for two years and I'm not much closer to solving it than when I started." Her hands clenched into fists at her sides. "There's a leak in your field office, Derek. One of the agents is selling sensitive information to the Federation. I'm only halfway through my investigation. I still have half the agents to investigate."

He grabbed her as she paced by him, pulling her to a halt in front of him. "Two years? That's about the time I first met you."

She nodded. "You were the first agent I investigated."

"And what did your investigation reveal?"

Sable lifted her chin to meet his amazing eyes. "That I'd met a man who made me hot. A man who made me wish for things I can't have. Things it's not possible for him to give."

"Until I met you." His gaze turned molten. "Am I cleared in your eyes?"

"Of course."

"Are you sure?" He searched her face. "You don't have any doubts?"

She met his questioning gaze head on. "I wouldn't have slept with you if I did. I wouldn't have even wanted to."

Tension visibly drained from his shoulders.

She stepped out of his embrace. "Now I have to get ready for the RetroBall. Agent Leroy will be attending tonight and he's next on my list."

"Jeff? I've known him for years. He's a good guy and he's having a rough time right now."

"I know. He's an agent in dire financial straits. His wife is dying and her medical bills are eating him alive."

"He's not the mole," he said with conviction.

Sable put her hands on her hips and arched a brow. "Listen, Derek. Don't try to tell me how to do my job. This thing between you and me won't work if you start interfering. I know what the fuck I'm doing. I happen to be a damn good agent."

Derek ran a hand through his hair and offered a sheepish smile. "I know you are."

"Leroy sent an update of his mission to headquarters this morning. He reaffirmed his pursuit of Kennedy Smith."

"Smuggler, pirate extraordinaire," he filled in. "So what? Sounds like he's on the job."

"Yeah well, Kennedy Smith has been in custody for the last two days. And this isn't the first time Leroy's lied about his missions. He's been coming to Rashier 6 at least once every six months."

Derek's eyes widened as he took in the implications of that. "Shit. So he's here for something else. I'll go with you to the ball," he offered.

She walked over to the bed and began to undress. "It would be better if you don't. Leroy will get suspicious if he sees you around."

He came up behind her and cupped her bare breasts in his hands. With a sigh of contentment, she leaned into his chest. It seemed like she'd waited forever for him to hold her like this, with lust heavily tempered by tenderness. His fingers found her nipples and squeezed, before rolling them gently. Her eyes closed on a soft moan.

"It doesn't seem fair that every other guy gets to ogle you in that dress," Derek whispered, before scraping his fangs gently across her shoulder.

Sable smiled. "I'll wear it for you later."

He stepped closer and swiveled his hips against her, revealing his renewed desire.

"Jeez, Derek." She laughed. "You don't quit, do you?"

"You wouldn't want me to." One large hand caressed the length of her torso and dipped between her legs. Two fingers parted her, while a third slipped across her clit. "Would you?"

Unable to speak, she shook her head. She widened her stance, shamelessly encouraging him to reach deeper.

"You're wet, baby."

"Yes..." Sable shivered as he thrust a long finger into her. And then another.

Derek licked the side of her neck. "Did it turn you on to suck me?" he breathed, pulling her tight against his cock and rubbing it against her. Even through his trousers, she could feel how hot he was.

"Hell, yes." Her hips moved in time with his fucking fingers. "Don't stop," she moaned, her eyes drifting shut.

"What if I'd rather fuck you with my tongue and return the favor?"

Melting at the thought of his mouth on her again, she hummed a sound of encouragement. His hands moved to her hips and urged her toward the bed. "Get comfortable, baby. We're going to be busy awhile."

"Leroy..." she murmured in faint protest.

"Leroy can find his own pussy to eat," Derek growled.

She knew that tone of his. It was his "*You're going to come until you can't move*" tone. Her body responded instantly. Her breasts became tender and full. Her cunt creamed with excitement and a hard shudder coursed the length of her body.

"You want it bad," he teased, his irises molten with lust as he watched her arrange herself on the bed.

"Oh yeah." She spread her legs wide and arched a brow. "You're really good at this, you know."

"I'm glad you approve." Derek crawled up from the foot of the bed, his wicked mouth curved in naughty smile. "Because I'm addicted to your taste."

"Umm..." She settled into the pillows as he licked her ankle and then moved higher.

The feel of his tongue surrounded by the warm circle of his lips and the occasional tip of a sharp fang made her back arch upward, her body tensing in heated anticipation. There was a tenderness to his touch and an affection in his eyes that aroused her just as surely as his carnal attentions.

"You're killing me."

"I know." He chuckled, his broad shoulders pressing against her legs. "But I owe you a good time for telling me the truth."

"Can't you pay me back a little higher?" she complained, her pussy spasming impatiently.

His eyes flared at the sight. He turned his head and gave her a teasing swipe. She whimpered.

"Yum, baby." He spread her open with his fingers and nuzzled his lips against her, his silky hair caressing her inner thighs. "You're drenched."

"Derek..."

"Hush," he soothed, his mouth settling softly around her and suckling gently. His tongue stroked in a lazy back-and-forth motion over her clit.

She cried out, her legs trembling at the light touch. He wasn't feasting so much as worshipping and it felt so good she couldn't breathe, every cell and nerve ending waiting for the orgasm that hovered just out of reach. His lips closed, pressed a soft kiss against her, and then opened again, licking her in a patient, loving rhythm. Her hands fisted in the bedspread, her hips lifting and falling in matching tempo.

"Ready to come?" he breathed, two fingers of his free hand slipping through her cream until they were seated deep inside her. They fucked her slowly, in and out.

Sable watched and licked her fangs. The sight of him finger-fucking her was so totally erotic so thought she might come just from that. He stared back at her, his smile tender. Then he lowered his head, suckled her clit, and brought her to a powerful climax. She called out his name, her cunt clutching franticly at his pumping fingers. Derek held her there, drawing out her pleasure until she sagged into the bed with a moan. Before she could catch her breath, he made her come again.

"I need you," she begged, as his fingers worked inside her.

"These aren't enough?" he asked, his voice husky. He licked the taste of her from his lips. "I was hoping to stay down here awhile."

Shaking her head rapidly, she gave a soft cry as he screwed three fingers into her pussy. "I-I want your cock."

Derek lowered his head and sucked her off again, using a deep, drawing pull on her clit while his fingers twisted slowly inside her. Crying out in pleasure, she nevertheless beat her fists into the mattress with frustration. Her hair was drenched with sweat, her cunt swollen and desperate.

"Your cock," she gasped, her mouth and throat dry.

He pulled his fingers out and licked them clean. "Ah, what every man loves to hear. His woman begging for his cock."

"Please." She managed a strained smile. "I'll make it good for you."

"Baby." He laughed, sliding from the bed and undressing. "There's no doubt about

that."

When his trousers fell from his hips and his cock was revealed, she quivered with excitement. He was as hard and thick as if he hadn't just come moments ago. The head was engorged and weeping, the shaft thick and lined with the pulsing veins she loved so much.

"Hurry," she urged, wanting nothing more than to feel that massive cock inside her.

He crawled up the bed and knelt between her open legs. Catching the underside of her knees, Derek draped her thighs over his and took aim, rubbing the broad tip against the creamy opening of her pussy. "Watch me take you."

She whimpered as that beautiful cock sank into her with a slow, slick glide.

"Damn, Sable," he gasped. "You're soaked and burning hot." Rolling his hips, he pumped the last few inches into her. With her hips tilted up to receive him, he pressed in deep. "Fuck, I wanted this to last."

"No! Hurry."

But he didn't listen, choosing instead to pull out, and then press back slowly, massaging her deep within. Her nails dug into his thighs as he took her with an achingly patient rhythm, the tight muscles of his abdomen rippling with every thrust. Fighting against his hands, she wrapped her legs around his waist and ground onto his cock, swirling her hips.

"Oh man..." Derek breathed, his shaft jerking inside her. "Keep doing that."

"Yes!" she hissed, feeling the first flutters of her coming orgasm. Leveraging her lower body by rising on her elbows, she rode him with every bit of strength she had, her legs tightening to plunge him deep and then releasing to slip off him. Up. Down. Up. Down.

And then she came. Hard. Clamping down on Derek's cock so hard he choked out a surprised sound before flooding her with a roar.

* * * * *

Derek wrapped a towel around his waist and said, "You sure you don't want to stay in?"

Sable laughed and left the bathroom. "Sorry, lover. I've got a mission to see to. And now I'm late."

"Alright, alright," he grumbled. "I need to feed anyway, and then I'll go back to the Starwing and look around. I have my suspicions about how those Federation ships found us." He tossed the towel in the corner and started to dress.

"You think they tracked us?" She turned to look at him.

"They must have. And for them to come after you like that...well, it was obviously a warning." He brushed the hair from his forehead. "You must be getting closer to the truth then they're comfortable with. If I can find a tracking device on the ship, maybe we can trace it."

"I don't just leave my ship open for tampering, you know."

"Never? Not once? How about when you caught Castle? You were locked up in your ship before I could catch you and I'm pretty damn fast."

"No, it was locked. I just had it programmed to open at my bio-signature, just in case my weapons drew attention from Concourse security."

"Then it must have been installed at headquarters."

Her eyes narrowed in thought. "If that's true, it would exonerate Leroy since he was already here on Rashier 6 at that time. Or," she said excitedly, "he could be working with someone else!"

She looked at Derek to see what he thought of her suspicion and found him watching her with rapt attention.

"You really like your job, don't you, baby?" he queried softly.

Sable chewed her bottom lip for a moment before answering. "I don't like finding out that someone we all trust, someone we believe is working toward the good of the

Council, is actually harming us. I hate that part of my job. But when I solve a case, when I know that someone who violated the oath I believe so strongly in has been removed from the force, I love it."

Derek kissed her, long and deep, then swatted her on the butt. "Get dressed. And call for me if you need any help."

He headed toward the door. He seemed so happy and relieved that she'd told him the truth about herself, she wished she'd trusted him sooner. She shuddered to think of how different the outcome would have been had he not been persistent and stowed away on her ship. She might have lost him.

"I don't know how to use my calling yet," she called after him.

"You're stronger than you realize. Just think about me and I'll hear you. I promise." With a rakish wink, Derek left.

Chapter Five

Derek lay on his back and stared up at the tracking device in confused anger. He recognized the design and it was Council, not Federation. Sable was being tracked by their own people. But why?

With a curse, he removed the offending piece of technology, ripped off the serial number for future use and easily crushed the rest of the tracker in his hand. What the hell was going on?

He dissipated into mist and remerged in the captain's chair. There was no way in hell he was going to wait another two years to court Sable like he wanted. He'd lived several hundred years and he knew a lot of things could happen in just two. He wasn't willing to risk losing her or the wonderful feelings she inspired in him. He sure as hell wasn't going to sneak around, trying to find the time to squeeze in a little lovemaking. He'd never get enough of her that way.

Resting his head against the headrest, Derek closed his eyes and relished the fullness in his belly. It'd been as easy as usual to find a meal. In the past, he'd enjoyed the triple impalement of his cock and fangs in an eager woman who he then gifted with a mind-blowing orgasm for her donation.

Tonight though he'd only fed. He'd given his meal her orgasm with his calling and nothing more. Sable had completely drained him with her wicked mouth earlier, but even if he hadn't been sated, he still wouldn't have had the heart to fuck another woman. He'd asked Sable to remain faithful to him and for the first time in his life, he had every intention of being faithful in return.

She was his perfect counterpart, his equal. They were so alike in so many ways their jobs, their vampirism, their sexual appetite. Whoever said opposites attract was an idiot. He much preferred a woman who could understand him without asking and know what he needed before he did.

Now he just had to keep her safe and get her through her assignment in one piece.

As his eyes remained closed, he felt a brush of feeling across his mind. He concentrated on it and tried to amplify it. Suddenly, he sat upright in the chair. It was Sable. Her thoughts were in a jumble, her pulse was racing and her breathing was erratic. He could sense something dark, insidious and possessive curling through her mind.

Moving too fast to be seen by human eyes, Derek flew out of the Starwing and was on his way to the RetroBall.

* * * * *

Sable stood motionless, her mind urging her to flee while her body refused to heed its dictates. She watched in stunned horror as Marius Drake approached her, his lips curved in a predatory grin of anticipation. Why the hell did he keep popping up in her life at the most inopportune times?

The expansive hotel ballroom was well lit, as befitted the RetroBall and Sable fought off the headache brought on by the unaccustomed bright lights. Multicolored streamers draped across the ceiling, and guests wore odd hats and blew on bizarresounding horns, all of which had her gritting her teeth.

She'd been searching the sea of guests for a glimpse of Jeffrey Leroy, when an insistent prodding in her thoughts had drawn her attention to Marius. He remained as arrogantly proud of bearing as always, his presence wordlessly conveying his power – a power it had taken her years to learn to resist. Still, Sable felt a deep fear and foreboding. She remained so untutored in the ways of vampires. She knew nothing about what rights Marius held over her.

Sable, my love, he drawled in her thoughts. What an unexpected pleasure to see you again.

She eyed the handsome blond man who came to a halt in front her. Her pulse

kicked into overdrive, and her skin grew cold and clammy. "Marius," she returned in an icy tone, as she ruthlessly shoved him from her mind. "What are you doing here?"

He laughed and the bitterness in the sound was harsh on her nerves. "You've gotten stronger. It took you no time at all to evict me from your thoughts. Have you missed me, my sweet novice? Are you tired yet of chasing the sewage of the universe? I am more than ready to have you come home."

"Never going to happen," she assured him. "I much prefer having my own thoughts and feelings. I enjoy living my own life."

Deep green eyes caressed her face with emotionless possession. "Your life was my gift to you. You would have been dead years ago had I not infected you with the virus."

"Your gift came with too many restrictions," she snapped, looking away as she searched the crowd for Leroy. She'd felt beholden to him for so long. Even now, she felt guilty for leaving him. "Go away, Marius. I'm not here for you."

"You live for me!" he hissed furiously. He gripped her elbow in what would have been a bone-snapping vise to a human. "You knew what I asked of you. I never deceived you. And you agreed to the terms."

Her head whipped toward his. "Bullshit. I was young, barely a woman, and foolishly infatuated with a handsome man who promised me the world and an eternity of his love. But you don't love anyone or anything besides yourself. You don't want *me*. You want a puppet you can control. I was *alive* before I met you. You didn't create me."

"I love you," he growled as he dragged her toward the crowded dance floor. "I've always loved you."

Sable attempted to shake off his grip, but couldn't. "See what I mean, Marius? You just do whatever the hell you please without regard to my feelings. If you truly loved me, you would see how miserable you make me and try to change it. Instead, you just want to change me."

Pulling her into his arms, Marius began to twirl her around to the ancient music he'd often enjoyed while they were together. He'd taught her how to dance, how to eat,

how to have sex. He'd been grooming her to take her place at his side in the highest echelon of universe politics and prestige. But she had never wanted any of it. She'd only wanted him. But he was, and always would be, completely self-absorbed and unavailable. Nothing like Derek, who offered himself so freely and wanted her just the way she was.

Marius dipped her and kept her bent over his arm. His head lowered and he licked along her throat while taking a deep breath of her scent. Suddenly, he faltered, nearly dropping her. He yanked her upright abruptly, his emerald gaze shooting sparks in his fury. "You reek of another man. *Another vampire*," he spat. "You swore you didn't want to be with a vamp."

"No," she corrected smoothly as she stepped out of his now lax embrace. "I swore I didn't want to be with *you*." She jumped in surprise as a strong arm encircled her waist.

"Is there a problem here, baby?" Derek asked in a casual tone that didn't hide the possessiveness.

Sable glanced at him with relief. He had changed his clothes and stood at her side in an antique black-and-white ensemble that she thought was called a "tuxedo". He had never looked as seductively handsome.

She curled into his side. "Not anymore," she assured him.

"Introduce me to your plaything, Sable," Marius growled.

"Derek, darling," she cooed, deliberately goading the bristling blond man. "Meet Marius. Marius, this is Derek."

Marius extended his hand. "I am Sable's Master," he said with a satisfied smirk, watching with glee as his rival stiffened at the news.

But Derek recovered swiftly and smiled a purely male smile. "Well then, I must thank you. Your infection of Sable allowed her to live long enough to become my mate." He bowed. "I am in your debt."

"She's not your mate, so enjoy her while you can," Marius snapped. His hands

clenched into fists. "She won't be able to avoid my calling forever." He looked at Sable. "Have a care, love. For yourself and your toy."

Sable took a quick step toward him, the murderous expression on her face causing the Master vampire to take a step back. "Don't threaten me and don't threaten Derek. Trust me, you won't like the way I handle threats."

Derek grabbed Sable around the waist and pulled her backward. He bared his fangs in a territorial warning as Marius stepped toward them. The blond man wisely backed down—for the moment. Derek knew he would have deal with Sable's past eventually, but tonight was not the time and the RetroBall was not the place.

Once they had retreated a safe distance away, he set Sable down and linked his fingers with hers, dragging her from the room. "Have you lost your damn mind?" he muttered.

"You heard him," she said crossly. "He was threatening us, the slimy bastard! He's lucky I didn't rip out his balls."

Derek looked at her over his shoulder and winced. "Ouch. Remind me not to get on your bad side."

She grinned. "Don't get on my bad side."

"Point taken," he said dryly, then he turned serious. "You leave Marius Drake to me. You've got guts, baby, but you're a novice and you're *his* novice. You don't have enough control yet to be tangling with a Master."

"You're a Master," she pointed out. "I think I'm pretty good at tangling with you."

He stopped and pulled her to him, lowering his lips to hers. He kissed her long and hard, with one hand at her waist and the other at her breast. His thumb stroked across her nipple until it peaked, eager for more. Instantly hot for him, she moaned into his mouth, heedless of the crush of partygoers around them.

"You don't want to tangle with him like you do with me," he murmured.

Breathless, she stared into his intent face and got lost in the swirling desire she saw

reflected in his eyes. "No, I don't."

"No, you don't." He straightened and pulled her toward the exit. "I'm far older than Marius Drake. There are very few vamps who are as old as I am, so leave the heavy lifting to me."

She tugged on his hand, digging in her heels. "Okay. Slow down. I can't leave yet. I haven't found Agent Leroy."

"I saw him leaving on my way in to claim you."

"What?" Sable's shoulders slumped in disappointment. "Shit, we'll never find him now."

"Yes, we will," Derek assured her.

"Have you got a tracking device on him or something?"

Derek snorted. "Listen. I did find a tracking device on your ship. And it's not a Fed design. It's Council."

"What the fuck?" Sable stumbled to a halt, gaping at the back of his head.

"Yeah." He tugged her along again. "My thoughts exactly. When we get through with Leroy, we'll see if the serial number is registered somewhere."

"Wow," she breathed, her stomach roiling. "I don't know what to think about that."

"Don't think about it now," he soothed. "I'll take care of you, Sable. Don't worry about that."

"This has been a really trying day, Derek. Look at everything that's happened."

"You've got me, so it can't be all bad." He tossed her a careless smile over his shoulder. "And I overheard Leroy getting directions from the front desk. I know just where he is."

"Getting you is worth all this shit," she said softly, profoundly affected by that smile.

He stepped out into the lobby and headed for the elevators. "We'll go to our rooms and change out of these ridiculous clothes. Then we'll see what he's up to."

"I happen to think you look very tasty in those clothes."

His mouth curved with sardonic amusement. "I have to wonder at your taste, Sable. You liked me in my uniform too."

"I like you best naked," she purred.

The elevator doors slid shut and he engulfed her in a warm embrace. "This crap with Leroy better be over quick," he groaned, his hands caressing the length of her spine. "Yours is the only body I'm interested in chasing right now."

* * * * *

Derek kept his large form tucked closely against the wall of the small motel on the outskirts of town. Music wafted across the still night air as various room occupants held impromptu parties. Out here, away from the city, the night was darker and the sounds of transports less intrusive. Stars shimmered in the sky above, as did the moon, which hung low and full.

It was a night made for lovers.

Or hunters.

He glanced back at Sable. She moved on silent feet behind him, her hand twitching restlessly by the hilt of her lasersword, which was strapped to the side of her lithe thigh. She wore tight black trousers and a tighter black tank top, her erect nipples easily delineated through the thin fabric. As a slight breeze blew Sable's luscious scent to him, his cock swelled with an unwanted erection.

He was going to throttle Jeff.

Glancing forward again, Derek inched his way along the dimly lit outside corridor. He'd forgotten to mention to Sable what he'd discovered about Marius Drake accessing, and possibly deleting, her records. At the time, he'd been too grateful that the other man hadn't recognized him to remember to tell her.

In any case, that definitely hadn't been their last meeting.

The President was obviously not in agreement with Sable that their relationship was over. Derek intended to do something about that. Somehow, he would convince the other Master that Sable was now off-limits and by her own choice.

As they reached the motel room door that shielded Leroy from their prying eyes, he slowed and placed a finger over his lips. Sable stepped past him and took a position on the other side of the portal. She cocked her head and listened. Her nostrils flared and her eyes widened.

He's fucking someone! she mouthed.

Derek knew his face had to be as shocked as Sable's. Jeff was married for Christ's sake and had always seemed devoted to his wife who even now lay dying. Raising his brows, Derek shrugged sheepishly.

Sable snorted with disgust and walked away.

He followed. "Damn, I'm going to beat Jeff within an inch of life when he gets out of there."

"For cheating on his wife?"

"No, for doing what we would be doing, if we weren't out here chasing him down."

She laughed and Derek softened his posture. Only a few days ago she'd been openly hostile toward him. Now they shared a growing connection that he was beginning to value greatly. "Sable?"

"Yeah?" She turned those stunning blue eyes toward him.

"If I hadn't trapped you on my ship a couple of days ago, would you have come after me when your mission was over?"

She scratched the back of her head. "Probably not."

"Why not?" He was surprised that she'd answered without hesitation. "You said you were interested in me from the beginning, that you're crazy about me."

"I was. I am." She crossed her arms under her chest. "But you're an arrogant

bastard. I had my share of inflated egos with Marius. And your reputation precedes you. You never stick with the same woman for long. My track record with men isn't very good, as you witnessed tonight. I doubt I would have thought you were worth the risk."

"I'm not arrogant," he protested.

Raising a brow, she said nothing. Which said a lot.

"And now?" he prodded. "Do you consider me a good risk now?"

She met his gaze and her ripe lips pursed in thought. Finally, she said, "The jury's still out on that one. You'll have to prove it to me, I guess."

"And how do I do that?"

"Stick around, Derek," she said quietly. "Just stick around."

He opened his mouth to speak, but she shook her head. "Do me a favor, okay? I'm beginning to suspect your friend Leroy is doing nothing more criminal than adultery. I'm not blowing my cover for that. Will you question him when he comes out? If my suspicions are correct, it will prevent the waste of two years of work."

"No problem," he agreed. "I'll come up with a good reason for being here."

"Good, I've got something to take care of." She strode down the hall.

You're just going to leave me here? he called after her in surprise.

"Sure," she tossed over her shoulder. "I trust you, Derek."

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Sable crossed the street and entered the nearby telecomm café. She'd checked in with her superior earlier that day, but already so much had happened since then. She needed to know where IAB wanted her to go from here. Slipping into a privacy booth, she closed the door and inserted her identi-card. She was pulling on the headphones and mouthpiece to further safeguard her conversation, when Captain Donnie appeared.

"Good evening, Captain."

The jovial Donnie smiled good-naturedly. "It's barely morning here, Taylor. What have you got?"

"Another all-nighter? How does your wife put up with you?" She smiled at his grimace. "I'm not positive yet, but I'm fairly certain we can rule out Leroy."

The captain sat back in his chair and frowned. "Another agent cleared. This case has me stumped."

"Yeah, me too, but we must be getting close. Someone at the STF field office placed a tracking device on my ship yesterday."

"You told me about the tracker earlier, but you didn't tell me it was implanted at headquarters."

"I didn't know until a few minutes ago. The device found on my ship was a Council design."

"But it was the Fed that attacked you."

"Exactly. Can you imagine the ramifications if the Federation has purchased the codes to our trackers and have access to our tracking information? They could locate any of our ships, at any time. We'd be sitting ducks."

"Shit, Taylor." Donnie shook his head. "If that's true, this is a lot bigger than we thought. I'm going to assign someone to assist you in investigating the remaining agents in that field office. I don't want to step on your toes, but it would make the work go twice as fast."

Sable nodded and tried to hide her relief. If she'd been presented with that idea yesterday, she'd have been mad as hell. Today, however, she realized she was in over her head. She was proud, sure. But she wasn't stupid. "Sure, Captain. I'm all for wrapping this up as soon as possible."

"Good. Glad you're not getting territorial about this." Donnie arched a brow. "Really isn't like you to concede so easily about a case that you've worked your ass off for."

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She shrugged and thought of Derek. He'd taken a leave of absence for her and she longed to do the same for him. "I'm tired, boss. I could use a little time away."

"Soon, Taylor," he agreed. "I'll give you three months leave when this is over."

"Great. Divide the remaining agents and leave a list of my assignments in the database for me to check in the morning." She stretched and yawned. "I haven't slept in days. I'm going back to my hotel to crash."

The captain nodded sympathetically. "You do that. You look tired and for a vamp, that's saying something."

* * * * *

Sable woke slowly. Opening her eyes, she could tell by the dim light creeping in around the blackout drapes that it had to be late afternoon. She stretched, grinning as her leg brushed along Derek's thigh. He slept like most vamps did, like the dead, his heavily muscled torso rising and falling with the measured breaths of deep sleep.

She brushed a hand along the rippled planes of his stomach and smiled as he groaned softly, the bed linens starting to rise with his erection. She stroked the heated length of him through the thin sheet, feeling him swell to rock hardness with a few deft squeezes of her hand.

Watching Derek as she built his desire, Sable took in the masculine beauty of his features – the full, sensual curve of his lips, the strong line of his jaw, the bold sweep of his raven brows. Just watching him so innocent and boyish in repose made her heart ache for him. He was physically beautiful, but also emotionally supportive, something she truly had never expected from him. The last two years she'd spent watching him and wishing she could have him, she'd never allowed herself to picture beyond the heartache she'd thought he would bring.

She grew wet and hot as her hands drifted with feather lightness over his satiny skin and the light matting of hair on his chest. She wanted him. Wanted to always wake to the sight of him, gorgeous and tousled and eagerly receptive to her sexual advances.

She pushed aside the sheet and licked her lips at the sight of his massive cock, fully engorged and pointing straight in the air.

As the cool air of the room drifted over his skin, Derek turned instinctively toward her warmth. Sable tossed her leg over his hip and wiggled until the hot head of his erection pressed at the creamy opening of her cunt. He'd taken her often during those two days on his Starwing. More than once, she'd woken up to the awareness of her body tensing in orgasm, discovering Derek's tongue or cock thrusting deep inside her.

It was time to pay him back.

She closed her eyes and, with a downward thrust of her hips, impaled herself on him with a tortured moan of pleasure. Shivering as needles of sensation swept over her skin and hardened her nipples, Sable set her hands on his broad shoulders and buried her face against his chest. She breathed him in, absorbing the luscious scent that drove her to distraction and hoped with all her heart that they could make a relationship work.

Unbearably aroused, she ground downward, massaging her clit with his pelvic bone. Her face rested just inches away from Derek's and when she opened her eyes, she found herself staring into his shocked and passion-heavy gaze.

"Damn, baby," he murmured in a sleep-raspy voice, sparkling erect fangs peeping out as he spoke. "A guy could get used to waking up like this."

Sable rolled him gently onto his back, straddling his lean hips and forcing him deeper into her core. "Yeah? Well, a girl could get used to waking a guy up like this." She raised slightly, the heavy weight of his cock slipping wetly from her, then she slid down around him again, gasping at the feel of his thickness boring deep.

Derek gripped the tops of her thighs, his expression intense. "You've got a deal."

He lifted her and then thrust his hips upward to meet her downward drive. They both groaned.

She began to ride him with the same slow strokes that he liked to use on her. Torturous stokes that drove them both insane. Again and again, she rode his cock until

she couldn't tell where he ended and she began. Her back arched, her head fell forward and her fangs descended. With a quick hiss of warning, she bit into his throat.

Rich and heady, Derek's blood was a nearly intoxicating delight. She reached out to his mind, feeling for the connection in the red haze of her overwhelming desire. She writhed over his body, her breasts rubbing across his chest, her stomach sticking to his with their mingled sweat, her arms wrapped around his shoulders as she held on to his bucking body with all of her strength. His tunneling cock stretched her deliciously and his warm hands firmly guided her hips while his deep voice purred encouragement in her ear. And then he was there, in her mind.

Sable, he growled. So damn good. Nothing has ever felt this good.

She sobbed almost desperately against his throat. It wasn't what he said, but what he felt, her mind flooding with his affection and need. Her entire body began to contract in anticipation of her orgasm and he urged her to a faster pace.

I'm here, baby. I'm right here inside you.

She'd never experienced this closeness with anyone, this need to merge completely with another individual. Derek knew what she needed and he was with her, everywhere. Over her, under her, around her, inside her.

Her body began to shake and she released his neck, pounding her hips onto his. The orgasm swept her away, hard and fierce, like Derek, who rolled her beneath him and fucked her like a beast, pumping his cock through the grasping spasms of her climax.

Sable held onto sanity by a thread as he built another sweeping tide of pleasure in her veins. Powerful and insistent, their need for each other would not be denied.

Wrapping her legs around his hips, she felt his steely buttocks clench and release against her calves as he propelled himself so deeply into her body that she felt him in her throat. She screamed as another orgasm claimed her.

Her eyes flew open in astonished pleasure and she met his gaze-dark and possessive and hot with passion. His face was flushed and sweat dripped from his forehead to splatter onto her skin. His fangs glistened in the semi-darkness and she

arched her neck to him, wanting to gift him as he'd gifted her. It had ceased to be just sex and they both knew it. Better yet, they both welcomed the added intimacy.

As he pierced her skin, she felt his shaft swell and then jerk inside her, his scorching come spurting out in powerful jets that brought her to the brink of pleasure and then shoved her over. Her back arched into his chest, her blood poured freely into his seductively sucking mouth, her pussy gripped his spending cock in a fist of silk. And in her heart, she felt Derek demanding entry.

She opened the door and let him in.

Chapter Six

Derek closed the tiny punctures he'd left in Sable's throat with reverent laps of his tongue and willed his heart to slow its fevered thumping. Making love with her just got better and better. He could feel the power her touch gave him flowering in his body. He rolled to his side, taking her with him, relishing the feel of their sweat-slicked skin stuck together.

I like the feeling too.

Derek looked down at Sable in surprised pride and awe.

She grinned at him. I love the way you smell after sex. You smell like me – power and pure male vampire. It's very yummy.

He gifted her with an exuberant kiss. "You're calling me."

She nodded shyly. "Every time you touch me, I grow stronger. I've been feeling your strength building within me since the first time we made love."

He nodded. "It's the same for me."

"What does it mean?" Her smooth brow was marred by a tiny frown. "Is this normal? I never felt like this with Marius."

Derek caressed the length of her spine. "I don't know what it is. But I like it."

"Me too." Her fingers drew invisible drawings on his chest. "So what happened after I left last night?"

He knew she was asking about Jeffrey Leroy. "You were right. Jeff is getting a little piece of action on the side."

Sable pinched his nipple, renewing the desire within him. He'd never been so physically attuned to a woman before. It was unnerving, in more ways than one.

"Where did you get that tuxedo you wore last night?"

"Someone reminded me yesterday that it was Retro-bration here on Rashier 6. I picked that costume up at a shop in town. Just in case." He smiled with lascivious intent. "You looked stunning last night in the slinky dress you wore. We'll have to keep that around for some off-duty use."

She tweaked his nipple again and blood rushed to his groin. "We may get that downtime you wanted a little earlier than I anticipated."

He shoved a pillow under his head to look into her eyes. "How so?"

"I spoke with my captain last night. He's going to assign another agent to partner with me on this case. He'll divide the remaining agents from your field office between us and hopefully, we'll get done twice as fast."

"While the news is good to my ears, I want to know how you feel about that." He brushed his fingertips along the side of her face. "I wouldn't think you'd like having to share a case you worked so hard on."

She gave a little shrug that strove to be nonchalant and almost succeeded. "I'm okay with it. Work doesn't hold the same appeal that it used to. Maybe I'm just a little burnt out."

Or maybe I'd rather be with you.

Derek kept his face impassive as her thought entered his head as clearly as if she'd spoken it. She was still so new to calling, she didn't know how to shield herself yet. And he didn't mind. His heart leapt at the simple declaration and he held her tighter. "So what's the plan for this evening, baby?"

"Tonight we leave Rashier 6." She rested her chin on his chest. "How much time did you take off from work? Do you need to go back yet?" *Please say no.*

As he felt the twinge of sadness that colored her thoughts, he kissed the tip of her nose. She still had doubts about his interest in her. He, however, no longer had any. "I have all the time in the world. It's only been a couple of days. I can stay with you."

"A couple of days. Is that all? I feel like I've known you forever."

"It's been a week since I first took you to my ship, but we had two years of foreplay before that."

Most people would consider them to be strangers, but Derek knew Sable from the inside out. They were connected so completely, he could sense her thoughts and emotions.

"Umm, foreplay," she purred.

"Not that you gave me a chance for any of that this morning." His hands drifted to the tempting curve of her ass. He pressed her into his growing erection.

"You loved it." Her mouth curved in a provoking smile. *Bet you'd love me to do it again too.*

"I'd love for you to do it again." He bit the lobe of her ear and hid his smile.

She wiggled her hips into position and pushed down onto his thick cock easily, her passage lubricated with her cream and his come. He watched her eyes darken as he filled her. Then her voice came husky and warm.

"Derek, darling, you read my mind."

* * * * *

Sable hung the last of Derek's new clothes next to hers in the closet of her quarters on the Starwing. In a way, it was comforting to see his belongings nestled so intimately with hers. In another way, it was like an invasion. He was merging himself into her life so completely, she wondered if it would ever be the same when he left.

Maybe he won't leave, whispered a little flare of hope. But she squelched the thought. It wasn't a good idea to get her hopes up so soon. Everything was still too new.

Sighing, she exited her ship through the cargo door and searched the bustling crowds of passengers for Derek.

"Hello, Sable love."

She stiffened at the familiar voice and turned. Marius stood just inches away at the

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end of the ramp. Wary, she rose up on her tiptoes and glanced over his shoulder, searching for Derek.

"Your toy is still in the concourse," he assured her.

"What do you want, Marius?" she asked coldly.

He grinned and the light in his emerald eyes chilled her to the bone. "You need to ask yourself what you want – do you want to keep your boyfriend? Or do you care enough for him to let him go?"

Sable felt her stomach tighten into a knot of dread. They'd spent decades together and she knew Marius so well. He wouldn't be such a successful politician if he didn't know how to play dirty. "What are you talking about?"

"Your friend."

"What have you done?"

Marius shrugged, his shoulder-length blond hair drifting around his handsome face. "Nothing. Yet. The choice is yours to make."

How had she ever imagined that she loved this man? "Let's not speak in riddles. Tell me what you want and how much I'll have to bleed to give it to you."

He stepped closer, curling his palm around her cheek. "If you want to stay with Atkinson, I can't stop you, but I can get you drummed off the Force. And I will."

She offered a grim smile. "Go ahead and try it. I've already proven myself to be an excellent agent. You'll have a hell of a time proving otherwise."

"I don't need to prove otherwise. You're a vamp. Since the popular opinion right now says that a predator shouldn't be guarding the prey, it won't take much to get you pensioned."

Knocking his hand away, she snapped, "Do your worst, then. But stay the hell out of my life afterwards."

"If you don't care about yourself, do you care about Atkinson?" His lips hardened into a harsh line. "I think he appreciates his job a little more than you do. Do you have

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any idea what he went through to get into the force? The academy was full when he applied and Captain Hoff had already begun his lobbying to keep vamps out. Atkinson slipped in when I got you in."

"You what?" Her face drained of color.

"Did you really think you got in on your own merit?" he asked softly. "Oh, you did well in the academy and Captain Donnie wanted you for IAB, but you should've gone through years on patrol with a partner and then more at a desk on the Force before moving into Internal Affairs. But I knew how badly you wanted the job and I pulled a couple of strings. You think I don't care for you, Sable, but I do. I would do anything to see you happy."

Sable recoiled, her mind in a near daze. *How long had Marius been watching her?* "If you truly wanted me to be happy, you'd let me have Derek." She lifted her gaze to meet his. "I love him."

Marius shook his head. "He's not for you. Can't you see that? He won't stay faithful to you or cherish you like I will. He's never been a one-woman kind of man and he never will be."

"Maybe you're wrong," she whispered.

"Are you willing to take that chance?" he asked, exploiting her greatest fear — losing Derek. "You've seen how much he loves his job," he pressed. "Atkinson may not care at first if he's kicked out of the STF, but eventually he'll resent you. And you'll lose him anyway. I'm a very powerful man, Sable, and I'll do whatever is necessary to keep you from being hurt."

Marius would follow through on his threat, she had no doubt. "What do you want in return for leaving him alone?"

"Break it off with him. Now. And come back to me. I want you back in my house, back in my bed. If you do that, not only will I leave him alone, I'll help him get promoted."

She snorted. "I won't share your bed. You make me sick."

"But you'll come home?" he asked with obvious excitement.

"It's not home to me anymore, Marius. I'll have my own room and I want it in writing that you'll assist Derek with his career. You give me those assurances and I'll move back in." He'd lose interest eventually. She'd make sure of it. In the meantime, it wasn't fair to Derek to drag him into her mistakes. She had to protect him and she would. Whatever the cost.

Marius grinned with triumph. "Of course," he agreed in the soothing tone of voice one would use with a petulant child. "I don't want you unwilling. I'll change your mind, love. You'll see. You'll forget about Atkinson and remember how much you love me, how right we are together. You're mine, Sable, and soon you'll remember that. You'll ask me back into your bed. And I can wait until you're ready."

Her lips curled with distaste. "You'll be waiting forever."

He bent his head low and kissed her cheek. "It's a lucky thing we're vampires then. I have forever to wait."

* * * * *

Derek gave an appreciative whistle as he stepped aboard Sable's Starwing. She'd dimmed the lights in the main cabin and all the adjoining rooms. Scented candles were everywhere, permeating the air with a sultry scent. Through it he could smell his woman, his mate. Her seductive call lured him in and he barely remembered to close the cargo door in his haste to find her.

As he stepped into the cockpit, his heart stopped. Sable stood with her back to him, her lithe body draped with a crimson robe. She knew he was there, he could sense her instant arousal and emotional pleasure in his proximity, but she didn't turn around.

"Remove your clothes and go lay on the bed," she ordered in a husky murmur. "I'm just finishing programming the coordinates to headquarters and then I'm going to fuck you all the way home."

His cock hardened to bursting immediately. Vamps were sensual creatures by

nature, but never had he experienced this kind of instant physical response before.

"Damn, baby," he growled, stepping toward her. Breathing her lush scent deep into his lungs, he cupped the cheeks of her ass and ground his erection in the cleft between. "You can drive me crazy with just a few words."

She punched a few more buttons and then turned to face him. "That's not all I can do to drive you crazy." She dropped to her knees, hitting the catch of his bio-suit on the way down.

Eager to help, he shrugged out of the sleeves with a haste that made them both laugh. He stared down at her, admiring the way the deep crimson material looked against her pale skin and dark hair. Her luscious lips curved in a wicked smile and then her tongue darted out, just catching the tip of erection.

"Baby," he growled, shuddered from that simple, tiny contact. Then his head fell back on a groan as Sable sucked his aching cock into her hot mouth.

Damn, she was good at giving head. She sucked him off like she starving for him, her greedy mouth tugging in an erotic rhythm that made him want to come. Right. This. Minute. And she moaned as she did it, telling him that she loved the act as much as he did. The vibrations of the sound traveled through his cock, into his balls, making his knees go weak.

Soft slurping sounds filled the cockpit. It was so fucking raw and base, the sight of her on her knees, her lips stretched wide to accommodate his thickness. She couldn't take him all, not even half, but he liked that. It turned him on to see how hard he was, to see his cock shiny with her saliva and his pre-come, which leaked profusely, because he was so aroused. He felt her tongue stroke rapidly over the veins of his shaft and then tease the tender spot just behind the head, and he tangled his fingers in her silky hair to guide her motions. He began to thrust his hips, fucking her mouth, loving how erotic it looked to take her this way.

Her hands left his ass and tugged open her robe, her long fingers grasping her erect nipples and squeezing. Rolling. She moaned again and his cock swelled until he felt the

pressure of her fangs on either side. Swiveling his hips, he deliberately scraped his skin against the tip, hissing at the slight pain, but gasping a moment later as that faint taste of his blood drove her crazy. Sable began to suck him so hard he almost thought she could suck the come right out of him.

Too far gone with lust to control himself, Derek thrust deep, the head of his cock dipping into the tight clasp of her throat. *Oh, fuck, it was good*. He felt his balls tighten up and he spread his legs to anchor himself more firmly to the deck.

One of Sable's hands left her breast and slipped between her legs. He growled as her lithe body shivered with pleasure.

"Fuck yourself," he ordered hoarsely, knowing that if she did, he'd come harder than he ever had in his life.

Sable whimpered and widened her kneeling stance, dropping her other hand between her thighs. One finger thrust straight up into her cunt. Derek heard the wetness that greeted her and knew she was creaming for his cock. He gripped her head tightly and fucked her mouth like a man possessed. He felt the need building, his balls aching, his cock swelling. And then she took the finger out of her pussy, reached under his drawn-up balls and, using her own come for lubrication, slipped her finger deep into his ass. He shouted as he came, his semen pumping out of him, coating the back of her throat. Over and over his cock jerked, his vision going black as she fucked his ass with her finger.

She moaned, sucking him so hard, trying to drain him. When he swayed, she pulled out of him and supported his hips with the tight clasp of her hands.

Derek pulled her head away from him roughly, still jetting his come and he lifted her up and impaled her in one brutal thrust. As soon as her heated cunt wrapped around him, Sable stiffened in orgasm.

He watched her, startled and awed as the spasms of her climax sucked his cock just as powerfully as her mouth had. The sex was amazing, fantastic, but it faded in significance compared to the way she looked at him. *Like she loved him*.

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Driven by a frenzy of adoration and lust, he lifted her body until just the tip of his dick speared her creamy opening and then he thrust her down onto him. Over and over he lifted and impaled her, claiming her, marking her, flooding her with his come.

She writhed on his cock and in his hands, screaming his name and he showed her no mercy, pounding her onto his erection until she came again. And still he wouldn't stop fucking her.

His mind reached out to hers and she let him in. This time, she let him almost completely and he wrapped her in his sensual call. He felt the immediate effect it had on her, her body melting in his hands, her silken pussy gripping him like a vise. And he felt something else, something dark and very desperate, as if she were pulling away or hiding something. It wasn't something he could take, not when he was lost in her, totally crazed for her.

Keep coming, he urged, determined to get past those last shields. *That's it, baby. Damn, that's so good... Squeeze my cock with that tight cunt.*

And she did, endlessly, her juices dripping down his straining thighs, her throat closed on a scream.

Derek kept her under his spell, refusing to spend himself again even though her pussy worked greedily to milk him. He kept his dick hard and kept pleasuring her with it, because her satisfaction was paramount, more important than his own.

In the part of his mind that still worked, he thought if he could sate her enough, she'd have to admit how she felt. He'd make her admit it.

She was so beautiful in his arms, her black hair damp with sweat, her pale skin flushed with passion, her lips swollen and shiny with his come, her lithe body impaled on his own. He'd never felt like this in his life—filled with his lover in his mind, his body, his soul, his heart.

Derek's eyes widened.

His heart.

He *loved* Sable.

Joy, fierce and wild and sweet, welled within him and he longed to share it with her. *I love you*, he declared with every fiber of his being. *Baby*, *I love you so much*.

And deep inside her, he felt something die.

Chapter Seven

Sable heard Derek's passionate declaration and felt his love shining brightly in her mind and in her soul. Her love for him rose in a fierce tide, threatening to overflow and wash them both away. But she bottled it up, hiding it, knowing that if Derek were to sense the depth of her affection, he would never let her go.

And he had to let her go.

Despite how much she wished they could be together now, she wouldn't ruin his life for her own selfish desires. It would be wrong to take his love and hurt him with it, and that's just what would happen if she didn't take care of Marius now.

Having seen Derek in action over the last two years, she knew he was good at his job and that he loved it. Maybe more than he loved her. She was new in his life and he was used to living without her. She'd rather leave with him loving her, than lose him to a festering resentment in his heart because she'd cost him a livelihood that meant so much to him.

But for tonight he was hers and she would love his body until morning and his soul until forever, even though he would never know it.

She wrapped her arms around him and suckled the side of his throat, not biting or feeding, just loving. He released her slowly, allowing her legs to touch the cold metal floor. She could feel the full, heavy prod of his arousal brush against her hip and realized that he hadn't come again. Her eyes lifted to his and her breath caught in her throat at the love she saw shining there. "Derek?" she queried, confused.

He kissed her forehead with such tenderness she wanted to cry. "I'm saving it for you, baby," he told her as he led her, fingers linked, into the bedroom. "I intend to pleasure you all night."

"You always do."

Lifting her feet from the floor, Derek set her on the bed. Sable scrambled to her knees. As much as she wanted to love him, to hold him with tenderness and speak her heart, she couldn't. In fact, it was best if she started to push him away now, so when she left tomorrow, it would not seem such a big surprise.

"I love you." He cupped her face and kissed her long and slow. "I love everything about you."

Her heart tightened painfully and she covered his mouth with her fingertips. "Please."

"Please, what?"

"Don't say that."

Derek frowned as he looked at her. He searched her face, his silver gaze too perceptive. "Why not?"

She felt him in her mind, probing, seeking. "It's too soon," she blurted out, pushing him from her thoughts. "You don't know how you feel. And it makes me...uncomfortable."

His features gave away none of his thoughts, but she felt what he did and knew she'd hurt him. She wanted to cry, to scream, to confess. Instead, she shifted nervously. "After Marius, I just don't -"

"Hush," he soothed, the tense line of his jaw softening. "It's okay. I can wait however long it takes for you to believe in me."

Eyes burning with unshed tears, she gripped his swollen cock and stroked, relief flooding her when she felt his focus alter. A girl could always distract her man with sex. "I want you again," she murmured, moving into position on her hands and knees. She looked over her shoulder at him. "Now."

Derek stood behind her, the touch of his hands on her hips sending his thoughts and feelings pouring into her. He kissed upward along the length of her spine, the depth of his feeling covering her in a safe, warm blanket. "You have me," he said softly

and then he slipped his cock into her in one slow glide.

She gasped and arched her back, heat immediately flaring across her skin, flushing her. His large body came over hers, his hands over hers, his body caging her to the bed. His hips moved his cock in shallow massaging strokes. The connection between them deepened, until she felt echoes of what he felt—the tight clasp of her swollen tissues, the liquid heat of her cream.

"Wow," he breathed, his cheek resting against her shoulder. "Feel that?"

"Yes..."

"I want to feel everything with you."

Sable closed her eyes, knowing there wasn't time to share everything. They only had a few hours left.

Derek rose up, his hands caressing her quivering thighs, and then he rubbed a thumb along the tight rosette. "Would you let me take you here?" he rasped. "I'd love to feel that."

Swallowing hard and unable to speak, she nodded, clenching tight around him as he swelled inside her. He continued that gentle, teasing rubbing and she shivered at the sensation.

"Have you taken a man here before?"

"No."

"It hurts the first few times," he warned, but the tiny tremors in his hands betrayed how much he wanted this.

"You're big."

"Yes." He slipped out of her and she protested with a plaintive whimper. Sitting on the bed next to her, Derek drew her into his lap. Lifting her chin with a gentle finger, he brought her gaze up to his. "Whether you're ready for it or not, I love you. You don't have to say it back and you sure as hell don't have to prove it. I'm happy being with you just the way you are. The happiest I've ever been. I'm completely satisfied, Sable."

Unable to help herself, she allowed a little of the love she felt for him to shine in her eyes. "Do you have to be so damn wonderful?"

He laughed.

"I want to give you this, Derek. Something I've never given anyone. Wouldn't you like that?"

"I'd like it so much it would probably kill me." He kissed the tip of her nose and hugged her close. "But I don't want to hurt you. It takes time and preparation. Lust is riding me pretty hard right now and I don't think I'm capable of the control initiating you requires."

"I'm a vamp. I heal quickly."

He pulled back and searched her face again. "Is this what *you* want? Or are you only offering to please me?"

She wiggled her ass against the burning length of his cock. "I suspect I'll like it. With you." Her voice lowered. "There's oil in the drawer."

He gave a wicked chuckle, returned her to the bed and held her down when she tried to roll onto her stomach.

"Don't move," he ordered as he stood between her thighs and lowered his head for a kiss. His sweetly seductive mouth pressed gently over hers, coaxing her to relax with teasing strokes of his velvety tongue. His thoughts caressed her mind. *Easy, baby. Concentrate on the feel of my hands, the touch of my lips, the warmth of my body pressed against yours.*

"Mmm," she moaned into his mouth as his skilled hands caressed the underside of her breasts, the callused pads of his thumbs brushing against her nipples. They peaked hard and tight, addicted to his touch. Even when Derek was apart from her they craved the pinch of his fingers.

Her hands drifted to his back, massaging the muscles she felt flexing as he gentled her. His skin was so warm, so sleek and fluid over the tight ropes of sinew underneath. His body was as gorgeous as his face, a work of art in its sheer perfection. She gave herself up to that body, to the seduction that it wielded with such consummate skill.

Seduce me, she pleaded. Make me forget everything but you.

Sable felt his answering love in the very marrow of her bones. Then his sensual call wrapped around her like a thick fog, obscuring her restlessness, erasing Marius and his threats just as she'd hoped. Deeper and deeper he drew her under his spell, warm and welcoming and wondrously arousing on the deepest level. He didn't probe or pry, merely surrounded her in his affection.

Suddenly, his hands felt as if they were everywhere at once, his mouth sucking and moving across her skin in a thousand different places at the same time. His scent was so wonderful, like sex and vampire. He tasted so good, like chocolate-covered sin. His lips, those beautifully sculpted lips, were opened wide against hers, so soft and sensual.

Sometimes, he thought, I want you so badly I can't think.

Sable closed her eyes and engulfed him in her very essence, wanting to touch him all over as he was touching her. Derek groaned, the sound so erotic that goose bumps spread over her skin.

It's never enough, baby. I can never get deep enough.

His hot mouth left hers, traveling across her jaw and then lower, licking along the vein in her neck, making her body weep with a rush of moisture. Reaching her breasts, he surrounded her nipples, holding one gently between his teeth while his tongue flicked across the tip until she mewled like a kitten and twisted restlessly in his arms. Then he paid the same loving attention to the other one. His warm hands caressed the length of her torso, kneading and petting in maddening rhythm until they slid between her thighs, spread them wide and found her dripping with need.

His long fingers spread the folds of her cunt and slipped inside, one swirling around her clit, two more penetrating her deeply. She moaned uncontrollably, calling his name. Derek was mouthwatering, the beautifully delineated muscles in his arm flexing with every deep plunge, his touch so reverent and possessive.

I love this, your cunt filled with my come. I need to fill you everywhere.

Covered in her cream and his seed, his lubricated fingers slid lower. He caressed the tight rosette with soothing circles. The soft swirling of his fingers was endlessly arousing and yet completely wicked. But she wasn't afraid. How could she be? This was Derek and he loved her, adored her. He would never hurt her and she could sense his expectation, his careful control. He wanted her this way, wanted it so badly he was almost shaking with the anticipation. He was a Master after all, a vampire used to having his own way. And she controlled him completely, ruled him in the most base of ways. This was her gift—her complete submission—and he knew her well enough to recognize the level of trust she gave him.

One finger pressed firmly against the tight rosette and with a gasp of pleasure, Sable relaxed and it slid deep inside.

Hot. So tight. Fuck, Sable, you're going to burn me alive.

She lifted her heels to the edge of the mattress and moaned, her hands going to her breasts to massage their swollen ache. *Take me*.

Soon. His finger withdrew and then returned.

He growled when her cunt spasmed.

She groaned.

It was strange, odd. A burning pressure, but not too painful. He worked his finger faster, fucking her until her hips rolled desperately. Then he retreated. Derek reached for the single drawer that protruded from the wall and found the oil. He rolled the bottle between his hands, warming the golden fluid. Then he opened the top and drizzled the liquid between her spread legs. She whimpered, one hand going between her legs and massaging her throbbing clit.

Don't come, he warned. Not until I'm inside you.

"Derek!" she protested, near mad with lust. Two of his fingers were fucking her tight hole, stretching and yet pleasing. It was almost painful, but she was shielded by his calling, wrapped in his love. Three fingers. Burning, more stretching. But she was wet, so wet that her fingers pumping into her pussy were drenched and her hips started

a gentle tempo in time with his thrusts. He bent over her, his mouth capturing a stiff nipple and suckling. His erection was rock-hard and stabbing into the back of her thigh, weeping rivulets of pre-come.

Now? he asked, concerned and yet so eager she could feel it.

Yes, now. She wanted him so badly, wanted to feel him inside her.

He stepped back, just enough distance to position the thick length of his cock at her tight, well-oiled rosette. His slick hand worked his cock, lubricating it. The sight of his masturbating almost made her come and she bit hard into her lower lip to prevent it. She was desperate for him, so aroused she could barely breathe.

Hurry.

Soon, baby.

Now!

And then he was there, huge and so hard, pressing for entry. Pressing until the tight hole flowered for him and the thick head of his cock popped through the tight ring. Sable gasped and writhed as he entered. So slowly. Pain grew and spread. She turned her head into the pillow and whimpered,

I can feel it, he thought. *Relax, baby.*

Clenching her sheets, she forced herself to relax.

Derek paused, his breathing harsh, his palms damp where he held her thighs open. *Do you want me to stop?*

No, she moaned, feeling his cock against her fingers through the thin membrane that separated them.

Let me in, Sable. I can take the pain away if you let me in.

The warm blanket of his call wrapped even tighter around her and she felt nothing but the heated length of him, tunneling deep with infinite care.

Mine.

Yes.

Forever.

And Sable said nothing, could say nothing. She wanted to shield her thoughts, but Derek had taken over, controlling her mind as he controlled her body, sliding home balls-deep in the depths of her ass. Pleasure poured from his consciousness into hers. The muscles of his stomach were clenched tightly as he began to thrust, gently at first to allow her to accommodate him, and then faster.

Hot, so tight and sweet, he groaned, sweat dripping from his forehead onto her belly. *I love you. I love you so much.*

Spread wide, she was pinned beneath him, his cock stroking through the oil into the dark depths of her. She moaned, lost in the pleasure, feeling him glide past her fingers on every deep plunge.

Sable shattered in orgasm, bursting into a million pieces. Lost in his love, her love, she felt his cock jerk and his come spurt in hot bursts, filling her ass with his seed. And through the blinding power of their mutual orgasm she was flooded with his thoughts.

So good. Yours, I'm yours. Never get enough. Want you more. Need you. Love you. Love you. Mine. All mine, my love.

Her heart broke.

* * * * *

Derek woke up with widest grin. He knew he must look starstruck, but he couldn't help it. He felt boneless and sated to his very soul. His chosen mate knew how to please him very well. Sable had slept for an hour at most and then she'd woken him to a hot cleansing cloth wrapped around his cock, which was later followed by her hot mouth.

Insatiable, she'd fucked him repeatedly throughout the night and he'd given himself completely into her hands. She had drawn him into her calling, drenched him with her luxurious sensuality and loved him to his core. His grin began to hurt, it was so big.

She loved him. Sable Taylor loved him.

She hadn't actually said the words, she hadn't even thought the words, but he'd felt it just the same. Her love for him was a precious thing. His most cherished possession.

He reached for her, but didn't sense her. Derek frowned and sat up, searching for her with his eyes and his senses. "Sable?"

Silence. In the room and in his mind.

He tossed the covers back and swung his legs over the edge of the bed. A rustling noise stilled him. He dug through the covers until he found the note.

Derek,

We're docked at your field office headquarters. I've gone. Don't come for me. It's over between us. I could never feel for you what you claim to feel for me and it wouldn't be right to lead you on or give you hope for things that can never be.

I don't want to make this harder for you. I'm sorry if you became more emotionally involved than you should have. It was never my intention to hurt you, but after Marius, your love is not something I want.

Thank you for your assistance in my investigation. Thank you for everything. – Sable

Derek shook his head and blinked rapidly. Was he having a nightmare? He looked at the open clothes locker and saw that all of Sable's belongings were gone.

Had she gone insane? Had he fucked the sense right out of her brain?

He must have, if she thought he was going to buy this shit. She loved him. He had no doubt about that. None.

He'd sensed her turmoil all night, had wondered about it and in the end had dismissed it as nerves. She was falling deeper and deeper in love with him, and he knew that scared her.

He crumpled the note in his hand.

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He sighed in resignation as he got out of the warm bed that smelled so strongly of sex and Sable. They were going to have to work on this fucking him and leaving bullshit.

Damned impossible woman.

Chapter Eight

Derek walked into the quiet squad room. A quick glance at the monitor told him all of the other agents were out in the field. His name on the roster was dimmed, showing his leave of absence status.

"Atkinson."

He turned to face Captain Hoff. "Yes, sir?"

"Is that Sable Taylor's Starwing in docking bay 7?"

"It sure is."

"Where is she?"

Shrugging, Derek said, "Hell if I know."

"Is she in the med-lab?"

Derek turned and leaned back against the counter, his arms crossing his chest. He eyed the captain carefully. "Not that I'm aware of. Why would she be?"

Hoff smiled easily. "Glad to hear that. I'd heard there was a spot of trouble with her ship. I'm relieved to hear she wasn't injured."

"Umm," Derek hummed. This was getting interesting. "I thought you didn't like vamps?"

"I don't. On the Force. She's a bounty hunter and a good one. She's helped us quite a bit, don't you think?"

"Sure. I'm just surprised to hear that you do." He pushed away from the counter. "Well, it's been fun chatting with you, Captain, but I'm still on leave, so I'll be heading out now."

"Are you leaving with Taylor?"

Derek studied the captain again. "Why would I do that?"

A red brow arched sardonically. "You came here in her ship."

"You sure know a lot about what happens with her," Derek pointed out.

"That's my job, Atkinson. I have to know what's going on with everyone who enters this building." Hoff walked toward his office. "Enjoy your vacation."

Derek watched the captain walk away, frowning at the thought that entered his mind. Hoff was far too interested in Sable, always had been. She was constantly being detained, sometimes for hours. In the past, he'd always assumed that her unconventional methods of capture had attracted the unwanted attention. Now, he wondered if there was more to Sable's case than she'd let on.

How many secrets did she have?

* * * * *

Derek settled into the captain's chair of the *Viper* and established a secure comm link with his assistant. He was not in a good mood. In fact, he felt murderous. He'd figured out where Sable had run off to. She was with Marius Drake. And he'd been chasing the two of them for almost three weeks. To his fury, he always seemed to be a step behind them.

Marius was a wealthy man with a dozen different residences scattered all over the galaxy. Unfortunately for Derek, he seemed determined to take Sable to each and every one of them, causing Derek to slowly lose his mind. So far he'd been able to detect by scent that Sable was using her own room and Marius was staying the hell away from her, but how long would that last? Loving Sable like he did, Derek knew it must be torture for Marius to have her so close and not take her. But if the other man touched her... And if she let him...

Derek growled.

The screen before him lit up with the image of his assistant and he offered a curt greeting.

"Good afternoon to you, too, sir," Stein returned. "On the *Viper* again, I see, and from your tone, I take it you were unsuccessful at catching up with them."

"Not for much longer," Derek muttered. "Did you discover anything interesting since the last time I spoke with you?"

"Quite a bit, actually." Stein fumbled around on his cluttered desk. "I managed to hack into President Drake's file."

Derek grunted. "About damn time."

"My job is not as easy as it looks, sir," Stein retorted. "However, despite the delay, I think you'll be pleased. Once I gained access to the file, I located Ms. Taylor's. He hadn't erased it as I'd originally thought, merely swallowed it into his."

"Son of bitch," Derek growled.

"There were some very interesting things in there. First of all, it appears that Ms. Taylor has been a project of the President's almost since birth."

"I knew that already. He's been grooming her to be his mate. He just wasn't counting on her having any backbone."

"Well, were you aware that he's been tracking her?" Stein asked. "He's had a tracking device on every one of her ships since she broke off their personal relationship."

Derek's eyes widened. Marius had put the tracking device on her ship? "I think that tracking device almost got her killed."

"So you said. I researched the schematics of the particular devices used on Ms. Taylor's ships. The President had them specially designed so that the authorities wouldn't be able to pick up the signal. It could only be read by a special receiver, one that he alone possesses."

"Damn, so the Federation didn't find her that way."

"It doesn't appear likely," Stein agreed. "As I searched deeper into the President's account, I noticed we aren't the only ones who've been delving into his information."

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"Hoff."

Stein's mouth fell open. "How the hell do you do that?" he asked, startling Derek with the rare curse.

"Hoff asked me some odd questions the last time I saw him and he knew about the attack against Sable's ship."

"So you've discovered the culprit. Ms. Taylor was the key after all."

"I suppose that's true, but not in the way I had originally assumed. Can you prove Hoff had access to the tracking device information?"

"Without a doubt. I'll send a security team to apprehend him immediately." Stein smiled. "Now that the traitor's been discovered, sir, will you be dropping your cover and returning to the Security Council?"

"Soon," Derek said evasively. He damn well wasn't returning anywhere without Sable. "Did you get a copy of the video from the concourse on Rashier 6?"

"Yes, sir. I downloaded it to your ship just a few moments ago."

"Excellent. I'm on way to Sarjon to check on another Drake residence. Comm me if you have any trouble with Hoff."

"Of course. Good luck, sir. I'm looking forward to meeting Ms. Taylor. She sounds like a remarkable woman."

"She is," Derek murmured. "Atkinson out."

He took a deep breath before playing the video taken by docking security on Rashier 6. Even though he knew deep in his soul that Sable loved him, part of him still feared what he would witness on the video.

He froze as the screen flickered and Sable appeared, standing on the cargo ramp of her Starwing speaking with Marius Drake. Stein had done an excellent job of filtering out the background noise and Derek listened in rapt attention as Marius blackmailed Sable into breaking off their relationship.

"I love him," Sable told Marius on the tape.

And Derek's heart swelled. He hadn't misread her. He rewound the video and played her words again. And again.

The tiny seed of doubt that had tried to take root, insidious and punishing, urging him to think that maybe Sable's note had been the truth, withered and died and would never return.

"I'm coming for you, baby," he whispered to her beloved face, frozen on the screen. "I'm coming."

* * * * *

It was approaching midnight when the transport cab pulled away from the large house. Sable waited a few moments more before leaving her hiding place in the bushes, just to be certain they wouldn't return for something they'd forgotten. She'd finally solved her investigation. Now she had only to capture the culprit. She'd wondered how this hunt would go down when Captain Hoff had come out of his house with his family in tow. But then he'd kissed them goodbye and sent them on ahead.

Now it was just the two of them.

She crossed the moonlit circular driveway and rounded the side of the house. Knowing how trigger-happy some agents were, Sable had waited until just a few moments ago to comm in her call for backup. She couldn't risk them arriving too soon and scaring her prey away. Not after the last two years of hard work.

Marius had done his worst to screw up her life, so it was ironic that he'd really helped her instead. Living with him had given her access to his computers and his passwords. With those advantages, she'd planted information under his access code. She'd created two secret Council files – one with a reference to a fabricated new weapon and one with a nonexistent "cure" for vampirism. Knowing that both of those items would be invaluable to the Federation, she'd deliberately left a back door to those files open and waited for the traitor to make their move.

It had been a risky gamble, but one that paid off. The traitor hadn't bothered to hide

his personal information when he'd downloaded the files. It would have taken weeks to circumvent the Council anti-hacker programs with an anonymous identity, and since Sable had set the files for automatic deletion in a couple days, she'd forced his hand. He'd used his own unique access code and revealed his identity in his greed.

And now his gig was up, as the archaic saying went.

Sneaking into the house through the kitchen door, Sable moved into the living room and crawled up the wall to the ceiling. She could hear Hoff packing quickly, shoving documents into a bag along with a few articles of clothing. Her fingers twitched restlessly around the hilt of her lasersword, preventing it from slipping out and crashing to the floor below. She walked toward the hallway with noiseless steps.

Waiting.

Hunting.

Hoff fell silent and her senses heightened. She crouched low, hugging the ceiling, as the hairs on her nape stood on end. And then she heard it, the sounds of transports moving into the drive.

Damn it, how did the Task Force get here so fast? With a smothered curse, she crawled from the ceiling to the floor without a sound. Preparing to pounce, she was startled by a steely arm wrapping around her throat.

"Vamp bitch," Hoff hissed in her ear. "I'd hoped those Federation ships would kill you! They would have too, if you hadn't had Atkinson on board to assist you."

Sable stilled, but she wasn't afraid. She could easily break the human male in half with her bare hands. "Not a wise move," she said casually. She felt a sharp prodding against her back.

"Feel that?"

"Yeah, don't rip my tank. It's my favorite."

"I'm going to rip your heart out," he growled. "And then I'm going to stake it through. The Federation is working on a program to eradicate your kind. I can only

hope the information I sold them will speed up its inception."

Sable rolled her eyes, grabbed the arm that crushed her windpipe and broke it.

The wooden stake in Hoff's other hand pressed against her skin and then sank in an inch. It burned like forged metal and she hissed, her fangs descending, her animal nature springing to the fore. She spun on him, furious and prepared to kill. Vamps didn't get defensive. They killed. Fully a predator, she lunged for his throat and was tackled from the side, the force of the blow carrying her across the room. In pain from the stake wound, Sable fought viciously against the men who held her down.

"Taylor!"

As she registered the sound of her captain's voice, she felt the red haze of fury drain from her. She stared up at the STF agents who struggled to restrain her.

"I'm fine," she growled. "I said I'm fine!" she repeated when they refused to release her.

"See?" screamed Hoff. "You can't trust them! You can't control them! They're infected, diseased, rabid animals that need to be put down. They'll kill us all. We're nothing but food to them."

Sable leapt to her feet and glared at the wild-eyed, red-haired man who struggled between the grips of two agents. "Get him out of here."

Captain Donnie stepped into the doorway after the agents dragged Hoff away. His countenance was grim as he came toward her. "What the hell is the matter with you, Taylor? You've never lost control like that before."

She winced. The captain was right. She'd let her personal turmoil affect her actions at a time when she should have been in control. And she knew why. Living with Marius was driving her insane.

"I'm sorry, Captain. You're right." Her shoulders drooped. "I've been having some...issues. They got the better of me."

Donnie shook his head and sighed. "I promised you three months leave of absence

when this case was over. Why don't you start them now? Just send your report to me by the end of the week."

Sable nodded. "Thanks, Captain."

Then she headed home to Marius.

* * * * *

Sable entered one of the dozen ostentatious, opulent mansions that belonged to Marius Drake and was grateful that she'd never have to enter it again. While she'd been in the database under Marius's access code, she'd stumbled onto something that had shattered her heart. Derek wasn't at all the man he'd said he was. She'd been staying with Marius trying to protect Derek and it turned out he didn't need her protection at all. That meant neither of the master vamps had a hold on her anymore. She was free and once she packed up her stuff, she planned to hole up for a while and wait for her broken heart to heal.

She was two steps up the staircase on her way to pack her bags when the growling and crashing in the expansive ballroom halted her ascent. Weary, but curious, Sable lifted her nose and sniffed the air. She smelled the two Master vampires immediately. Their territorial hormones filled the air, their heady and intoxicating blood pervading her senses, making her heart race and her palms damp.

She moved to the open doorway of the ballroom and surveyed the damage. The place was a mess. The heavy, three-story tall velvet drapes hung in tatters and every piece of furniture in the room lay smashed to pieces.

Her gaze searched for and found the combatants over twenty feet above the floor. They were clinging to opposite walls of the room, panting and snarling, their handsome features distorted with rage and bloodlust. Both of their nostrils flared as she entered, smelling the blood from her wound. They became even more enraged, more animals than men, their hormones and instincts running the show. By her assessment, the battle for a mate had begun hours ago. The battle for her.

She drank in the sight of Derek, noting the minor injuries he bore. He was obviously winning, because Marius was in far worse shape. A relieved breath escaped her in a sigh. She was furious, yes, and terribly hurt, but she would never wish him harm. In fact, she couldn't bear it if something happened to him.

If Marius weren't so stubborn, he'd admit that she wasn't the mate for him. He needed a wife who relished power and politics as much as he did. Sable liked action and a hands-on approach. Political sidestepping just wasn't something she could spend an eternity doing. They also didn't love each other anymore, if they ever truly had. It was time for him to move on, too.

And Derek... What the hell was he doing here? Hadn't he gotten everything he needed out of her? The hollow ache in her chest became nigh unbearable and she lifted a hand to shelter her heart. Her stomach did a little flip at the thought of him coming after her and fighting for her, but she squelched the tiny hope ruthlessly. He'd lied about who he was, he'd used her body to get what he wanted, he'd demanded the truth from her and then hadn't given her the same courtesy. Everything they'd shared had been a lie. It didn't matter if he still wanted to fuck her. He didn't love her. Not like she loved him.

Despite all this, her body softened, responding instinctively to the scent of her mate and the pheromones he exuded in his battle to win her. Looking at him and needing him with every breath she took broke her heart a little more. She loved him desperately, but she couldn't trust him and there was no future to be had with someone you couldn't trust.

She remembered their conversation in the hotel on Rashier 6...

"At least you're honest."

"Because that's what I want from you in return, Sable – your honesty."

"And I'll give it to you."

What a fool she'd been. And these two were even dumber for fighting over her

when she didn't want anything to do with either of them.

"You're both idiots," she said scornfully.

Then she turned on the heel of her boot and left.

Chapter Nine

Derek's senses were inundated by his mate's proximity, his body recognizing her scent and adjusting to it. He stared at Sable's beautiful face with a soul-deep longing. Three weeks. Three damn weeks since he'd last seen her. He waited for her to smile, to show some pleasure at seeing him again. Instead she looked at him impassively for only an instant before leaving the room.

Filled with the animalistic need to claim his woman, he was no longer even remotely human. Moving with extraordinary speed, he crawled along the wall and out of the room, following her up the staircase. Marius did same, wisely keeping to the opposite wall.

The blond Master was badly cut and bleeding profusely, but remained determined to fight. Derek felt a reluctant admiration and a tiny grain of pity for the other man. To have once had Sable and then to have lost her—he could only imagine the pain of that. But his imagination was enough.

Sable climbed the stairs with a casual, unhurried stride. She had to sense the two territorial Masters crawling along the walls above her, but she ignored both of them. That worried Derek a lot, but not nearly as much as he worried about the scent of her blood.

Sure, she was tough and could take care of herself, he wouldn't try to shield her because she'd hate that and resent him. Still, he knew he was going to be terrified every time she was endangered. But he accepted that, because he loved her the way she was.

As she entered her bedroom, she left the door open and Derek preceded Marius into the room behind her. As she pulled a bag out from under her bed and began to pack, Derek felt the rage boiling in his blood reduce to a steady simmer. He shot a glance at Marius. "She's coming with me," he growled triumphantly.

Marius hissed at him and crouched for another lunge when Sable's calm voice stilled them both.

"No, I'm not, *President Atkinson*." She snorted in disgust. "You're so damn arrogant you didn't even attempt to disguise your name."

Derek winced. Shit, shit, shit. She'd found out before he could tell her.

He felt his spine straighten, his muscles lengthening, his fangs and claws withdrawing, as the animal retreated and allowed the man to emerge. He reached out to her with his calling, tossing it over her like a warm blanket. *Sable, love...*

She tossed it right back. *Nice try, lover, but the mission is wrapped. Haven't you heard? You don't need to seduce me anymore.*

Marius growled, remaining in his combat form out of sheer self-preservation. "Sable, we have a deal," he reminded her in a guttural voice no human could comprehend.

"Deal's off," she said coldly. She continued to pack without looking at either one of them. "Didn't you hear me? Derek isn't a STF agent. Fuck, he *controls* the STF. He's President of the Interstellar Security Council. He's just as powerful and connected as you are. In fact, I can't believe you didn't place his name and face. You can't do anything to him and you can't do anything to me. Not anymore. Not ever again."

"I'll protect you," Derek assured her smoothly, still trying to connect with her, but ramming into the impenetrable wall she'd erected against him. Her ability to block his calling was amazing and impressive. As she aged and matured, she would become a formidable vamp the likes of which Derek had never seen. And he wanted to be there with her on every step of the journey.

"Of course you'll protect me," she agreed, pressing a button on the side of her bag, which compacted it to a quarter of its former size. She brushed past him. "You wouldn't want word to get out about how you seduced your way into an IAB agent's bed just to solve a case."

His hand snaked out and clutched her elbow, halting her retreat. He searched her

sapphire gaze, and found it icy and remote. "Damn it, Sable. That's not true!"

Fury blazed in her eyes. "Are you denying that you went undercover and followed me for two years?"

His jaw tightened. "No, but –"

"Are you saying that when you detained me aboard your ship after the Windemere incident your intention wasn't at least partly to fuck information out of me?"

His nostrils flared. "Partly, but then—"

"And are you trying to tell me that when you stowed away on my ship, your intention wasn't to decide once and for all if I was the agent selling information to the Federation?"

He swallowed hard. This was bad. She knew everything. "Fuck, it isn't what you think."

"It's exactly what I think," she retorted, before yanking her arm from his grip and storming out.

Marius moved first to follow her. "Sable. I tried to warn you about him."

She continued downstairs, leaving the two men to trail behind her. "Go to hell, Marius. How do you think I discovered who he was? You kept popping up in my life in all the wrong places. The first thing I did after I moved in was use your computer to access your records. I know all about the tracking devices you've been putting on my ships."

"I can explain – " he began.

"Don't bother," she said curtly. "In a way, I'm grateful, even though that damned tracking device almost got me killed by the Federation. Once I got into your record, I saw a Charles Stein poking around in there. I looked him up and found out he's the assistant to Security Council President D. Atkinson, presently on a mission of Interstellar Security. It didn't take me a second to put it together. Maybe if you'd been doing your job instead of stalking me, you would have remembered voting him into

office." She threw her free hand up in the air. "I'm done with pushy, overbearing, domineering, lying, bullshitting vampire Masters. I think I'll find me a nice docile human male for once. Someone *I* can push around for a change."

"Sable!" the two Masters cried in stunned horror.

She waved at them over her shoulder and slammed the front door shut behind her.

* * * * *

Derek stood on the edge of the expansive ballroom in the Interstellar Council Headquarters and watched the hundreds of dignitaries and their dates swirl by on the dance floor. From the corner of his eye, a glimmer of golden hair caught his attention.

Marius Drake danced by with his fiancé, a beautiful woman who looked very much like him—cold and blonde. It had taken the other Master less than a month to find a newer, more docile mate after realizing that Sable was far more vamp than he could handle. Marius had tolerated her walking out on him once, but the second time was too much for his monumental ego.

Derek groaned inwardly. He, on the other hand, was still pining away for his one true love. He'd waited seven hundred years to find her and he would love her forever. He'd tried to track her down, but she'd simply disappeared and he had no idea where to look. When Sable Taylor wanted to hide, she knew just how to do it.

He turned away from the festivities and headed down the hallway toward his offices. Work was his entire existence lately. All work and no play made Derek a very grumpy vampire. He hadn't gone this long without sex in over six hundred years and it showed. He was curt and short-tempered, and since he'd ordered half his staff to scour the universe for Sable everyone knew why.

He strode through the open door leading to his outer offices and then further into his own expansive suite. He went straight to his desk and checked his messages. Sixteen agents had reported in, but the results were all the same – no sign of Sable.

He slammed his fist into the desk. "Damn it, baby, where are you?"

I hear you've been looking for me.

He looked up in shock, then shot to his feet. Sable lounged in the doorway, her long legs crossed at the ankles, her torso encased in the old-fashioned silver dress from Rashier 6. Her hair was piled high on her head, and she was gorgeous. Breathtaking.

"You came back," he whispered, insanely worried that he'd frighten her away.

Pushing away from the doorjamb, she sauntered in with an exaggerated sway of her hips that made his cock harden instantly. "Why did you suspect me of treason?" she asked in a conversational tone of voice that couldn't hide the hurt in her eyes.

"Your file was incomplete, with large gaps and inconsistencies. In fact, Captain Donnie hid you so well, I recently promoted him. He had you listed in the IAB database as a droid, an area I'm ashamed to say I never thought to look in, so I never caught it. As far as I knew, you were a bounty hunter, but unlike most, you didn't take breaks after every capture. You never stopped hunting. It was a red flag to me that you needed so much money and despite how many captures you made, you never seemed to get ahead financially. The leak was coming out of the Delta Sector field office and that's the one you worked out of the most. It was reasonable to investigate you."

"I see." She licked her bottom lip. "When did you realize you were wrong?"

"After those two days on my ship." He rounded his desk. "When I established our first mental connection you were distant and secretive, but I sensed nothing but good in you and a strong desire for justice."

"You still thought I was a criminal."

"There were too many questions, baby, and you block me very well. Too well. But even if you had been involved in something illegal, I would have found a way to keep you."

The left strap of her dress slipped down her shoulder, displaying the creamy swell of her breast. "Why didn't you tell me who you were when I told you I was IAB?"

Derek swallowed hard and leaned back against the front of his desk. "I was already

falling in love with you. I knew what you would think if I told you. I was afraid you wouldn't believe my interest in you was genuine. And you see I was right. You broke it off with me as soon as you knew."

Her steps slowed. "Were you ever going to tell me?"

"Sure. Right after the wedding."

The other strap slipped and the dress hung onto her torso against the laws of gravity, barely clinging to the mounds of her breasts. His fangs descended as his cock swelled.

Her sapphire gaze narrowed. "Don't you think that's a little arrogant?"

He shrugged, pressing a palm against his straining, painful erection. "What better way to prove my love?"

As soon as he said the words, he felt her sensual call swirling around him – hot, misty and alluring. Sweat broke out on his forehead.

"I do love you," he whispered reverently. "If you can believe anything I say, believe that."

The dress fell to floor and Sable was gloriously naked beneath it, baring her firm, high breasts with their berry-colored nipples, her sleek abdomen and her impossibly long legs. All taut and toned, covered by creamy pale skin.

Damn, he loved her body.

"I realized you must care, at least a little," she murmured.

"More than a little, baby. More than anything."

"Otherwise, I wouldn't have come back for you."

Derek tore his silver jacket, the symbol of his station, away from his body. His pants also fell in tatters to the floor. And still she stood, unmoving, waiting.

Waiting for what?

"Let it out," she urged in a throaty murmur. "Like the first time you took me and made me yours. You claimed me then, like a beast. And I loved it." He watched her hungrily, memorizing her just as she was now, then his eyes slid closed. He felt his power and need rising inside him, heard her blood pumping through her veins and smelled her arousal. The animal tore at him, fighting to be freed, and he struggled to restrain it, to control it. It began to radiate through his cells, growing in strength.

Then she said what he'd longed to hear.

"I love you, Derek."

And he couldn't hold it back any longer.

* * * * *

Sable felt the energy building within her mate. It poured from him in hot, steadily radiating waves. She smelled him—pure, potent vampire male. Her vampire. Her Master. Her slave. Her love.

Everything. All things. I'll be all you need. All you want, he promised. Then he leapt at her.

She watched him in a daze, as if time had frozen, contained in a bubble. Strong, powerful, beautifully masculine, his body stretched through the air. And then suddenly the bubble burst and she leapt to the top of his desk, neatly avoiding his grasp.

He growled, a deep rumble that vibrated through the air into her body. Cream flooded between her legs as her nipples hardened and her mouth watered at the sight of him. His magnificent cock was so hard, it curved upward to nearly touch his navel.

She crouched and her lips curved in a come-hither smile. Moving slowly, carefully, she twisted to sit on the edge of the desk and spread her legs wide, letting him see her welcome. She leaned her weight on one hand, while the other reached between her legs and stroked her swollen clit.

She watched his nostrils flare, watched him lick his fangs with a loving caress of his tongue. His eyes were molten silver, his muscles bunched and thickened, his cock

swelled and wept. And through his heat and mindless lust she felt his love, powerful and true. She lifted her heels to the edge of the desk, opening herself completely to receive his mounting. *Fuck me*.

Derek's haunches bunched tighter with his crouch and then he sprang. She closed her eyes and forced herself to relax. She'd asked for the beast and that was exactly what she was going to get—a raw, primal claiming.

The only warning she got that she'd miscalculated was the hot steam of his breath across her inner thighs an instant before his tongue slipped inside her. Gasping in surprise, Sable lifted onto her elbows, affording her a breathtaking view of his gorgeous face buried with enthusiasm between her thighs.

His tongue, elongated by the vampirism within him, laved the creamy walls her pussy with surprising tenderness in his animalistic state. Lapping, licking and fucking, he goaded her desire, built her passion. He latched onto her clit as two fingers slipped in through her cream and began to plunge slowly. Sable cried out as she spasmed in climax, her sheath rhythmically sucking at his thrusting fingers. His mouth moved to the pulsing vein on her inner thigh and he struck deep with his fangs.

Instantly his sensual call enveloped her and she was lost in the mindless pleasure of his fucking fingers and the deep, erotic pulling of his warm mouth on her skin. She came hard, her orgasm blinding her with pleasure.

When he finally released her, Sable collapsed backward upon the desk. Her heart pounded hard against her rib cage, her thighs trembled and her entire body quaked in the aftermath of her powerful release. Derek crawled over her, his eyes lit with masculine satisfaction, and his seductive grin was feral and predatory. He gripped his thick cock in one hand and started to enter her when she pushed him away with such force he sprawled on his back on the floor. She pounced on him and laughed.

"Not so fast, lover. This time, you're mine."

* * * * *

Derek looked up at the beautiful woman who caged him to the floor with her body and fell even deeper in love. Sable had let her own animal loose, releasing her power and desire to soak the air around them.

Everything primitive and fierce within her answered the call of everything base and carnal within him. She was his mate, his better half, his truest love. She complemented and completed him. And she had come back to him.

She loved him.

In one fell swoop, she thrust her hips downward and engulfed his cock in the heated, creamy embrace of her cunt. His back arched as sharp pains of pleasure flared out from his groin and fired every nerve ending in his body. But Sable didn't give him time to recover, her cunt slipped up and down his erection at a rapidly increasing, superhuman pace. He'd never been fucked by a vampire in her full animal state before. It was glorious, primordial. He could feel every inch of her and experienced, through her thoughts, how he felt inside her. How he stretched her and filled her perfectly.

Pumping and gasping, Sable rode him hard and then harder, claiming him. His balls tightened, his cock swelled, his eyes clenched shut along with his jaw. Derek felt her mouth suckling his neck the second before her fangs sunk deep. Her head remained motionless as she drank from him while her hips continued the wild fucking of his shaft. She called to him, sweetly brushing across his mind and his soul.

I love you love you love you love you.

Growling and snarling and cursing, he exploded in orgasm with hard, pulsing jets of come, spewing his essence directly into her core, branding her from the inside. His claws ripped into the rug beneath him. Pleasure inundated him, pouring out of him and into her mind. Sable screamed, her cunt clamping onto his jerking cock as she joined him, still chanting her love, while soaking up all of his.

* * * * *

Sable stirred slowly, nuzzling her mouth against Derek's damp chest. Deep within

her body she could still feel him pulsing and deep in her soul she felt the warmth of his love.

"Will you marry me?" he asked as his hands stroked the length of her spine.

"Of course."

He kissed the top of her head. "I have another proposition for you as well."

"Really?" she drawled, rising onto her elbows to look at him. For the first time the affection in his eyes brought her joy and not pain.

His sexy mouth curved in a smile. "I want you to work for me."

"Hmmm."

"I want to keep you close by. I have an idea that'll keep you busy and out of trouble."

"Trouble?" She arched a brow. "I'm never in trouble."

Derek rolled his eyes and laughed. "Hear me out. We have to make preemptive strikes against the Federation. They know half the Council consists of vamps. If they find a way to kill us it will disrupt the entire universe. I've decided to establish an elite corps of vamp agents to handle missions that require superhuman skills and the utmost secrecy. And I want you to help me train the agents I select."

Sable shook her head sadly. "The council will never go for it. Vamps are facing too much bigotry and opposition as it is. To create a group that excludes humans because they don't possess our skills will be political suicide for you."

He grinned. "That's why no one is going to know the corps exists except for you and me."

"And if we get caught, Derek? What then?"

"I can afford to support us indefinitely, but it won't happen." He licked her lips. "What do you think? Ready to take on the universe with me?"

She brushed back a damp lock of hair that had tumbled onto his forehead. "I think I love you. And if I can take you on, I can take on anything."

He growled. "Is that a yes?" He grew hard again inside her.

She rolled her eyes. "Are you always going to use sex to get what you want from me?"

Rolling her beneath him, he gifted her with a devilish smile. "That's my intention." She purred. "How can I refuse an offer like that?"

The End

Sylvia Day is the multi-published author of highly sensual romantic fiction set in historical and futuristic settings. A former Russian linguist with the US Army Military Intelligence, she now writes full-time. When she's not working on her next erotic romance, you can find her chatting with visitors on her weblog, message board and chat loop http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SylviaDayBookCafe.

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