

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

Trista Ann  
MICHAELS

ENTWINED FATES  
*Crossing*  
THE  
*Line*

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Crossing the Line

ISBN # 1-4199-0835-9

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Edited by Ann Leveille.

Cover art by Syneca.

Electronic book Publication: November 2006

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# ***CROSSING THE LINE***

**Trista Ann Michaels**

## Prologue

*Planet Tilarus – Legana Sector*

“Why do I feel as though I’m about to be cornered?” Taron Sinnar asked dryly and raised an eyebrow at the four faces staring at him.

“Come in, Taron. Please.” Senate Magistrate Carvic waved to a chair in front of the huge mahogany desk that dominated Stefan’s office at the Tilarian Council Building.

Taron frowned as he stepped further into the room. It was highly unusual for the magistrate to be away from Rhenari and even more so for him to request an audience outside the Senate.

“Magistrate,” Taron said with a nod as he took the seat across from him.

His two adopted brothers, Stefan and Sidious Marccone, stood on either side of Carvic. By the fireplace stood his adopted father, Count Damon Marccone, a worried frown creasing his brow.

“If this is about the young woman...” Taron began, trying to lighten the suddenly tense atmosphere with a joke.

Stefan cleared his throat, trying to hide the grin tugging at his lips. Sidious, on the other hand, narrowed his dark gray eyes.

“Be serious, Taron,” Sidious snapped.

The two brothers had always been complete opposites. Sidious was serious and firm, where Stefan could find the humor in most any situation. Due to this, people always assumed Sidious was the older, but he was actually the younger. Even as a child Sidious had been the one in charge, the one taking care of himself and Stefan. Thirty-six years later, nothing had changed. Everyone did as Sidious requested, even Damon.

“If you want me to be serious, then perhaps you should tell me why I’ve been summoned here. ‘Posthaste’, I believe is what you said?”

“I’m terribly sorry about that,” Carvic sighed. “I’m afraid it was necessary. We could not have had this conversation on Rhenari.”

“Why not?” Taron asked, his curiosity now piqued.

“Let’s just say there are too many ears on Rhenari,” Sidious said dryly.

“Let’s just say we get to the point,” Taron snarled.

“I know that you’ve taken an extended leave from security,” Carvic began, his expression one of a man who expected a not-so-pleasant outcome. “But I could really use your help.”

And now he knew why. Taron sat back in the chair and frowned at Carvic. Somehow, he had a feeling he wasn’t going to like this. “Help with what?”

Stefan sat on the edge of the desk and handed him a file. "Take a look at that," he said. Crossing his arms over his chest, Stefan waited for Taron to read through it.

Taron frowned as he studied the biography in front of him. Taron Karmase? There was a whole history within the file. Education, or lack thereof. A work history at numerous mining facilities and even a few months in lockup on Dellon Five. Karmase certainly had a colorful past.

The last page was an application, already filled out and approved, for a position as overseer in a mining operation. Then it hit him. They wanted him to go undercover, to portray Taron Karmase. "No." He slapped the file down on the desk.

Damon grunted from his position by the fire. "At least one of you has some sense."

"You're not helping," Sidious snapped.

"I told you I wasn't going to," Damon snapped back.

Taron stood and stepped between the two of them. "Enough."

Damon mumbled angrily and turned away. It wasn't normal for the man who had raised him to be so withdrawn and angry. "I know why I don't want to do this, but what's your problem with it?" Taron asked.

"I think someone else would be better suited."

"You and me both."

Stefan pushed his shoulder-length platinum hair off his face, his forearm muscles rippling as he clenched his fingers in frustration. With a pointed look at his father, he dropped his hand. "Damon is just being a dad. He finally has all his sons in one place and he wants to keep it that way."

Taron could tell by the furious look on Damon's face that was far from the truth. He'd known him all his life, considered him a father, so he knew the signs. Damon's normally gray eyes had darkened to black in anger. Worry lines creased his forehead and deepened the wrinkles around his eyes. His lips were clamped so tightly shut they were practically nonexistent.

Taron sighed heavily as he looked up to the ceiling. There was something they weren't telling him, he would bet his life on it. Otherwise Damon wouldn't be so dead set against it.

"You know I wouldn't ask this of you if it wasn't important." Stefan's voice broke through Taron's thoughts and he turned his gaze toward him. Stefan still leaned against the desk, his arms crossed, his ever-observant eyes watching. Probably searching for any sign Taron might be giving in. With a wave of his hand, Stefan continued, "Besides, you're the only one Devlin will work with."

"Devlin is in on this?" Taron asked in surprise. Devlin was a good man, but he usually chose to stay away from assignments that involved the newly formed senate.

"Yes." Stefan nodded. "He's your contact."

"But why me? Why can't you talk Devlin into working with someone else?" Taron asked.

"Because you have the most experience with this kind of undercover work," Stefan said in his most reasonable voice, which for the former Tilarian Senator was as close to begging as he would go.

"Plus with your build and...attitude, you would be perfect for the job," Sidious said with a shrug.

Taron rested his hands on his waist and scowled at Sidious. "What attitude?"

Sidious grinned at him. "That one."

"Go to hell," Taron growled.

"Taron, you would be perfect," Stefan began. "You're formidable when angry, you're arrogant. You're just the type of person who would strike fear in the people beneath him, and that's exactly what we need. Not to mention the fact you're familiar with Veenori—"

"Veenori?" Taron snapped. "Oh, hell no! I hate that damn planet."

Veenori was a wasteland, nothing but desert, rock and dirt. Temperatures reached well over a hundred degrees, even in the shade. Its twin suns beamed down twenty-four hour sunlight, making the place a living hell ninety percent of the time. No way were they going to talk him into this.

He pointed toward Sidious. "He's familiar with Veenori and just as formidable. The man can even scare the hell out of me sometimes."

Sidious snorted. "I also have a wife and two sons. No."

"Oh, so you dump it in my lap?" Taron snarled.

"Taron—" Stefan began.

"No!" Taron snapped. "I told both of you after that Carlone fiasco, I wanted out. I'm tired of chasing crazy loons all over the galaxy and being shot at. I just finished my house, damn it. I want to settle down with a sweet-tempered girl and have a house full of children."

"Oh, please." Stefan stood and walked to the chair by the fireplace. Sitting down, he grinned at Taron. "I know you. If you really want to settle down with a sweet-tempered girl, I'm Vorhallas."

"Hello, Vorhallas," Taron snarled. "Nice to meet you. Find someone else."

"We need you, Taron. *You*. You're the only one who can do this. The only one we trust to get this done," Sidious said in a quiet voice.

Taron rolled his eyes and turned to gaze out the window behind the desk. It was a beautiful day. The blue sky and surrounding greenery were reflected in the glass of the Tilarian buildings. Puffy white clouds rolled by as the breeze rustled the leaves.

Damon's small runner was secured on the landing pad just outside Stefan's office. The warm sunlight reflected off the metal, making it sparkle. Early spring on Tilarus was his favorite time of year. He had been looking forward to getting settled in his house, actually shopping for furniture. And he hated shopping.

*We need you.* That's all it took and they knew it.

"What exactly is it you want me to do?" he asked, his gaze still out the window.

"Go undercover at the Veenori Mines," Sidious said.

*God, I hate Veenori.* His teeth ground together in frustration. Of all places, why that one? "What am I looking for?"

"You're aware that the rebels want a dictator back in control?" Carvic asked as Taron turned from the window.

Taron snorted as he sat down. *Rebels.* Just four years ago, he'd been a captain in the rebel armada. Then they had been against the dictator, trying to free the people. Now there was a group of rebels that wanted the old oppressive government back. Why was beyond him. Serving under a dictatorship was nothing more than slavery, bowing to the whim of one man.

"Yes," Taron said with a nod. "I've also heard they've been shipping weapons and supplies. Supposedly gearing up for some kind of major battle against the government buildings on Rhenari."

"We believe someone in the Senate is behind it."

"A senator?" Taron frowned at the magistrate.

"If not a senator, then someone close, an assistant possibly," Stefan said as he handed him a glass of Earth brandy.

The drink was one of Sidious' favorites and he paid a fortune to have it shipped here. Lifting the glass, Taron gulped half the liquor at once. It burned going down and he grimaced.

"So how is going undercover at the mines going to track them down?" Taron asked as he continued to sip at his drink.

"The weapons are being shipped through there. There's someone in the mines acting as a middleman," Sidious said as he walked around the desk to sit in the chair next to Taron. "They hide the weapons in with the mineral shipments. Get close to the people involved. Do whatever is necessary to get inside. We believe the people in the mines will lead you to whoever is in charge."

Taron rubbed tiredly at his forehead. "How did you get this information?"

"A young man in the wrong place at the wrong time," Stefan said quietly.

"Is he still with us?" Taron asked. He would hate to think someone innocent was hurt over all this.

Stefan nodded. "He's well hidden and, for the moment, believed to be dead."

"Family?" Taron asked.

"One sister, Alyssa Carington, who we haven't been able to locate," Sidious replied. "Her brother told us he sent her some information as well so we're trying to find her before they do. We'll load your minicomputer with her image so if by chance she shows up there, you'll recognize her."

Taron sighed. "When do you want me to start?"

"Day after tomorrow." Carvic rose from his chair and indicated Taron should follow him. "That will give us a day and a half to get you ready for your role."

Taron followed the magistrate from the study, a heavy weight tugging at his chest. He had a bad feeling about this assignment. Something was going to happen—something he definitely wouldn't like.

The bang of the study door as it slammed vibrated through the hall and he turned to stare at it. Damon, no doubt. His adopted father's aversion to this job only added to his unease. The magistrate placed a wrinkled hand on his shoulder, silently indicating he should continue moving.

Taron turned his gaze to Carvic and smiled slightly. "Lead the way, Your Grace."

\* \* \* \* \*

Damon stood for a moment staring at the closed door. Taron had been like a member of his family since the day he was born. His mother had been a close friend of his wife's. He loved him as much as he loved his own sons.

Taron had had such a sorrowful childhood. His father ran out on them when he was eight and his mother died less than a year later. He'd blamed his mother's death on his father. As far as Damon knew, he continued to even into adulthood. He was convinced if his father hadn't left she would still be alive. Damon wondered if that wasn't true as well. A lot of Taron's mother's problems had stemmed from a broken heart.

After Taron's mother's death, Damon and his wife had adopted him, giving him all the advantages they gave their own children. But Taron had chosen to keep his own name, refusing the title of "lord" that went with being the younger son of a count. He did it for his mother, to remain close to her. The thought of Taron taking on this assignment tore at his heart, especially knowing what they did.

He turned angry eyes toward Stefan, the brother closest to Taron. "Why didn't you tell him?"

"We don't know for certain," Sidious said as he slumped in the chair behind the desk.

"Even if it's a remote possibility, he has the right to know."

"No!" Sidious' thunderous voice echoed off the walls as he slapped the desk. "I'm not telling him. I'm not going to get him all upset over something that may not be true."

"What if it is?"

Both the men were silent as they pondered his question. Damon had been against the idea from the start, but he was the outsider. Both Sidious and Stefan worked for the senate. Stefan had been a senator and instrumental in the rebuilding of the government until he'd met his wife Krista and decided to resign.



Sidious worked organizing special assignments such as these. In this case, Sidious was in charge and there was nothing Damon could do, but damn it, he wasn't about to sit back and not let them know what he thought.

"How can you send him on this assignment, knowing what he may uncover?" Damon snarled.

Stefan stood and paced, a sure sign he was agitated. "We've discussed this. We agreed it would be better if he didn't know going in. If he knew, his mind would be on that and not on the assignment."

Damon sighed and turned to leave the room, frustration eating a hole in his heart. If what they suspected turned out to be true, Taron would be furious he had been left in the dark, and rightly so. "You're making a mistake. One I hope Taron can forgive you for."

"So, do I," Stefan replied with a sigh.

## Chapter One

### *Vordak's Bar and Gaming Hall, Veenori*

"Where the hell did I go wrong?" Alyssa Carington asked herself as she stood just off the stage behind the curtain.

Her body shivered despite the heat. She was dressed in nothing but a black leather collar around her neck, a matching leather strap attached to it so she could be led around like an animal.

This wasn't her plan. She wasn't supposed to be a slinoy, Veenori's version of a sex slave. She should have been sent to the mines. That was where her brother Anthony had been working as a transport pilot when he'd been murdered.

A week before she'd been informed of his death, she'd received a package from him full of photos, a list of names and a short note telling her to keep the packet of evidence somewhere safe. She hadn't been able to make heads or tails out of the scribbled notes and names, but one name kept appearing over and over. Vingosa.

She'd hidden the packet in a safe deposit box and given the key to a good friend who happened to be a criminal attorney. She handed over the key with strict instructions that if she wasn't back in six months, open the box and investigate the contents. She then headed to Veenori to begin her search.

Her plan had been to lose money gambling then be sent to the mines to work off her debt. There she hoped to be able to find the man she believed to be responsible for her brother's death, Vingosa. But somehow everything had gone wrong. When she'd asked why she wasn't being sent to the mines, they'd laughed at her, saying women were not welcome there.

She'd done her research, knew that to be a lie and confronted the owner of the gaming hall. Vordak had sneered and told her she was too frail to withstand the mines and that he'd stand a better chance of getting his money back by selling her as a slinoy.

So now here she stood, naked as the day she was born, a collar around her neck, waiting to be sent on stage and displayed before the mass of horny aliens that packed the hall. Reaching up, she fingered the gold figure eight charm that hung from the leather. It was where the leash was attached and while Vordak wasn't looking she tried to feel for a way to undo the strap of leather but, with a sigh of disgust, realized she couldn't figure it out.

Vordak had told her if she behaved and pleased her master, she should work off what her buyer paid for her in about a year. Oh, God. A year as someone's sex slave. She liked sex, but this was not her idea of a turn-on.

"Come forward, slave," Vordak ordered and tugged at her leash.

She cringed and fought the pull of the leather strap, grabbing it with her hands. Vordak turned to glare at her and grasped her fingers in a harsh grip, removing them. Moving behind her, he clasped her wrists and bound them at the small of her back with a set of leather cuffs. The movement caused her breasts to jut forward and she closed her eyes against the desire to fall apart as the locks clicked into place, sealing her fate.

How was she going to go through with this? What if the man who bought her was abusive? Or ended up killing her? She was terrified and tried her best to swallow the bile that tried to choke her. She couldn't do this.

Vordak shoved and she stumbled out onto the stage. Cheers erupted from the crowd and she swallowed a sob of mortification as Vordak pulled at her leash and tugged her to the edge of the stage. Her body trembled in fear and anger as Vordak pointed out her various attributes to the packed room.

"The next on the list, gentleman, is Alyssa. A spicy little vixen from the planet Earth. You'll notice the high, firm breasts..." Vordak smoothed his hand over her nipples and she flinched, shooting him a scowl.

"Don't touch me," she snarled.

Vordak grinned nastily. "Full of spunk, she is," he yelled and the crowd murmured its approval.

"Twelve hundred veenok," someone from the front shouted.

"Fourteen hundred," someone else shouted, and Alyssa wanted to sink to the floor. *Please let it at least be someone I can stand to look at.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Taron stood at the back of the room with Rhia, Devlin's sister and assistant. Her stunning flame-red hair and light gray eyes were second only to her beautiful face. She was every man's desire here on Veenori, but Devlin was protective and had made it quite clear Rhia was off limits.

Even though the two were not blood-related, she'd been under Devlin's protection since the day their orphan freighter crashed here years ago, when Devlin was twelve and Rhia four. The same man who took in Devlin had also agreed to take Rhia on the condition that the small child be Devlin's responsibility.

Devlin had agreed and kept the child, raising her as his sister. Once she'd grown, he'd tried, with Taron's and Stefan's help, to get Rhia to move to Tilarus where she would be safer, but she'd refused, saying Veenori was the only home she knew and she would not leave it.

"I think the blonde you bought earlier is my favorite," Taron said with a grin.

"Don't like the brunette?" Rhia asked, her eyes sparkling with barely suppressed humor. "She certainly liked you."

Taron chuckled. "Really? I hadn't noticed."

"Kind of hard to not notice, don't you think? How many times did she grab your cock?"

"At least three," Taron said dryly. "I believe she's done this before."

"That will be one less that I have to explain the rules of being a slave then." Nodding her head toward the stage, she asked, "What do you think of that one?"

Taron turned and stared at the stage. "Wow," he growled.

She was one hot number. Long legs that he could well imagine wrapping around his waist as he fucked her smooth pussy. A firm, flat stomach with a diamond bellybutton ring that made his eyebrow quirk in interest and high, handful-sized breasts that begged to be suckled. Moving up toward her face, he couldn't help but admire her full lips, upturned nose and the silky black hair that curled softly around her shoulders.

He imagined holding a firm grip on her thick locks as he fucked her from behind...until he met her almond-shaped gray eyes. *Fuck*. He knew those eyes.

*Alyssa Carington. What the hell is she doing here?*

"Damn it," he snapped.

"Taron?" Rhia asked. "What's wrong?"

"We have a problem," he mumbled. "Call Devlin and tell him the woman he's been looking for is here."

"What?" she gaped and turned back toward the stage. "That's Anthony's sister? What the hell is she doing up there?"

"I don't know."

"Taron, you have to buy her."

"Me?" he snapped. "What about you?"

"I've already bought my limit. Vordak won't let me buy another one."

Taron groaned. "What the hell am I supposed to do with a slinoy?"

"Whatever you want," she said with a grin.

"We're talking about Anthony's sister, Rhia. We told him we'd protect her, not fuck her."

Rhia shrugged. "It's either you or one of them." She waved her hand, indicating the mass of salivating men moving closer to the stage.

*Damn it all to hell.*

A slinoy was the last thing he needed—especially one who looked like that.

Vordak eyed the crowd with narrowed golden slits. "Come now, gentleman. She owes thirty-five hundred veenok. I can't let her go for a penny less." Moving her closer to the edge of the stage, he spread her legs, running his hand between her thighs.

Alyssa flinched, but didn't take her gaze off the back wall. She stood proud, her head held high, but a telltale blush covered her beautiful face.

Bringing his hand to his face, Vordak inhaled her scent. "Ah, she smells lovely. Clean, tight and unbroken. Surely someone will pay what she's worth."

Taking a deep breath, Taron shouted a bid. "Sixty-five hundred veenok."

\* \* \* \* \*

Alyssa gasped at the sudden jump in amount and searched the crowd for the man who possessed such a deep timbre.

"That's almost twice what you owe, slinoy. Someone must like the idea of sinking between your thighs."

Alyssa glared at Vordak, then again searched the crowd. She had no idea who'd yelled out the amount. The darkened hall was full of aliens, it could have been any one of them. There were tall blue men with horns, short men with fangs and long hairy ears. She shuddered at the image of having to please one of them.

Then there were the lizard-like Veenori natives with their golden eyes and long, flicking tongues. There were a few humanoids, some could have even been from Earth. It was hard to tell, for some alien races were almost indistinguishable from Earthlings.

Her gaze caught a movement in the crowd, and she stared as someone stepped forward. Her heart stopped. *Oh, God. Is this the man?* His whiskey-colored gaze raked over her, heating her flesh, and she swallowed a strong sense of dread. It had been a while since a man had looked at her like that. He looked as though he could eat her alive, and the very idea sent a wave of heat up her body.

He was huge. His height and wide shoulders dwarfed the men standing next to him, giving him a stunning air of authority she doubted even the bravest of men would question.

Her gaze moved upward, catching the dim light of the room as it reflected off his tan, bald head. Normally she loved bald men, there was just something sexy about them. But how was she supposed to feel about this man? Or any man who bought her? She swallowed as she watched him stroll closer, his eyes taking in her heaving breasts then moving lower. Refusing to cower, she met his stare head-on when it finally moved back to her face.

He was confident, almost arrogant. She could tell by the way he practically swaggered forward, his whole body exuding confidence. Oh boy did he exude it. It practically oozed from every pore.

"Overseer Karmase," Vordak said, his voice holding just a hint of fear.

"Vordak," he answered back and tiny tingles ran down her spine.

His deep voice rumbled low in his chest and she felt the vibration in her own, making her skin prickle. She'd never had this kind of reaction to a man and it stunned her. She was unprepared for what had happened to her. She had no idea how a slinoy should behave or what happened to them once they were bought. The idea of her being

bought by such a prime specimen of a man sent her body into immediate arousal mode and it pissed her off.

Vordak turned back to the crowd. "The bid is sixty-five hundred veenok. Do I hear sixty-nine?"

The tall giant's gaze spanned the room, his stance and expression daring anyone to bid. No one spoke, no one looked at him directly and who could blame them? If it were possible to kill someone with a look, he could do it. Who was this man?

"Looks like you win her, Karmase."

Vordak handed her leash to the man he'd called Karmase and quickly moved on to the next woman. Alyssa followed, trying to recall where it was she'd heard the name before.

*Karmase? The mines*, she realized with a start, her heart hammering in her chest at her luck.

She'd researched the mines before arriving here and Karmase was the new overseer. Things couldn't have worked out any better. Well...it would have been better if she wasn't going in as a damn sex slave.

Her new owner stopped at the table and tugged Alyssa to his side. The heat from his skin flowed into her naked body and she unconsciously moved closer.

"Karmase," the cashier grumbled. "How are you paying for her?"

Karmase dropped his currency chip on the table and it clanged against the glass, bouncing twice before settling just at the edge of the electronic books. She looked up, her gaze scanning the room and the people moving around them. Men and women alike openly admired her naked body as they passed by. Some even stopped to boldly ogle her, giving her the creeps. She tried her best to ignore them, to somehow forget she was naked, but she couldn't.

She scowled, wishing she could remove her shackles and cover herself against the multitude of prying eyes. "Would you at least be kind enough to give me a cover? I'm cold."

Karmase snorted. "How can you be cold? It's a hundred and twelve degrees."

"Then I'm embarrassed," she growled.

Karmase glanced down at the man watching them, then turned narrowed eyes at her. "Quiet, slave," he snapped.

Sticking her chin out, she met his stare with equal anger. He was so tall she had to crane her neck to meet him head-on. Her efforts were useless though. Her anger only seemed to amuse him, as well as those around them.

The man at the table chuckled, his golden eyes dilating then snapping back to normal as he stared at her breasts. "I think your slave needs a lesson in manners. I have a whip, if you need use of it."

"I'll handle it," Karmase growled and a shiver of fear ran down Alyssa's back.

*A whip? Please let him be joking.*

Once the money exchanged hands, Karmase led her from the table and back toward the crowd. Cold clammy hands slid along her skin as men passed them, making her feel ill. "Can we please get out of here?" she asked.

Karmase's amber gaze flicked to her, a hint of amusement twinkling in its depths. "Anxious to begin pleasing me, slave?"

She snorted. "In your dreams." She was loath to admit it but the thought of pleasing someone who looked like him was more of a turn-on than she'd expected, especially in a place like this.

"You have a lot to learn about being a slinoy, woman," he growled close to her ear.

"I'm new to this, so I'm winging it. Okay?"

"I'll give you one thing," he said, his voice dripping with barely controlled laughter. "You've got balls."

"Please," she whispered. "Just get me out of here and into some clothes and I'll be the perfect slave."

Karmase chuckled. "I doubt you will ever be the perfect slave." His intense whiskey eyes stared down into hers and her heart lodged in her throat. "And that makes you worth every veenok I paid for you."

"Like your women feisty?" she asked snidely.

"No." His lips twitched and she wasn't sure if he were teasing or not. "I like breaking them."

Alyssa swallowed a sudden lump of dread. What the hell was she in for?

Taron almost regretted his comment as he watched fear cloud her eyes. He would never hurt her, or any woman for that matter. But if this was going to work, he needed her to be a true and obedient slave.

Now that he'd bought her, he was stuck with her. And keeping her obedient was the only way to protect her as well as himself.

Grasping her leash, he led her toward the entrance. Men stared and more than once he heard her grumble to herself, he was sure cursing him to oblivion, but as she was his slave, he could not show her any kind of consideration. She would have to walk naked behind him for now.

Just thinking about that body of hers in his bed, lying next to him, there to do his bidding, made his cock harden painfully beneath his coarse pants. "I can't think like that," he mumbled.

"What did you say?" Alyssa asked.

Taron came to a stop and rolled his eyes toward the stars in exasperation. She needed training. "Do not speak to me, slave, unless you are spoken to."

"Well, I thought you were speaking to me."

With a sigh, Taron spun to face her. Narrowing his eyes, he stepped closer. His nostrils flared as he inhaled her flowery scent mixed with the smoky smell of the bar.

Hell, even her scent aroused him, and a muscle twitched in his cheek as he fought hard to keep his reaction to her neutral. She was under his protection and he wouldn't cross that line of protector. He'd promised her brother he'd keep her safe and he'd keep his word. Even if it drove him insane.

To her credit she didn't back away, but raised her chin, meeting his glare head-on. She was going to be the death of him, he had no doubt. "Don't push it, Alyssa, or I swear, I'll put you over my knee right here and beat your ass until you can't sit for a week," he growled quietly.

Her eyes widened then narrowed into gray slits that sparked fire from their depths. She was absolutely breathtaking and it would take every ounce of his control to keep his hands to himself—especially if he had to spank her. "Say 'yes, Master, I understand'," he growled.

Her full red lips dropped open in shock, and if not for the nosy eyes around them, he would have found her comical. "Don't," he snapped, "even think about saying something smart. Repeat what I said, Alyssa."

She clamped her mouth closed, her jaw working in anger. He could tell she was gritting her teeth and her spunk amazed him.

"Now!" he bellowed, making her jump.

"Fine," she hissed through her teeth. "Yes, Master, I understand."

He nodded and began to once again move toward the door. "That you're an ass," she said with menace behind him, just loud enough for him to hear.



## Chapter Two

Alyssa could not believe what she'd just done. If looks could kill, she'd most definitely be a dead woman. Was she out of her mind? One of these days her smart-ass mouth was going to get her into loads of trouble, and she had a sneaking suspicion that day had arrived.

"I'll take her with me and explain things to her," a woman said as she stepped between her and Taron, taking her leash within her grasp.

"I think that's a good idea," Taron growled, then shot her another murderous glare before turning on his heels and leaving the building.

The woman turned and for a second Alyssa was speechless. She was absolutely beautiful with long flame-red hair that hung halfway down her back. Her eyes were the color of ocean ice—stunning and intelligent with just a hint of coldness. She was tough, she could tell by the set of her shoulders and the way she carried herself. If she were a man, Alyssa would consider her to be arrogant. But there was something else in her gaze—compassion.

"You can not," the woman began softly, her voice holding just a hint of accent similar to a French accent, "antagonize him." She nodded toward a couple on the other side of the room. "Do you see them?"

Alyssa looked. A woman just as nude as she knelt before the man holding her leash, her head bowed just slightly. She never appeared to look him in the eye, never spoke to him. She just obeyed like a damn pet. Alyssa scowled.

"That is how you must behave in public. In private, you may behave however Taron wishes you to."

"Taron?" Alyssa asked. Interesting name.

"Yes. Taron Karmase, the man who bought you. But you must refer to him as 'Master'. Unless he specifies otherwise."

"I don't think I can do this," Alyssa mumbled. "It goes against everything that I am. I'm not a slave."

A tiny grin pulled at the woman's lips. "Honey, as of right now, you are. Come on. Let's get you ready."

With one final glance at the woman bowed before her master's feet, Alyssa followed the woman out of the building and into the hot Veenorian sunlight.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I heard," Devlin drawled in amusement as Taron stomped down the hallway toward his office on the top level of Devlin's bar. He was still furious.

"Don't start with me," Taron growled as he pushed past Devlin's massive frame to enter the immaculate office.

"What?" Devlin asked, barely containing his laughter. "All I said was 'I heard'."

Taron began to pace in front of the massive cherrywood desk that dominated the room. There were very few trees here, so Devlin had had to have the desk shipped in from Tilarus. He preferred wood to the otherwise steel and stucco construction that covered the mostly barren planet and would pay whatever price necessary to get it.

"What the hell was I thinking?" Taron snapped.

"I don't know. What were you thinking?"

Taron stopped pacing to glare at him, then resumed his traveling.

"Where is she?" Devlin asked as he shut the door then settled into the leather seat behind his desk.

"She's with Rhia. Your sister had to step in to keep me from putting her over my knee." Devlin raised an eyebrow but said nothing. "How the hell am I supposed to do my job and keep her from driving me insane?"

"Looks like you'll have to figure it out."

Taron rolled his eyes and ran his hand over his head. "What do we tell Tony?"

Devlin shrugged. "The truth."

"The truth?" Taron gaped at him. "We don't even know what that is. What the hell is she doing here? How did she end up on that stage being sold as a slinoy?"

"I'm willing to wager she's here to find her brother's killer."

"Fuck. That's all we need."

"Maybe we should tell her that he's still alive."

"No. Telling her that would mean telling her who I am and why I'm here. That would put her in unnecessary danger. The less she knows the better."

Devlin nodded. "I'll go along with whatever you think is best."

Taron didn't know what he thought was best at the moment. One thing he knew for certain—having her in his bed was going to make an already hellish assignment even more so. His cock was already aching for her body, but all his hands wanted to do was strangle her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alyssa sat before a mirror, watching Rhia fix her hair into a mass of ringlet curls. "You have stunning eyes, Alyssa." Rhia smiled at her in the reflection.

"Thank you. My brother has some just like them. We both got them from our father." She swallowed back a sob. "Or I guess I should say he had some just like them."

"He's no longer with you?"

"No," she whispered. "He was murdered."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

Alyssa watched Rhia curl her hair, wondering why Rhia was here. She wasn't a Veenorian, that much was certain, but she wasn't from Earth either. "Where are you from?" Alyssa asked. When Rhia glanced at her questioningly, Alyssa shrugged. "You just don't seem like you belong."

"I don't," she said with a grin. "I wasn't born here. Devlin Armonde, the man who owns this bar and gambling hall, and I were on an orphan freighter destined for Rhenari. The freighter crashed here and we were the only two to survive. Devlin was twelve and knew where he came from. I was four and did not. Devlin had been kind to me the first day on the ship, so I attached myself to him, going wherever he did. He took it all in stride, taking care of me. When we crashed, he continued to do it. He basically raised me." She stared at Alyssa for a moment in surprise. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to tell you my life story."

"It's okay." Alyssa smiled slightly. "It's interesting. You really don't know where you came from?"

Rhia returned her attention to Alyssa's hair. "No. I still don't know. All I had was a necklace." She raised her hand to finger to gold charm around her neck that resembled a puzzle piece. "It's the only link to who I am, but so far we haven't been able to find anything out about it."

"Maybe one day you will." For some reason she felt a kinship with this woman. Rhia may turn out to be the only friend she would have in this godforsaken place.

Rhia quickly turned all business. "We need to discuss the rules, Alyssa."

Alyssa sighed. "Of course, the rules."

"Taron is a good man. A little rough around the edges, a little frightening when he's in a foul mood, which lately seems to be quite often, but he would never physically harm you."

"Why would you tell me that? Shouldn't I be afraid of him?"

Rhia smiled. "Yes, you should, and when in public you should act like you are. Never speak until spoken to, never look him directly in the eyes unless he tells you to, and for God's sake, never talk back to him."

"Why? What would he do if I did?"

"Let's just say you don't ever want to be in a position to find out. Alyssa, please. Don't challenge his authority in public and force him to make an example of you. Taron has hundreds of men below him and he can't afford for them to see him challenged by a woman. Do you understand?"

Alyssa nodded. "I think so."

"Good," Rhia said with a smile. "Now let's get you something to wear."

Once dressed, Alyssa stared at herself in the full-length mirror. She wasn't much better off. The top was like a bra, pushing her breasts together, although she had to admit the deep blue color went well with her skin tone. The bottom portion was nothing but a gold band around her waist with a flimsy piece of deep blue material to cover her front and one to cover her back. Her legs remained exposed. "You can't be serious."

She eyed Rhia in the reflection of the glass. She would much prefer her outfit, rust-colored pants and matching sleeveless jacket. The material was thin, allowing for the extremely hot temperatures here on the small planet. "Why can't I have an outfit like yours?"

Rhia chuckled. "Because, dear, you are a slinoy, so you must dress like one. Later Taron may dress you as he sees fit but for now, you dress your station."

"Peachy," Alyssa whined, making Rhia laugh.

"Relax, Alyssa. If you please him he will give you pleasure beyond anything you could imagine."

Alyssa studied her and for a fleeting second jealousy ran through her. "Do you know this firsthand?"

"No," Rhia said with a knowing grin. "But I've heard the other women talking about him. He's an attentive lover." Rhia stepped closer to whisper in her ear. "And quite large."

Alyssa gulped. Just how large?

"Come on." Rhia reattached the leash and led her from the room. "It's time to return you to your master."

As she followed Rhia down the long maze of hallways, she took a moment to study her surroundings. It was cool in the building, very few windows graced the outside walls. Since Veenori had twenty-four hour sunlight, she was sure it helped to keep the heat at bay.

The walls were made of clay and concrete, which trapped the cool air and helped to keep the interior temperatures down. Even the floors were concrete or slate, depending on the wealth of the owner. It was obvious Devlin had wealth for all the floors of his buildings were slate.

At the end of the hall, Rhia knocked at a set of massive double doors made of what appeared to be mahogany. Seeing the wood surprised her, for all the other doors had been metal. "Enter," someone shouted from within.

Alyssa's heart began to pound as Rhia opened the door and pulled her inside. Her gaze moved across burgundy walls and dark, wood furniture. For him to have had wooden furniture shipped here meant he was wealthy indeed.

"Alyssa," Rhia began. "You know Taron, but this is Devlin."

Her mouth practically dropped open as she stared at the man sitting behind the desk. He was breathtaking with shoulder-length, unruly black waves and eyes the color of sapphires that stared back at her in interest. His shoulders were massive and stretched the material of his shirt to almost bursting. Her gaze strayed to Taron and she gulped at the pure lust that shone in his eyes.

*Where the hell were men like this on Earth?*

"Damn, Taron," Devlin drawled. "You must share."

For a split second she imagined being sandwiched between the two intergalactic hunks and her nipples hardened beneath the material of her bra.

Taron's gaze dropped to her breasts and he grinned devilishly. "Something tells me you like the idea."

"Don't be ridiculous," she snapped.

Rhia's hand met Alyssa's ass with a stinging slap, making her gasp in surprise.

"We discussed this, Alyssa. He didn't give you permission to speak."

"It's all right, Rhia," Taron drawled. "Although I liked seeing you spank her. Give her another, just for good measure."

Again Rhia's hand smacked her, this time landing across the other butt cheek. Alyssa was prepared this time and refused to make a sound, despite the little shots of pleasure that shook her to the core. Refusing to examine her surprising arousal, she met Taron's gaze without flinching. Devlin's chuckle caught her attention and she turned her glare to him.

"She's going to be a handful. I have no doubt." He turned to Taron and smiled. "I envy you. It's been a long time since I've had the privilege of breaking in such a stunning beauty."

"Devlin," Rhia cautioned from behind her.

"I'm not a horse to be broken, damn it. I'm a woman."

Taron snorted. "I think that's rather obvious, Alyssa."

*"Neece vortune ali van moran timot,"* Devlin spoke quietly to Taron, who shook his head.

*"Neevok,"* Taron responded.

Okay, that Veenori word she knew. It was "no". But the others Devlin had said too quickly for her to catch.

"Don't do that," she snapped and they stared at her with amusement.

"Do what, slave?" Taron chuckled.

"Speak another language in front of me. It's rude."

"I can speak whatever I wish. Would you like to know what we were talking about?"

"Yes," she hissed with a sneer.

"Fine." He grinned and a sick feeling tightened her stomach. "Devlin wants to bend you over the desk and fuck your ass."

Alyssa gaped angrily at him. He was joking, surely.

"Taron, stop that," Rhia yelled. "That's not what he said and you know it. Stop trying to terrify the girl."

Rolling his eyes, Taron moved to rest his hip on the edge of Devlin's desk. "We never have any fun with you around," he drawled. "Devlin, make your sister go play somewhere else."

Devlin laughed, a deep rumbling sound that sent shivers down her back. He and Taron sounded a lot alike when they laughed and the thought was unsettling. It was bad enough she was attracted to Taron. God forbid they both tried to seduce her. When the hell did she turn into such a damn slut?

"I think not. When you get going the two of you are entirely too entertaining."

"Can we please just go?" Alyssa asked.

Taron grinned knowingly and she gritted her teeth against the desire to smack that smug look off his face.

"I'll talk to you later, Devlin. I think I better get my slave back to my quarters before she commences having a fit."

"I don't have fits," she snapped.

Taron came to a stop directly in front of her. She tilted her head back, trying to look him in the eyes. A tough feat, considering she only came to his collarbone. Taking a deep breath, she tried to calm her fluttering heart. If he'd keep his mouth shut he wouldn't be too bad to look at. Who was she kidding? She could stare at him all day. He was magnificent.

"It's time I found out if you're worth all that money I paid," he murmured against her lips. His warm breath fanned across her mouth and her nostrils flared, inhaling the scent of *kinok*, a Veenori alcohol. Her whole body tingled and she fought the overwhelming desire to lean into him and cover his full, kissable lips with hers.

"Come, slave," he said and tugged at her leash, forcing her to follow him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Rhia stepped behind Devlin and smacked the back of his head with her hand. He laughed, then reached up to rub it. "Ouch. You're getting good at blocking me, little sister," he drawled. "That one caught me by surprise."

She walked around his desk and smiled. Devlin was Dorian, an empath from the planet Thallion, and could sense her emotions, which sometimes made it extremely difficult to keep secrets from him. "You deserve a whole lot more. Both of you do."

"What?" he asked innocently, but Rhia knew better. There wasn't a damn thing about the man who'd raised her that was innocent.

"You know what." She glared at him before turning to leave the room. "Like you're going to share Anthony's sister."

Devlin's chuckle followed her out the door and she clucked her tongue in frustration. *Men.*

## Chapter Three

Alyssa followed Taron down the hall and into the main floor of the bar, her leash dangling between them. They'd entered through the back entrance earlier so she'd missed the main salon. It was huge and her steps slowed as her gaze took in the crowded tables.

At the center of each table were women and men dancing for the patrons around them, their bodies glistening with glitter and jewels as they undulated around the poles coming up through the center of the tables. No one paid them any attention as they made their way through the mass of people. Close to the door, a woman dancing on the table before them caught her eye.

The soft, muted lights reflected off her sparkling body, making the tiny jewels glisten like diamonds. Jeweled clamps dangled from her nipples and jingled like tiny bells as she swayed and undulated around the pole. For some reason, Alyssa couldn't take her eyes off her. The dancer's fingers moved lower to touch her shaved pussy and the men around her table all grunted their approval.

Taron moved behind her and the heat of his body seeped into hers. Darting her gaze to the next table, she stared as a male dancer surrounded by women gripped his cock and stroked it. The women sighed and licked their lips as his cock grew in size. Slowly he worked his way around the table, allowing each woman seated there to swipe her tongue around the head of his shaft.

Alyssa's body burned as she watched the erotic images surrounding her. She'd never seen anything like it and couldn't for the life of her look away. Taron's fingers slid beneath the split in her skirt and brushed along her slit. She closed her eyes with a moan, mortified that he would feel what this place had done to her. What his softly spoken words earlier had done.

She tried her best to remain compliant, tried to remember what Rhia had told her. *Never challenge him in public*, but she couldn't let him do this to her here. She'd never had sex in front of people and the very idea made her tense.

"Relax, Alyssa," he purred in her ear. "I won't fuck you here. Just watch them."

She swallowed and kept her gaze on the man and woman before her, both now pleasuring themselves on separate tables a good twenty feet away from each other, his hands stroked his cock, hers plunged and fingered her clit as the dancers twirled around the pole.

Taron's fingers continued to gently stroke her wet pussy, fueling her already out of control passion. Why was he doing this? Did he want to humiliate her? But as her gaze moved around the room, she realized no one paid them any attention. No one noticed what Taron was doing.



Moving her gaze back to the man dancing on the table, she softly gasped as Taron separated her folds and slid two fingers deep within her aching walls. He stepped closer, supporting her back against his chest. "Watch them, Lyssa," he whispered as he wrapped his other arm around her waist.

She opened her heavy-lidded eyes and watched the couple. They were more than a few feet apart, but they seemed to move in unison. "They're Dorian," Taron purred. "Because they are both Dorian, they can mentally link themselves, but they must do it together. She can feel his cock thrusting inside her and he can feel her pussy clenching his cock."

He increased the rhythm of his fingers, plunging them deeper, harder. "Imagine it's my cock thrusting inside you now, Lyssa." His deep, sexy voice washed over her, sending her to heights beyond anything she'd felt before. "Pretend I'm fucking you, burying myself deep inside your hot pussy."

Panting now, her gaze remained glued to the man's cock as he pumped it hard and fast. His balls tightened and pulled upward, his breathing harsh and labored. Taron's thumb shifted to circle her clit and she moaned, her knees weakening in desire and need. God, what the hell was he doing to her?

Alyssa's hips rocked against his hand and she exploded, falling back against Taron's chest, her walls clenching and unclenching around his thick fingers. Taron's soft voice whispered soothingly in her ear and her body began to slowly relax. In front of her the dancers were still moving, still working their bodies toward fulfillment.

Just as the female dancer screamed her release, the male dancer spilled his seed with a shout, then allowed each woman to take turns licking him, cleaning his cock with their tongues. It was the most erotic thing she'd ever witnessed or felt and for a fleeting second she forgot to be embarrassed.

Taron's breath brushed across her neck as he spoke softly, sending little shivers down her spine. "You're definitely worth the amount I paid for you."

\* \* \* \* \*

Taron settled Alyssa in his speeder and turned to walk around the back. Lifting his hand, he inhaled her honeylike scent and his cock tightened painfully. He didn't have a clue what he'd been thinking, but when he'd seen her reaction to the sharing suggestion earlier and then again as she watched the couple dance, he hadn't been able to stop himself.

She was beautiful, stunning and so fucking hot he had wanted to lift that skirt and fuck her right then and there. She was his slave. It would be within his rights, but the last thing he needed to do was demonstrate how little control he had around his slinoy. What he was doing was dangerous enough. Add this to the mix and he was screwed.

"Where are we going now?" she asked as she eyed him warily.

She'd been suspiciously quiet since the bar, and he took a moment to study her. "Did I say you could speak?" he asked.

She grumbled something under her breath and turned away from him to glare across the desert wasteland. It would take her a while to get used to these rules, he was sure. As he watched her, he frowned. What the hell was he supposed to do with her? He knew what he wanted to do—use her as the slave she was. But he'd promised Anthony he'd take care of her and taking care of her didn't include fucking.

But damn, after that little impromptu session in the bar, all he could think about was sinking his cock into that delectable body of hers. Damn she was hot. Taking a deep breath, he tried to turn his mind from fucking her and answered the question she'd asked. "We're headed to my quarters at the mine." After a brief pause, he added, "You may ask questions if you wish."

"Aren't you the generous one," she sneered and Taron turned away to hide a grin.

"I can be very generous, slave." He glanced back at her and ran his finger along her jawline. She flinched and narrowed her eyes in apprehension. "When I'm pleased. And your reaction to my touch earlier pleased me very much."

She scowled and moved her angry gaze to the dash of his speeder. "I would prefer to forget that ever happened."

Taron chuckled despite himself. "Are you always such a *vigic*?"

"What's a *vigic*?"

"What you Earthlings would call someone who's surly all the time."

She gave him a tight-lipped grin. "If I was would you release me and let me work off my debt in the mine instead?"

Taron snorted. "No."

With a sigh, she crossed her arms over her chest and sulked.

Taron leaned closer and traced the shell of her ear with his tongue. She jerked away as though startled but Taron grabbed her arm and held her close. "We have people watching," he whispered. "Behave yourself."

She tilted her head and snapped at him, "Do you enjoy toying with me in front of an audience?"

"I enjoy making you squirm. I have to wonder, though. Why would you want to spend more than twelve hours a day at hard labor when you could spend twelve hours a day being pleased by me?"

"What makes you think you pleasure me?"

A slow smile spread across Taron's face as he gently licked the side of her neck, making her shiver. "I think that orgasm you had in the bar says it all, *ni pahti*." For a second his use of that particular endearment made him pause. It meant "my angel". Brushing the thought aside, he slowly slid his hand up the inside of her leg. The muscles bunched and twitched beneath his touch as he moved closer to her smooth, hot pussy. "Do you need a reminder of just how well I can please you?"

His hand cupped her and he smiled as her warm juices coated his palm. She gulped in a sudden intake of breath then bit down on her lip. "Don't do this here," she whispered in a strained voice. "They're watching."

With a gentle touch, he separated her folds and softly stroked her swollen clit. She gasped, her hips wiggling in the seat. Through his lashes, he glanced up and noticed that indeed several men had their eyes locked on his slinoy and the quick rise and fall of her breasts.

The color of her cheeks deepened to the most adorable shade of red and he applied a little more pressure to the hard bud beneath his finger. Her blush deepened along with her breathing. "You will find, slave, that I do what I want, where I want," he whispered in her ear. "That includes pleasing you. Come for me, Lyssa. Let me feel your pussy quake against my hand."

Shifting slightly, he pushed two fingers deep within her folds. She was slick with her juices and hot as lava. Closing his eyes, he imagined his cock buried inside her tight walls. "That's it, Lyssa," he purred as her walls clenched his fingers, pulling them deeper.

He increased his thrusts, his thumb circling her now engorged clit. She whimpered and bit down on her lip. He increased his rhythm, fucking her harder. "Don't fight it, Lyssa. Let it go. Show them how pretty you are when you come, how hot."

Her mouth dropped open and her head fell back against the seat. Closing her eyes tight, she let out a mewling sound that almost drove him over the edge. The walls of her pussy spasmed around his fingers over and over, milking them as they would his cock.

Once her throbs subsided, he removed his hand and slid his fingers into his mouth to lick her juices. Her eyes opened to stare angrily into his. "I hate you," she snarled.

He smiled as he licked the last of her essence from his knuckle. "Give it a week, *ni pahti*. By then you'll really hate me."

\* \* \* \* \*

Alyssa stared in awe as the small speeder descended into a deep hole in the ground. All around them were steel structures and landing pads built into the side of the rock. As they fell lower, the temperature dropped dramatically and she hugged herself to keep warm. Since the top had been removed, leaving the inside exposed like a convertible, there was no climate control within the ship.

Leaning her head over the side of the ship, she tried to tell how deep the hole went, but the bottom was covered in darkness. "How far does this go?" she asked.

"Five dectons, or three miles. My quarters, or I guess now our quarters, are halfway down, in the residential levels."

"What's above the residential level?"

"Docking stations, offices, supply bunkers."

"And the mine itself is below them?"

"Yes."

She darted her gaze quickly from one landing pad to another, trying to get a glimpse of everything. It was amazing. Steel walls jutted out from the rock. Some of the windows were lit, their soft yellow lights casting a little brightness in an otherwise dark and damp environment. Lower they descended, into what could only be the bowels of hell.

The faraway sound of machinery could be heard over the engine noise and white smoke drifted up from the dark bottom. Taron moved the ship closer to the side and came to a stop on a small pad. He pushed a button on the dash and the metal wall slid open, allowing her a view of the apartment within.

"Your own personal parking space. Aren't you special." she said with a frown.

Taron shook his head in amusement. "I think we should go back to the rule of don't speak unless you're spoken to."

"Fine," she snapped and turned her nose up. She ignored him as she stepped out of the speeder, holding her leash within her hand so as not to trip on it. Her gaze moved upward, trying to gauge how far down they were. A wave of dizziness swept through her and she wobbled, almost falling onto the cold concrete beneath her bare feet.

Taron's arms snaked around her and held her close to his warm chest. "I've got you. Be careful," he said as he gazed down into her face, his eyes full of concern and just a hint of mischief and lust. "It's a long way down if you fall over the edge of the platform."

The heat of his body seeped into her cold one, filling her with warmth. She raised her hands to rest against his chest and felt the hard muscles twitch beneath her fingers. He was so big he dwarfed her when she stood this close to him, which unnerved her greatly. She didn't like feeling this vulnerable or this out of control.

She swallowed a sudden lump of desire. "I'm fine now. You can let me go."

His hands moved lower to cup her bottom as a sensuous grin tugged at his lips. Oh, God. What was he up to now? She couldn't take another lesson on just how much control he had over her body.

"I don't think I'm quite ready to yet," he purred and pulled her flush against him. His hard cock pressed into her stomach and she gasped at his size and the pure, hot lust that suddenly gripped her. Even through his clothes she could tell he was huge. Much bigger than anyone she'd been with in the past.

"Feels to me like you're ready for something," she murmured then clamped her eyes shut in aggravation. *What made me say that?*

Taron chuckled and released his hold on her. She staggered back from him, unsure if she was happy with the release or not. She definitely missed the warmth of his flesh as the cool air brushed across her heated skin.

"Come on inside. It's much cooler down here than on the surface and I'm sure you'll need to get warm. You're starting to shiver."

She followed him into the suite of rooms and jumped when the wall slid back into place behind them. The interior was much different than she expected—steel walls, thick-shaded windows that overlooked the landing pad outside and tile floors that felt cold against her bare feet, adding to the cool temperature. The furniture was all metal and glass. “Is the whole planet like this?”

“Like what?” Taron asked from the room to her left.

Following the sound of his voice, she stepped into the bedroom. He stood by the closet, thoughtfully studying the clothes that hung there. For a second she let her gaze wander down his wide, strong back and firm hips and thighs. The man was a mountain and would surely crush her during sex.

Raising her gaze, she found him staring at her over his shoulder. “Like what?” he asked again.

“Oh, sorry. Desert. Is the whole planet like a desert?”

“For the most part. There’s a small grove of trees to the north of the mine. Even has a wooden cabin, if you can believe that. Trees don’t grow here easily, so they’re protected. No one can cut them down.”

“How do they survive?” she asked as she searched the room for a place to sit. She really didn’t want to sit on the bed and give him any ideas.

“There’s an underground spring that feeds the trees, keeps them alive. The only place it flows to the surface is a few miles west of the city. There are a few trees there as well, but they’re small. The heat and constant sunlight stunts their growth.”

“Oh,” she breathed then finally decided to just remain standing.

“Here. Put this on,” he said as he handed her a wool shirt and reached out to unhook the leash attached to her collar. “It’ll help keep you warm until I can get you something else to wear. Sexy as that outfit you’re wearing is, I can’t have you traipsing around the mine in it. The men are sometimes hard enough to control as it is.”

“Thank you.” She wrapped the thick material around her shoulders then slipped her arms through the sleeves. It swallowed her whole, but it at least helped to ward off the chill.

“Are you hungry?” Taron asked.

“Yes. I don’t think I’ve eaten in several hours.”

Taron nodded then headed for the door. “I have to work for a while, but I’ll have my assistant bring you something. When he gets here do not speak to him, understand?”

“What if he speaks to me first?” she asked.

“He won’t.”

With that, he stepped out into the hallway, the door clicking shut behind him. Running over, she quickly grabbed the handle and gave it a turn, hoping he’d left the door unlocked. With a growl of aggravation, she realized he hadn’t forgotten and slapped her palm against the thick metal.

“Nice try,” Taron drawled through the metal. The amusement in his voice was obvious and she scowled at him through the door, silently cursing him to hell.

## Chapter Four

Taron jumped off the elevator ledge before it came to a stop on the first floor of the mineshaft, toward the bottom of the hole. A dusting of pebbles rained down on his head and he brushed them away with his fingers. "Neelok," he shouted.

"Yes, Overseer?"

Taron frowned at the tall man before him, his long, spindly legs bent at awkward angles as he tried to stay low and keep his narrow head from scraping the ceiling. "Get someone down here to fix that," he nodded to the constant shower of dust and tiny pebbles that fell from the roof of the cavern, "before the damn thing gets any bigger."

"Yes, sir." Neelok nodded then headed off to find someone.

"Karmase."

Taron rolled his eyes heavenward at Jonah's voice, then turned to stare at the intruder questioningly.

Jonah was from Taron's homeworld of Tilarus, and Taron tensed whenever he was around him. The man hadn't given any indication so far that he recognized him, but Taron was careful nonetheless. He was glad he'd thought to lose his Tilarian accent before coming here, adopting the Norgosen accent of his father.

"What is it, Jonah?" he asked.

"The shipment bound for Hilarac is ready for your approval."

Taron nodded and took the small computer Jonah handed him. As quickly as possible he scanned the minerals to be shipped then checked the weights. Right away he noticed they didn't match up. Foran Five was a dust and should weigh no more than a few thousand pounds. He narrowed his eyes at Jonah. "Since when does a full shipment of Foran Five weigh over two tons?"

"What?" Jonah stared at him in surprise then grabbed the manifest from his hand to see for himself. "There must be a mistake."

*No, Taron thought to himself, there's a shipment of weapons mixed in with the minerals.*

He didn't believe Jonah was behind it, but he had a sneaking suspicion Master Chief Morlak was. His only dilemma was, how did he find out who Morlak worked for?

"There's no mistake," Morlak purred from behind Taron.

Taron stiffened and turned to glare at Morlak. "Care to explain the discrepancy?"

Morlak took the computer from Taron and nodded to Jonah. "You may go," Morlak said. Once Jonah had headed back down the shaft, Morlak turned his attention back to

Taron. "An additional shipment of un-ground mineral rock that was accidentally left off the manifest. I'll take care of it."

"You do that," Taron replied softly.

Morlak studied the list then glanced at Taron with his gold, lizard-like eyes. "I understand you bought a slinoy, Karmase. Paid a hefty sum for her from what I hear."

"So?"

"Where did you get such a large amount of money? I know you don't make that much here."

"Maybe it's none of your business."

Morlak's lips lifted into a sideways grin. "I like you, Karmase. You have balls."

"I'm thrilled," Taron murmured.

Taron had made sure since he'd been here that the men knew about his bloody past and time spent at Dellon Five. His well-constructed reputation could be the one thing that got him in.

"Perhaps you and I should get together. Discuss a way for you to line your pockets even more," Morlak suggested.

"I'm listening," Taron purred as he crossed his arms over his chest.

"I'll let you know when. For now, I'll take care of this." He waved the computer and turned to jump on the elevator, which had begun the slow climb back to the top level. Taron watched him go and wondered if maybe he'd finally found a way inside.

\* \* \* \* \*

Taron opened the door to his quarters with caution. He expected to be pummeled by his stubborn little slave, and when he stepped in and wasn't greeted with something being thrown at him in her attempt to leave, he quickly scanned the room looking for her.

He caught a glimpse of her small ankle dangling off the edge of the mattress and he moved further into the bedroom for a closer look. She was sound asleep, stretched out across his bed. For a moment he just watched her, letting his gaze wander aimlessly across her exposed flesh.

In her sleep, she'd knocked the covers off, leaving most everything but her hips visible to his hungry gaze. Never in his life had he seen a more fascinating woman. Or a more beautiful one. Her eyes were especially stunning and extremely expressive. Everything she felt could be seen there, shining in their bright, intelligent depths.

Walking closer, he brushed a stray lock from her forehead. Long black lashes graced her cheeks and fluttered in her sleep. She was dreaming. He smiled and softly trailed his fingertip along her eyebrow, smoothing out the strip of black.

She moaned and rolled to her back. His gaze moved immediately to her ample breasts. They were perfect—full and firm, and the rose-tinted nipples perked upward,



begging to be suckled. He moved his fingers down her neck and chest, all the while watching her face for any sign she was waking. With the barest of touches, he circled her nipple with the tip of his finger. It beaded into a hard bud and he gently pinched it, making her moan in her sleep.

His cock hardened instantly beneath the coarse material of his slacks. He knew he shouldn't. This woman was Anthony's sister and Anthony trusted him to look out for her. But another side of him – the lust-filled side – wanted desperately to fuck her.

What was it about her he just couldn't seem to resist? With an inward growl he moved back to the living area, putting some distance between him and the temptation she offered. He plopped down into a chair and rubbed at his temples, trying to ease the pounding that had started behind his eyes.

He hoped the conversation he'd had with Morlak would lead somewhere. Alyssa rolled to her side, giving him a perfect view of her delectable backside. He ran his hand down his face with a sigh. The first order of business was to get the woman some decent clothes before she drove him insane with desire.

"This is ridiculous," he murmured. "It's my damn bed and it's big enough for both of us."

Standing, he walked back into the bedroom and removed his clothes then climbed into bed beside her. Her body curled instinctively against his and he wrapped his arm around her, holding her close. She was soft and warm and her body fit perfectly within his embrace. The rightness of it all startled him.

He'd never had a woman feel like this in his arms, like she belonged, and he wasn't sure what to make of it. This was going to be a long assignment.

"Too long," he whispered toward the ceiling.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alyssa awoke with a start and sat upright in the bed, her fingers grasping the sheet beneath her chin. At first she couldn't remember where she was but then it all came back to her – every mortifying touch of his hand. She closed her eyes with a groan and brushed her hair from her eyes.

Where was the jerk anyway, she wondered and glanced around, looking for him. She stopped cold the second her eyes landed on his gorgeous, rock-hard form in the bed next to her. His skin was bronze and stretched tight over massive muscles that flexed when he shifted. In surprise, she realized there wasn't a scrap of hair on him anywhere. So apparently his being bald wasn't by choice.

With deliberate slowness, she lowered her gaze past his firm pecs, his washboard abs, his thick... She swallowed a lump at the sight of his thick cock. The thing was huge and she couldn't imagine being able to take all of it. Was he actually going to fuck her with that?

"Stop staring at me like that, Alyssa," Taron drawled with a just a hint of amusement. "The damn thing is hard enough."

*Oh, God. It can get harder?* Biting down on her lower lip, she turned her back to him so he hopefully wouldn't see her trying not to giggle.

"Come back to bed. It's too early to get up," he grumbled.

She glanced back at him over her shoulder. He had one arm thrown over his eyes, the other resting on his hard stomach. God, he looked good. "I'm wide awake now," she said with a shrug.

With a speed that shocked her, Taron grabbed her arm and pulled her back to the bed. She landed on the mattress with a squeal, then gasped as he swiftly rolled and settled over top of her, pinning her small body beneath his larger one. His hard shaft pressed into her thigh and she stared up at him in shock, her heart beating frantically in her chest. The move didn't scare her. Quite the opposite. It turned her on.

"I never said anything about sleeping," he whispered against her lips.

Blood rushed through her ears and down to her pussy with alarming swiftness as the smoldering heat of his whiskey stare bored into hers. She felt hot, and thoroughly thrown for a loop as his mouth slowly lowered, coming to a stop just inches away from hers.

"I don't have time for you, *ni pahti*," he murmured, his lips brushing softly across hers as he spoke. "You're a distraction I can't afford."

"Then why did you buy me?" she whispered back, her lips opening in silent invitation for his kiss. He smelled of mornings and hot male and she inhaled deeply, pulling his essence into her. Welcoming the heat of his flesh.

He grinned then licked at her bottom lip, making her shiver. "You were just too tempting to pass up." His smile faded and his gaze sobered, turning her insides to molten fire. "Too beautiful for the other men to ruin and abuse."

"So you saved me?"

"And damned myself, it seems," he murmured just before his lips claimed hers in a deep, all-consuming kiss.

She moaned as his tongue slid into her mouth, taking complete and utter possession. His kiss was wild, deep and incredibly erotic. His tongue delved and licked, his teeth nipped. He put his whole mouth into the kiss, leaving her hungry for more.

Suddenly Taron stiffened and pulled away from her, his labored breaths fanning across her lips. At first she didn't understand what was wrong, why he scowled so angrily. Then she heard it—the knock at the door.

"Son of a bitch," he growled and rolled off her, stomping across the floor. Throwing open the door, he snapped, "What the fuck do you want?"

Alyssa watched in awe as the young man cowered before his furious glare. "I'm sorry, sir. But you requested this be brought to you first thing this morning."

With a shaking hand, he passed a small silver box to Taron, who snatched it from him with a growl then slammed the door.

"You know, you probably gave that poor boy a heart attack," she scolded as she sat up and covered herself with the blanket. Her hands shook as she brushed her hair from her eyes. She still couldn't believe what they'd almost done. But wasn't that what she was here for? To appease his basic needs and desires?

His gaze flicked to her momentarily, then shifted back to the box he held in his palm. "He's not a boy, Alyssa. He's older than both of us put together."

"And how old is that?" she asked.

"Well, I'm thirty-four and you're twenty-six, so that makes him sixty or better," he said as he made his way across the floor to his desk.

She lost her train of thought as what he'd said sank in. "How do you know how old I am?"

He stopped mid-stride but didn't look at her before continuing across the room. Wrapping the sheet around her body, she climbed from the bed and stomped to glare at him across his desk. "Well?" she snapped.

Slowly, he took his seat before meeting her questioning gaze. "I guessed."

"Bullshit," she snapped.

Taron remained quiet as his eyes slowly slid down the length of her body, heating her flesh and sending a sudden wave of desire to the pit of her stomach. He wasn't going to sway her that easily, damn it.

"Taron," she started, then licked her lips.

"You look delectable in that sheet, Lyssa. But I think I'd rather you take it off."

"That reminds me," she said, tightening the sheet around her breasts. "When do I get some clothes?"

"Who said you were getting clothes?" he asked, his eyebrow arching adorably.

"You did, last night. You might be comfortable naked," she snapped, trying to keep her gaze from flicking to his massive cock, which still stood fully erect. "But I'm not. I'd prefer some clothing."

"Haven't you figured out yet, Alyssa, that you're a slave and you get what I choose to give you, when I choose to give it to you? What you prefer is irrelevant."

She took a deep breath and counted to ten. "Please. You can't keep me here in the nude until you tire of me."

"I most certainly can. I paid for you, remember? You are at my beck and call. Whatever I want you to do you are required to do and if that means living here naked, then you live here naked."

"As much as I love the idea of being your beck-and-call girl, I refuse to be forced to run around here naked," she snapped angrily.

"You refuse?" he asked as he slowly stood from the chair, his eyes narrowing dangerously. "You're treading awfully close to trouble, slave. You better calm down before you say something you'll regret."

"Why? What are you going to do? Spank me?" she snarled. "I dare you." The second the words left her lips she regretted them. Why did she always have to lose her temper and spout off at the mouth? Why couldn't she think before she spoke? "I...um...I didn't mean that," she stammered.

"Too late," he growled and lunged for her, his fingers wrapping around her upper arm.

"You wouldn't dare," she hissed. "I'm a grown woman, not a child. You can't be serious." She tried to pull her arm free of his grasp as he tugged her to the bed. He looked furious and completely serious and her struggles increased, in earnest.

Sitting on the side of the bed, he ripped the sheet from her body before throwing her across his lap on her stomach, her ass high in the air. She bit down on her lip, determined to not make a sound as the first stinging slap landed across her buttock. "I can't believe you're doing this," she growled.

"You'll learn to control your temper, Alyssa, or you'll get more of these," he purred, then slapped her ass again with his palm.

She stiffened, but not from pain. It was something else that shook her to the core. Desire. Every time his hand met her flesh, her whole body tingled, sending shock waves of lust to settle between her legs. This wasn't right. How could a spanking make her want him?

The slaps stopped and his palm softly massaged her muscles. "Your ass is now the most adorable shade of red," he purred and slid his fingers between her butt cheeks and down her cleft to her pussy.

Tremors of molten desire made her groan and she buried her face against his thigh.

*This can't be happening. Please, tell me this isn't happening.*

"I can't believe you actually spanked me," she growled. "You should be shot, hanged, left to die a slow death."

Taron chuckled and smoothed a fingertip along her sensitive slit. "I think you protest too much, slave. You're awfully wet for someone who didn't enjoy it."

"And you're awfully like a tyrant who gets his kicks out of..." He pushed two fingers deep into her aching pussy and she gasped, clamping her mouth closed against the desire to scream her pleasure.

Of their own accord, her hips lifted to meet his gentle thrusts. Her juices coated his fingers then slipped lower to soak the side of his leg. He leaned down and softly bit her shoulder. His mouth was hot against her flesh and shivers of unanswered need moved along her limbs. "I want more than just my fingers inside you this time, Lyssa. I want to feel your pussy come around my cock."

She whimpered, remembering the thickness of his cock, and more wetness pooled from her center. Could she take him? She wasn't sure but at the moment, more than anything, she wanted to try.

Removing his fingers, he grabbed her arms and turned her so his mouth could claim hers in a deeply erotic kiss. His lips moved over hers with a skill that left her breathless. She wrapped her arms around his neck and deepened the kiss, her tongue battling his for control. The arm around her shoulders held her close while his other hand massaged her breasts and rolled her nipple between his thumb and forefinger.

"Taron," she sighed. "Hurry before we're interrupted again."

With a soft chuckle, he lifted her then turned to lay her on the bed. Spreading her thighs wider with his, he positioned the head of his shaft at her opening. She moaned and bucked her hips against him, silently begging him to take her, to appease the terrible ache that was eating her alive.

"Damn," he sighed into her kiss. "Easy, Alyssa. I don't want to hurt you. You're so fucking small."

"Please," she whispered, and it was all the encouragement Taron needed.

Slowly, he slid his cock inside her. Inch by excruciating inch he plunged deeper, retreating then pushing back in. She gasped as his thick cock stretched her, filled her so completely it took her breath away. Aggravated with his patience, she wrapped her legs around his hips and pulled him deeper inside her. With a growl he thrust hard, burying himself balls-deep.

She screamed, throwing her head back against the bed and lifting her hips higher, forcing his cock even deeper. "Oh, God," she groaned as he began to move. Slowly at first, then harder, nearly splitting her in two.

"*Shetah*, you feel good," he growled as he gently nibbled the sensitive spot behind her ear. "Too good."

"Taron," she gasped as the first waves of her release began to work their way through her body. The insides of her thighs tightened and trembled as the waves increased in intensity.

Taron slowed his thrusts, grinding his hips in circles against her clit as he plunged deeper. Every muscle in her body tensed as she tried to hold back, to fight it off. But it was no use. Her body wanted it, needed it too much.

"Oh, God, yes," she screamed and bucked against him harder. "Harder, Taron."

Rising up on his hands, Taron thrust harder, his balls slapping against her ass. She began to scoot across the bed and threw her hands over her head to grip the mattress and push herself back. The movement forced her into him and forced his cock even deeper, bringing her closer to orgasm.

She held her breath, trying to delay it. He felt so good inside her she didn't want him to stop.

"Look at me, Alyssa," he said and she opened her eyes, meeting his hot stare.

"Don't hold it back," he ordered as he began to move his hips in tantalizing circles against her sensitive clit. The movement sent a shock wave of sensation up her vagina. "Come with me, *ni pahti*."

She closed her eyes again and let herself go. With a loud groan, she shattered into a million pieces, her pussy spasming around Taron's invading cock.

With a shout of his own, Taron stiffened above her, his body shivering in the throes of his own release.

## Chapter Five

Alyssa paced the floor of Taron's suite, thoroughly bored out of her mind. She had to find something to do before she went crazy. Taron had left this morning right after he'd finished with her. He didn't say a word but as he dressed he kept stopping to glance at her with this odd expression—like he didn't know what to make of her.

Well, she didn't know what to make of him either. He made her body feel things she never dreamed it could. And God knows he was gorgeous. Beyond gorgeous. The man was a god. He was also an arrogant ass. It infuriated her, the way he led her around by the leash and made her call him "master". Although he didn't push the use of master when they were alone, which made her pause in her pacing.

Shaking her head, she continued walking from one end of the room the other, her arms swinging back and forth. She needed to keep her mind on why she was here. Vingosa. She needed to find Vingosa. With a sigh, she glanced at the locked door. She certainly wasn't going to find him in here. She needed to find a way out of this room and into the mine. Unless...

Thinking, she strolled over to Taron's desk and stared at the small, square computer. What she assumed to be a password prompt blinked on the screen.

"Damn, I wish I'd thought to learn Veenorian," she mumbled to herself as she leaned closer to study the letters.

The door opened and she jerked upright, meeting Taron's suspicious gaze. "What are you doing?" he asked.

"Nothing," she replied, and inwardly cringed when her voice cracked.

"Nothing, huh? You look awfully guilty for someone who's doing nothing. Did my assistant bring you dinner?" he asked.

"Yes. He came about an hour ago. Did you bring me some clothes?" she asked and hugged his shirt around her more tightly.

He shook his head in amusement. "You have a one-track mind."

"It's kind of hard to not think about it when you're cold," she snarled. "*Master.*"

"Then turn up the environmental controls," he answered back. "*Slave.*"

She chewed on her lower lip and moved her gaze away from him. Just looking at him reminded her of earlier and the way his hands had played her flesh like an instrument, making it sing in pleasure. "I can't. The panel is in Veenorian and I can't read it."

Taron set his handheld computer on the table and motioned for her to join him at the panel. "Come here."

She walked over and stood next to him. "This symbol," he said as he pointed to a small triangle with a squiggly line through it, "is the on switch." He pushed it and the panel lit up, causing other symbols to become visible. He pointed out each one, showing her how to raise and lower the temperature.

Each symbol, she realized, was a complete word, not just a letter. This would be a difficult language to learn. "Is there some way I can learn more of this language?"

He studied her for a moment, thoughtfully, and her stomach knotted. Could he read her mind? Did he know she was up to something? "I'll teach you."

That surprised her and she stared at him in shock. "You will?"

"Yeah," he snorted. "What? Didn't think I knew how to read?"

"Well—" she began but Taron held up a hand, stopping her.

"Never mind. Don't answer that."

A knock sounded at the door and they both turned to frown at it. "Who's that?" she asked quietly.

"Probably Morlak. He said he would be by here later."

"Who's Morlak?" she asked.

"He's the master chief."

"So he's your boss?" Alyssa asked. Taron didn't seem like the type to take orders and she couldn't imagine him under anyone. *Except maybe me*, she thought with a wicked grin.

He noticed her smile and his brow wrinkled into a stern expression. "No. He controls the ships and the pilots." He stepped closer, his brow creasing into a frown as he leaned down to meet her eye to eye. "This isn't a game and it's important you do as I say. Understand?"

She swallowed her trepidation at the dangerously serious tone his voice held.

"When I open that door, I need you to remember your place. I know it will be hard for you, but be submissive."

She opened her mouth to speak but he scowled, putting his finger over her lips. "I mean it, Lyssa. So help me if you do anything stupid..."

"Okay, I get it," she hissed. "I'll be submissive."

He studied her for a moment as though he didn't quite believe her, then moved to the door. He glanced her way and she nodded, then moved to take a submissive stance, eyes downcast, hands clasped before her. The door opened and she watched Taron through her lashes.

"Morlak," Taron said.

"Taron," Morlak replied as he stepped into the room.

He was tall and thin with green-tinged skin and gold eyes that darted to her in interest. He walked toward her and she inwardly cringed. His eyes dilated then quickly shrank back to normal as they roamed over her body, sending goose bumps along her



flesh. The man gave her the creeps and she darted a nervous glance toward Taron, who shook his head ever-so slightly.

Morlak brushed his cold, clammy fingers along her neck and she tried not to noticeably flinch. It didn't work. Morlak scowled down at her, making her heart pound in fear. Would Taron let this man abuse her?

"She's lovely. No doubt worth the amount you paid for her," Morlak said as his hand moved to pull open her shirt and expose her breasts, and she stiffened before moving back a step. "Still unbroken, I see. She hasn't learned yet that anyone can touch her."

Close to panic, she shot Taron a frightened gaze, silently praying he would do something. The possessive scowl on his face startled her and she watched, mesmerized, as he moved forward and grabbed her elbow. "Only at the owner's discretion. Go to the other room, slave," he ordered.

"Yes, Master," she whispered, but mouthed a silent thank you as she walked past.

Taron scowled at Morlak. Fury had punched him in the gut when he saw the Veenorian put his hands on Alyssa. He didn't want anyone touching her and the realization startled him. She'd been on his mind all day, ever since this morning when he'd lost his control and fucked her. He had no business doing that. She was Anthony's sister and they'd promised him they'd find her and take care of the girl. But now that he'd had her once, he wasn't so sure he could keep from having her again.

"I'm sure you didn't come here to get a closer look at my slave, Morlak. What do you want?"

Morlak grinned, sending a shot of apprehension down the back of Taron's neck. He didn't like this man. Taron's gut told him to watch his back around him. "Like I said, Karmase. I like you. Come with me to Devlin's. I'd like to speak with you about a little side project I have for you."

Taron nodded. "I'll meet you there."

"Good." Morlak grinned and left the room, quietly shutting the door behind him.

With a sigh, Taron turned to see Alyssa step from the bedroom, her eyes watching him expectantly. His lips quirked, fighting a grin. "Please tell me you're not going to read me the riot act about how I never take you anywhere."

She scowled adorably and his gut tightened. What the hell kind of effect did she have on him? Whatever it was, he didn't have time for it, nor did he like it. He sighed and ran his hand over his head.

He punched the panel next to the door and the outside wall slid open. Cool air rushed into the room and he watched Alyssa hug the shirt around her more tightly. Tomorrow he would have Rhia take her shopping. As much as he liked looking at her body and loved teasing her, she needed some clothes. "Don't open the door while I'm gone," he ordered.

"I think that's a given since I don't know how to unlock the damn thing."

Taron frowned, then nodded. "You don't want to go out there, Alyssa. Trust me on this."

Alyssa remained silent as she watched him walk out to his speeder, parked on the extended dock. Part of her wanted to run after him, beg him to take her too. She hated being cooped up here alone and would give anything to have someone to talk to. She just didn't know if she should *want* to talk to him.

His ship lifted from the pad, spun around, then whizzed quickly toward the light at the top of the hole. She walked cautiously toward the end of the landing pad and peeked over the edge. Her head swam with dizziness and she immediately stepped back. She should have known better.

Placing a hand against her forehead, she watched a small ship levitate a few feet away. Two men leered at her and she shivered as nasty grins spread their lips. Fast as a shot she turned and ran back into the suite, anxious to close the wall and put a safety buffer between her and the men outside.

\* \* \* \* \*

The metal door opened and Alyssa pretended to be asleep in the large bed. She could hear Taron moving around, his footfalls soft on the floor. She'd lain awake most of the night thinking about yesterday morning. Wow, she hadn't had sex like that ever. The man was incredible. Would he have his way with her again? And did she want him to? She wasn't sure. Part of her did and the other part wanted to hate him.

His large palm slapped across her ass, the thin blanket doing nothing to soften the sting. She'd been so wrapped up in her thoughts she hadn't heard him approach. "Ow," she snapped and jerked her head around to glare at him. "What was that for?"

"Because I felt like it," he replied with a devilish grin.

"Are you always such an ass?"

"No," he drawled. "Most days I'm worse."

"I can believe that." She moved to a sitting position, careful to keep the sheet over her breasts.

He came to a stop by the bed and leaned down, bringing his nose close to hers. His breath smelled of Veenori ale and she crinkled her nose in distaste. "Are you drunk?"

He snorted. "Not likely. I haven't been drunk since I was fifteen. Be nice, slave, or I won't take you out today."

Her heart hammered in excitement. "You mean I get out of this room?"

"It's only been a day," he choked in amusement.

"One day with you is like a lifetime," she replied dryly.

She hated being such a bitch, but it just came out. Her attraction to him concerned her, confused her. She should be thinking about finding her brother's killer, not ways to get Taron in the sack.

He stood straight and placed his palm over his heart. A purely dreadful look of mortification crossed his features. "You wound me," he gasped.

She bit back a giggle. "You're going to wound me with the lousy overacting."

He frowned down at her, but deep down Alyssa knew he was all bluster. For some reason he seemed to be in a good mood this morning. "I think I'm way too lenient on you."

"Considering you keep me here naked and at your disposal, I don't think you're lenient enough."

"So you think I should let you wander the mines? Do whatever you want?"

She shrugged and glanced up at him. "Is there a reason I shouldn't?"

"Lots of them."

"Like what?" she asked.

"I'll show you a big one later. For right now, put your clothes on. We're heading to Devlin's bar."

He turned and headed back to the living room and she couldn't help but admire his tight ass and wide back. "Isn't it a little early for drinking?"

Her skin prickled with intense heat as he shot her a smoldering look over his shoulder. "Would you prefer we stay here? I'd be more than happy to repeat yesterday morning."

Whiskey-colored eyes sparkled with the most intensely seductive look she'd ever seen and for a split second she almost wished he would. But her common sense took over and she quickly stood, wrapping the blanket around her more tightly. "I'll be ready in a couple of minutes."

"My loss," he drawled in a deep, sexy timbre and every inch of her flesh tingled in awareness.

God help her, the man was sexy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alyssa followed along behind Taron as they headed into Devlin's office. Well, not really followed along. More like was led like a dog. She hated that leash and would give anything to be able to shred it. Taron, on the other hand, seemed to enjoy leading her around. Either that or he just pretended to because he knew she hated it.

"Coming in," Taron shouted after knocking on the large wooden door. "Hope you're decent."

"When has my not being decent ever stopped you?" Devlin asked dryly.

Devlin sat at the desk, his sister Rhia behind him. Rhia sent her a friendly smile of welcome. Alyssa returned her smile then turned her glance toward Devlin. His eyes raked over her with interest and just a hint of amusement. He was gorgeous, and she

would bet her life just as arrogant as Taron. But there was a deep sadness in his eyes and she wondered what had caused it.

"You know, now that I think about it, when you're not decent is probably the best time to come in here. I seem to recall an incident with the Begonite twins that was quite memorable."

Alyssa frowned at him, her gut clenching with something she didn't want to acknowledge.

"I remember that day," Rhia said with a chuckle. "I think it's one of the only times I've actually seen the twins thoroughly satisfied."

"Of course they were," Taron answered with a wide grin. "After all they did spend the evening with me and Devlin."

"Is this what you brought me here for?" Alyssa snapped. "To listen to the two of you brag about how good you are with women? If so, I think I'd rather head back to the room, thank you."

"What's the matter, slave?" Taron took a seat across from Devlin's desk and rested one ankle on his knee. "Jealous?"

She huffed and crossed her arms over her chest. "Not likely."

Taron turned to Devlin and the two of them shared a smile. "My slave's not a very good liar."

"I see that," Devlin purred, his amused gaze shooting to hers.

The two of them were unbelievable. Where did they get off insisting she was jealous? Why would she be?

"I think the two of you are having way too much fun," Rhia scolded.

"I actually came here for you, Rhia," Taron said. "Would you be so kind as to take my slave shopping?"

"What did you have in mind?" Rhia asked.

Taron studied Alyssa for a second before turning back to Rhia. "Something a little less distracting would be nice."

Rhia laughed and the sound was light and tinkling, like bells. "I think we can find something."

"Good," Taron sighed and handed her leash to Rhia. "She's all yours."

Taron watched Alyssa leave the room, letting his gaze wander down her slim back and firm, rounded hips. He shifted slightly in his seat, trying to relieve some of the pressure that had built up in his cock.

"You've already fucked her, haven't you?" Devlin asked.

With a sigh, Taron brushed his palm across his head. "Is it that obvious?"

"Just to me. I'm an empath, remember?"

Taron cringed. "I keep forgetting that."

Devlin chuckled.

"Did you get in touch with Stefan?" Taron asked.

"He was in negotiations with a couple of Tilarian traders. I told his assistant it wasn't urgent and that he could contact me when he's finished."

Taron nodded in acknowledgment.

"I noticed you with Morlak last night."

"That was an interesting evening," Taron sighed. "I think he's testing me."

"Testing you how?"

"He wants me to deliver a small package to the planet Haven. Not for the mine but for him personally. I think it's just to see if I can be trusted. He apparently found in my file I can fly intergalactic ships."

Devlin frowned. "I don't think I like this."

"What am I supposed to do, Devlin? Turn him down? This is why I'm here. If I do this for him then maybe he'll feel as though he can trust me and I can find out who's behind all this."

"Will you take Alyssa?"

"Do I have a choice? I can't leave her here alone."

"Have you ever been to Haven?" Devlin asked.

"Once, several years ago. It's virtually ice. Very pretty but damn cold."

Devlin's computer beeped, indicating an incoming message. "It's Stefan," Devlin said as he hit the button to open communication channels. "Hello, Count Marcone. What can I do for you?"

"You called me, if I'm correct," Stefan answered with a grin.

"We have some news for you," Devlin said, returning Stefan's grin.

"Good, I hope."

"We've found Alyssa."

Stefan smiled. "That is good news. Where is she? I'll go get her."

"No need," Devlin purred. "She's here as Taron's slinoy."

There was a moment of silence then a thundering, "What?" Taron cringed. "Is he out of his damn mind?"

Taron stood and walked around Devlin, coming in view of the computer screen. "I didn't have a choice. It was either I buy her or someone else would."

"What the hell was she doing there?"

Devlin sighed. "We're thinking she came here to try to infiltrate the mine in the hopes of finding her brother's killer."

"Does she know who Taron is?" Stefan asked.

"No," Taron replied firmly. "I'm afraid if she knows what I'm doing here it will put her in unnecessary danger. For now she believes I'm just an employee at the mines who happens to be her slinoy master."

Stefan dropped down in his seat and brushed his long white hair off his face. "Anthony is going to be furious."

"At me or her?" Taron snorted, trying to find a little humor.

"My guess would be all of us, since we didn't find her before she got in this mess."

"I don't envy you. I know how I would feel if Rhia were in this situation. Especially knowing Taron as I do."

Taron smacked the back of his head, making him chuckle. Stefan laughed as well. "If you weren't a member of the family before, Dev, you are now." With that, he leaned forward and put his finger on the disconnect button. "I'll let you know how Anthony takes the news."

"There's more," Taron said, stopping him.

"What?" Stefan asked.

"I'm making a run to Haven for Morlak. I think it's a test of sorts."

Stefan nodded. "I'll assign someone to trail you."

"No." Taron shook his head firmly. "What if they're seen?"

Letting out a tired sigh, Stefan pinched the bridge of his nose. "At least let Devlin inject a tracking chip. That way we can keep track of your vitals and location. It will make it easier to find you if you're ever injured."

"I'll agree to that," Taron replied with a nod.

## Chapter Six

Rhia pulled Alyssa into a room toward the back of the second floor. Inside it was a table and chairs with a single computer, behind it a large silver box. "What is this?" Alyssa asked. "I thought we were going shopping."

"We are," Rhia said with a smile. "We buy the clothes over the computer, then the replicator will produce them."

"Interesting."

"Let's see." Rhia sat before the computer and lightly touched the screen, making it come to life. "Taron said something less distracting."

"And preferably something a little warmer."

"Is it cold in the mines?" Rhia asked.

Alyssa nodded. "Yes. Which surprises me, considering the rest of the planet is so hot."

"You're deep in the ground," Rhia said with a grin. Her ice blue eyes sparkled with mischief. "But I'm sure Taron can keep you warm."

Rolling her eyes, Alyssa turned away and ran her fingers over the silver of the replicator box.

"Is it so bad being his slinoy, Alyssa?" Rhia asked quietly.

"Honestly?" She took a deep breath. "No. He's infuriating, impossible, arrogant."

"And?" Rhia encouraged.

"And...incredible in bed. There, I said it."

Rhia's tinkling laugh filled the room, floating around them. A high-pitched beep sounded and Alyssa jumped, her gaze searching the room for the cause. "What is that?"

"It's my brother," Rhia said with a sigh. She hit the button on a small box next to the computer. "Yes?"

"Pick up the earset, my love," Devlin's voice came through the small speaker. With a sigh, Rhia picked up a tiny black device and placed it in her ear, keeping Alyssa from hearing what was said on his end.

"It's in. What do you need?" There was a moment of silence, then Rhia raised an eyebrow in surprise. "Where?" she asked. "Haven? All right. I'll take care of it."

With a huff of surprise, Rhia disconnected from Devlin. "Looks like you're going on a trip."

"A trip?" Alyssa asked. "Where?"

"You and Taron are going to Haven, so you'll need something really warm."

Alyssa stared at her in shock. She'd heard of Haven. It was a cold planet far in the Outer Rim, completely covered in snow and ice. The sun hardly ever shone there through the thick haze of gray clouds. "Why are we going to Haven?"

"I don't know," Rhia said with a shrug. "I'm sure he'll tell you later. For now," she wiggled her eyebrows devilishly, "let's see how much of Taron's money we can spend in an hour."

A tiny smile lifted the corner of Alyssa's lips. She liked Rhia and she definitely liked the way her mind worked. "If there's one thing I know how to do, Rhia, it's spend money." She pulled up a chair and sat next to Rhia. "Point me to the expensive stuff."

With a laugh, Rhia again brought the screen to life.

"While we're doing this," Alyssa began. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"Is there a dictionary for translating English to Veenorian?"

Rhia frowned at her. "A dictionary? Do you mean a translator? What for?"

Alyssa turned away from Rhia's intense stare. She'd never been good at lying. "For working environmental controls and possibly doing something on the computer. I noticed he had one in his office. I'm bored there all alone and thought there might be something I could do to keep me busy on Taron's computer."

"Taron's computer links with the mine mainframe. I doubt there's anything you can do on there."

Rhia turned back to the computer, ending that particular conversation. "What do you think of this?" Rhia asked, pointing at an outfit on the screen.

\* \* \* \* \*

Taron dropped the box of clothes on his bed with an overexaggerated sigh. Alyssa grinned and let her gaze roam over his wide shoulders. Tingling warmth spread through her stomach as she remembered how it had felt to be beneath him.

"How much clothing did you buy?" He glanced at her over his shoulder and she turned away quickly, looking for the wool shirt she'd had on earlier. The last thing she wanted was for him to see the desire in her eyes and she busied herself with pushing her arms through the sleeves. "Just enough to do me for a while. Are you going to tell me why I can't go out into the mine?" she asked.

"I think it would be better if I showed you. Take the shirt back off."

She frowned. "I have to go out there like this?" Holding the shirt open, she scowled. She still wore the skimpy slave costume, which left very little to the imagination.

His eyes traveled down her chest and stomach then slowly back up again, heating her flesh. "You are a slave, Alyssa. Accept it."

With a sigh, she removed the shirt and tossed it to the bed. "Fine."



Taking the leash that was still attached to her collar in a firm grip, he led her from his suite. Alyssa was amazed as they walked down the dark cavern hallways. Steel support beams held the walls upright every eight feet or so. Her bare feet were cold against the stone floor and twice she winced as pebbles pierced the tender soles of her feet.

After what seemed like forever they came to a wider and more traveled hallway. Men leered at her and she tried her best to ignore them. She kept her head partially bowed and her eyes as downcast as possible. But sometimes it was hard to not look around.

Turning to the right, Taron led her down another corridor then down three flights of stairs. The corridor emptied onto a balcony that overlooked a massive great room.

Alyssa scooted to the edge and glanced over the waist-high stone wall. Below them were several men, pacing and laughing. Her eyes narrowed to get a closer look. They were nude? "Why don't they have clothes on?" she asked.

"You'll see," he said and nodded his head toward a set of double doors opening at the far side of the room.

Women sauntered in, also nude, and the men began to rush them, grabbing them roughly. There appeared to be one woman for every two men and Alyssa had to blink twice as she stared at the beginning stages of the orgy. Men struggled with one another as they fought over positions and control. Women were slammed against walls, thrown to the floor as the men used every possible orifice of their bodies to slake their lust.

The women didn't seem to mind and their moans filled the cabin below, becoming louder as the intensity picked up tempo. Her heart raced as she watched them and blood pounded through her ears. Why was he showing her this? The whole scene was insane. They were like animals, rutting and growling as they used and abused one woman after another.

They were insatiable and she grimaced at the sight of one woman satisfying three men—one in her pussy, one in her ass and one in her mouth.

"What's going on?" she asked.

"This is why I don't want you in the mines alone, Alyssa. These men are hard to control. They bring women in to satisfy their lusts once a week, but if you were within their midst unprotected, this is what you would be doing all day, not mining. They would abuse you, rape you, and I don't want that to happen. Those women are here because they want to be. They enjoy it. I don't think you would."

"No," she gulped. No woman wanted to be mauled. But those women were definitely enjoying it. They moaned and screamed as the men fucked them over and over. After a while the men would change partners, each experiencing several of the women before they were done.

Taron came up behind her and slid his palms down her arms. His warm touch sent tingles down her back. His hands came around her ribs and moved up to cup her

breasts. She gasped as his palms squeezed them. "It's very arousing, isn't it?" he whispered in her ear. "Watching them rut like animals."

Alyssa swallowed and tried to close her eyes to the orgy below them. She had no idea how long they'd been watching. It seemed like forever but in reality probably wasn't more than thirty minutes. An hour at the most.

Even though she'd blocked the view, she could still hear it, the women moaning, the men grunting as they fucked one woman then another. The sound was more arousing than the image and part of that disgusted her. How could such a thing turn her on? But it did. And Taron knew it.

Taron's hand moved lower and slid behind the piece of cloth that hid her smooth labia. His fingers brushed along her slit, making her knees weaken. Her knuckles turned white as she tightly gripped the edge of the stone wall, trying to keep herself upright.

His touch was like fire as he separated her nether lips and circled her throbbing clit. She moaned, her head falling back onto his chest. The heat of his body seeped into hers, warming already overheating flesh. Her moans mingled with the sounds from below and she felt as though she and Taron were a part of it, centered in the midst of all the sex.

Taron moved to her front. Lifting her leg, he placed one of her feet on the edge of the wall next to his hip. She watched as he lowered to his haunches and placed his face between her legs. One flick of his tongue across her clit and she was lost, gripping his shoulders for dear life. Two thick fingers slid into her depths and she groaned and moved her hips in time with his thrusts.

Every muscle tingled and she gulped for air as her release hovered just out of reach. Without warning, Taron stood. "No," she gasped, "don't stop."

He kissed her hard, his tongue fucking her mouth in a way that made her melt, desperate for more. She could taste herself in his kiss and the realization only fueled her hunger.

"Undo my pants, Alyssa," he growled against her lips as he leaned back, resting his hips against the wall. "Release my cock so I can fuck you."

Her shaking hands moved quickly to do as he asked. With the pop of the final button his thick cock sprang free and she gripped it with her fingers, slowly sliding them up and down his steely length. Taron groaned and pushed her hand away before gripping her hips and lifting her to settle her pussy at the tip of his straining shaft.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and held tight as he used the wall to support his hips and impaled her hard. She screamed in pleasure as his massive cock invaded her aching pussy, pushing deep and stretching her tight walls. He felt so good and she ground her hips in a circular motion, rubbing her clit against his lower stomach. She moaned at the sensation the friction caused and began to grind faster.

Taron grabbed a handful of her hair and tugged, pulling her face back so he could claim her mouth in another all-consuming kiss. She couldn't get enough of him and

returned his kiss with equal hunger. She'd never had sex like this. Had never even been sure passion like this existed. Sex had always been nice. But this...this went beyond nice and bordered on ecstasy.

Taron's lips nipped at her neck, his teeth gently biting as one hand shifted its grip on her ass. The tip of his finger slowly circled her anus and she started, her eyes shifting to his in question. A small smile touched his lips as he slowly slid his finger into the tight hole, his eyes closely watching hers.

She gasped at the unusual invasion, but soon relaxed as the finger added pressure to her vaginal wall from the other side, intensifying her pleasure. She felt full and so consumed. With a sigh, she leaned forward and bit the side of Taron's neck. He groaned and increased his thrusts, bringing her closer to orgasm.

Her stomach tightened, the insides of her thighs quaked as her release hit, pounding through her like a tidal wave. Tingles spread through her limbs to settle in her stomach and she screamed as pulse after incredible pulse gripped her pussy.

With a shout, Taron stiffened, his hot seed filling her throbbing channel.

Breathing harshly, she opened her eyes and caught Taron's gaze as he watched her in surprise. "You make me forget myself, slave," he whispered as he leaned back against the waist-high wall.

"Seems you do the same thing to me," she sighed.

One corner of his lips quirked and his eyes darkened, sparkling with humor and desire. He brushed her hair back, gently combing his fingers through her tresses. "Promise me you'll stay away from the mines, Lyssa."

The sound of the shortened name on his lips made her heart flutter. She'd heard him call her that before and she liked it when he used the nickname. She didn't want to lie and tell him she wouldn't go, because she did intend to go. So instead, she just nodded her head, hoping he wouldn't push her to actually say the words out loud.

"Good," he whispered and placed a soft kiss on the end of her nose. "We have a trip to get ready for. We leave tonight."

She sighed in relief and tried to untangle her legs from around his waist. He gripped her thighs, holding her still. "Did I say you could get down?" he purred and ground his hips against her, sending shots of pleasure up her spine. His lips captured hers in a kiss that was surprisingly gentle. She whimpered as his tongue slid into her mouth and leisurely explored.

The sounds of sex still rose from below and she felt herself getting wet again, coating his cock, which was still buried inside her. Shifting her hips, she tried to tell him without speaking that she wanted him once more.

He broke the kiss and slapped at her ass with his palm. It didn't hurt, but the sound was loud, echoing off the rock walls around them. His gaze held a tenderness that surprised her and sent a shot of warmth to her chest. "Save a little energy for later, *ni pahti*. I promise, I'll give you all you want," he whispered.

Her face heated in sudden embarrassment. She'd all but begged for it again. What was he doing to her? "You started it," she grumbled.

"Yes, I did. And I promise I'll finish it." With a wicked grin, he nipped at her lower lip before setting her down so that she could follow him back to the suite on shaky legs.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alyssa sat in the passenger side of the ship, watching out the window as they flew low over the light blue landscape of Haven. Space travel amazed her. She'd thought they would be traveling in some huge thing with quarters and multiple decks, but Taron had told her since Haven was within a day's travel, they could take a much smaller ship. The transport gate had been able to get them within a few hours of the planet. The shipment he was delivering was of a personal nature and very small, so a cargo hold had not been needed either.

Truth be told, she actually liked the close quarters and had enjoyed being able to see everything around them. Unlike other times she traveled through space, where she'd been stuffed into overcrowded indoor compartments. No windows, no view of the outside. But this, she thought with a sigh as she took in the swiftly passing landscape below them, this was amazing.

It looked so barren below but at the same time, so beautiful. Dark gray waters rippled between large glaciers and intermittent stretches of barren land. The sky was overcast, hovering somewhere between light and dusk. Light blue snow fell to the ground, sometimes flowing sideways when the wind picked up.

She huddled within her light gray, brushed-leather coat. Rhia had actually picked it out, saying it matched her eyes perfectly. It fit her pretty well too, with the tapered waist, large flowing skirt and jeweled buttons. Fur lined the collar, sleeves and bottom hem of the coat, brushing around her light-gray ankle boots when she walked.

They'd even bought a matching fur muff and hat, which she was extremely grateful for at the moment. The cold of the planet seeped into the small ship despite the environmental controls. Taron insisted it was her imagination, but she was cold nonetheless and kept herself bundled within the soft leather.

Reaching up, she fingered the gold charm that hung from her collar. It was in the shape of a figure eight, or infinity loop if she wanted to see it as something a little more romantic. She growled inwardly. Romance was the last thing she should be thinking about. Taron had bought her to use as a sex slave, nothing more. At least he'd left the leash behind. That had to be the most humiliating thing she'd had to endure so far.

Out of the corner of her eye she watched Taron fly the ship, his brow creased in a frown. "Why are we here, again?" she asked. "I don't think you told me."

He glanced at her, then back to the skyline. "I needed to drop something off for Morlak, then pick something up in return."

"That's it?"

"For the most part. We'll spend the night then head back tomorrow."

She started to ask another question, but stopped when a voice came over the ship's speaker. "Approaching craft, identify yourself."

"This is Taron Karmase. I'm here to meet with Major Janik. He's expecting me."

A moment of silence then another voice spoke. "Proceed to hangar bay six on the southern perimeter. Once past the outer marker, please release controls to the bay. They will guide you in."

"Understood."

They rounded a rather large mountain and Taron nodded toward something on the horizon. She looked as well, then gasped as the mountaintop castle became more visible. "Wow," she sighed. "That thing is huge." It stretched for what looked like miles, its deep gray stone walls blending into the rock of the mountain it sat upon.

Taron chuckled. "That *thing* is Belock City. There are eight of these manmade castles, each one a different city."

A castle that was a city – interesting.

She sat in silence as Taron let go of the controls, allowing the bay to fly the ship into the massive hangar. Numerous ships of varying sizes sat, secured, down the sides, leaving the center open for arriving and departing spacecraft. As the engines powered down, three men approached from the left and waited for her and Taron to step out.

"Taron Karmase?" the man asked.

His heavy beard hid most of his face, leaving only a hawklike nose and green eyes that studied them in hesitation, as though he wasn't sure he trusted them. His body was cloaked by a long black robe and a matching turban covered his head, leaving dark brown tendrils peeking out from underneath. Two men dressed as he was stood silent behind him, their eyes ever watchful. Alyssa had found out from Taron on the ride here that the people of Haven kept to themselves, not often allowing strangers within their home.

"Yes," Taron answered and placed a hand on Alyssa's elbow, pulling her close.

"I'm Major Janik. I understand you have a package for me from Morlak."

"I do. It's in the ship." Taron stepped back to the ship to pull the box from behind his seat.

Janik's stare made her nervous and she was anxious for Taron to return to her side. She felt safer when he was near. Taron handed the box to Janik, but the major didn't pay much attention to Taron. He kept his gaze on Alyssa as he reached out to touch the link that hung from her collar – the link where the leash attached and marked her as a sex slave.

"She's a slinoy." Janik said in surprise. "It's been a while since I've seen one of these collars. The Senate has outlawed slinoys on most of the planets within their jurisdiction. I don't think I've seen a slinoy quite this lovely before. What would it take to get her off your hands? Name your price."

"She's not for sale," Taron replied firmly and wrapped his arm around her back, pulling her close. "I'm afraid I've become quite fond of her."

Alyssa's heart soared and she tried desperately to remind herself that it was just for show. He was only trying to protect her and keep her safe.

Janik smiled slightly. "I understand. My last mate started out as a slinoy. She died just a year after we were officially joined." His eyes took on a faraway look as he shifted the box in his hands.

Alyssa felt bad for him. *He must miss his mate a great deal.* The idea that he'd actually married his slinoy surprised her. She'd heard of slinoys falling for their masters. Hell, it looked like she might be one of them. Out of the corner of her eye, she glanced toward Taron and studied his profile as he spoke.

"I'm sorry for your loss," he said and Janik nodded in thanks.

"Well," he said with a sigh. "I have a suite reserved for you in the north tower. My assistant will show you the way. In the morning I'll have Morlak's package brought to you before you leave. Enjoy your stay."

He bowed and the two silent men behind him bowed as well. Taron bowed and tugged at her sleeve, indicating she should bow also. Janik smiled at her again before turning to leave with one of his assistants. The other remained behind to escort them to their room.

"Interesting man," she whispered as she and Taron followed their escort to the suite. Her heels clicked on the hard stone floor as they made their way through the bay and toward the long hallway at the far end.

"Yes. Interesting. He certainly found you so, as well," Taron whispered back in hushed tones.

"Jealous?" she teased, but immediately regretted it. Even if he was he would probably never admit it. And why would he be? It's not as if he was in love with her.

"I don't get jealous."

"No?" she asked.

He turned to her and grinned suggestively. "No. I keep a woman so satisfied she has no desire to search out someone else."

She snorted and the man in front of them glanced over his shoulder in amusement. "You're so unbelievably arrogant. I'm amazed your head even fits through a door."

Taron's deep laugh echoed down the long corridor. The stone walls and richly colored tapestries reminded her of old England, where kings and knights ruled the land. Just ahead of them was a small cart that would take them to the north side of the castle.

He leaned in and grasped her elbow. She could feel the heat of his touch through the leather of her coat and without thinking leaned toward him. "You know I'm right," he whispered.

She glanced up at him and smiled devilishly. "Maybe. Perhaps later you'll refresh my memory."

"It's a definite, *ni pahti*," he murmured, returning her smile.

## Chapter Seven

Stefan strolled through the walled garden of his Tilarian Estate, trying to decide how he would break the news to Anthony. He would be furious his sister was on Veenori and would insist on getting her off. Devlin didn't think that would be a good idea. How would Taron explain letting a slinoy he paid a fortune for go just a few days later?

Rounding the corner, he spotted his wife Krista leaning over to pick a flower in bloom. She lifted it to her nose and smiled. The light spring breeze ruffled her blonde hair and she raised a small hand to brush it from her face.

Walking up behind her, he placed a hand on her very pregnant stomach. Their children were due to arrive in two months, and he couldn't wait to hold them in his arms. His and Krista's babies. He couldn't believe they were actually having twins.

"How are you feeling, *kisary*?" he whispered, his hand softly rubbing her protruding stomach.

"Like a fat cow," she grumbled.

He chuckled. "But you're a very beautiful fat cow," he teased, making her giggle.

"You're terrible. But I love you," she said and leaned back against his chest.

"I love you," he whispered back. A child kicked at his hand and he grinned, placing a soft kiss on her temple. "I believe our son is jealous. He always kicks at me when I touch you."

"How do you know it's not your daughter? There is one of each in there, you know."

Stefan's smile spread as he gently rubbed his hand in a soothing circle. "A boy and a girl. More than likely it's not me they're kicking at but each other."

Krista snickered. "If the two of them are anything like you and Sidious, I don't doubt that."

"My mother will be ecstatic that someone is finally having a girl. You'll never see her, you know. My mother will run off with her."

"We should probably tell them soon. She keeps watching me and wondering why I'm so big," she sighed and ran her hand over her stomach.

"We will. I want to keep this to us for a while longer. Our little secret." He sighed and pulled her closer against his back.

"Is something bothering you?" she asked, her voice full of concern. "You feel tense."



He sighed and rested his chin on the top of her head. "I heard from Devlin earlier. They found Alyssa."

She turned and smiled up at him. "That's wonderful. Your brother says that Anthony has been beside himself worrying about her."

"Well, I'm afraid that what I have to tell him isn't going to help matters."

Stefan took her small hands in his and brought them to his lips, kissing the back of them. "Now you have me worried."

"She's fine. She got herself in a mess and ended up being sold as a slinoy on Veenori. Taron recognized her and bought her."

"You're kidding," she said, her eyes widening in surprise.

He shook his head. "Afraid not."

"You know," she said, her lips spreading into a grin, "from what Anthony has told me, Alyssa is exactly like Mikayla. Quick-tempered, smart-mouthed, kind of sassy."

"Kind of?" he teased with a grin. He loved his brother's wife, but she definitely had a temper to rival her husband's.

"Stop that." She poked at his chest with the tip of her finger, making him chuckle.

"So what's running through that mind of yours?" he asked.

"Taron is always giving Mikayla a hard time. I've told him more than once he'd end up with a woman just like her."

Stefan laughed and shook his head. "So let me get this straight. You think Taron is going to fall in love with Alyssa?"

"Well, you've seen her picture. She's beautiful."

"I didn't notice," he replied in mock seriousness.

"I know good and well you noticed, just like I noticed that Anthony is gorgeous. With that thick black hair and those light gray eyes. My!" She sighed and fanned herself with her hand.

Stefan narrowed his eyes at his wife. "Gorgeous, huh? I think you should stay here while I go to Daego and tell Anthony."

She batted her long golden lashes. "You would leave me, your pregnant wife, here all alone? Who would take care of me?" Her arms wrapped around his waist and his hands settled at the small of her back, holding her close.

"I think you're more concerned with who would raid the kitchen for you in the middle of the night when you have those strange cravings."

"That too," she pouted.

"Woman, you're insufferable." Stefan smiled down at her adorable upturned face. Her blue eyes sparkled with life and happiness but were soon clouded with worry.

"Do you think she'll be okay?" she asked.

"I have faith that Taron will take care of her. Unless, of course, she's like you and he's having to constantly pull her out of trouble."

Her adorable china-doll features scrunched into a pout as she poked her finger into his chest, making him grunt. "Watch it, husband. I'll set your mother on you."

That made Stefan laugh. "Like I'm afraid of that little scrap of a woman."

"You should be. I always thought you and Sidious got your tempers from your father until I saw her angry with one of the traders the other day for slapping his wife. The man was actually trembling by the time she got done with him."

"I can believe that," Stefan said with a grin, remembering one of the few times he'd seen his mother that angry. "But trust me, I get my temper from my father."

He pushed an errant curl behind her ear then let his finger trail down her cheek. He'd never imagined he could love someone as much as he did her. She was his life and seeing her pregnant with his children just made her all the more beautiful. "Do you feel up to going to Daego?"

Her eyes lit up. "You don't even need to ask. Just tell me when we're leaving."

His wife liked the peaceful planet of Daego much more than the hectic estate here on Tilarus. "We leave within the hour. I already have your maid packing a bag for you."

She bit at her lower lip and glanced toward his chest in a move he'd come to recognize as hesitance. "I have a request concerning Daego," she said quietly.

"What?" He lifted her chin with his finger, forcing her to look at him. Surely she knew by now he'd give her anything she wanted.

"I want to have the babies there. It's so much quieter at your brother's estate than here and not nearly as crazy. Here there's always someone running in and out, always a commotion..."

Stefan put his finger over her lips. "Of course we can. I think it's a great idea." A smile of relief crossed her features and his gut tightened in desire. He grinned and pulled her closer, pressing his hardening cock into her stomach. "I also think we should take the long way to Daego."

"I agree," she purred and brushed her lips across his.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alyssa stood in the center of the large room and turned a circle, trying to admire everything. The room was completely done in white. White carpet, white fur bedcovers, white curtains. Even the fireplace in the center of the room was white marble. She took off her gloves and placed her hand against the stone. "It's warm," she said with a smile.

"Of course it is, silly. There's a fire in the grate," Taron answered with a grin.

She scrunched her nose at him and he laughed. She loved to hear him laugh. It was low and rich, rumbling from deep within his chest. Taron seemed like the type that never did anything halfway. He laughed fully, lived fully, even made love fully.

The more she learned about him, the more she liked him, and that bothered her. Eventually he'd get tired of her and set her free. She was an impulse buy. One he would soon regret, and she didn't want to be heartbroken when it happened. She was here to do a job, to find her brother's killer, and she needed to focus on that. If she could just get out of that damn room at the mines...

"Your dinner will arrive shortly," their escort said from the doorway. "If everything is in order, I'll have your bags brought down."

"Thank you," Taron replied with a slight bow. The escort bowed in return then left the room, shutting the white double doors behind him.

"This place is amazing," she said and headed toward the open archway that led to an outdoor balcony. "Where do they get the firewood?"

"The moon," he replied, pointing to the sky, but with all the cloud cover, it couldn't be seen. "We flew past it on the way here."

She nodded, remembering the green-tinged planet. Her gaze took in the mountains below them, the blue snow falling around them and the water falling down the rocks just to the side of the terrace. She reached out to touch the water and felt a sharp tingle run up her arm. She jerked her hand back and gripped it with her other one. "What was that?"

Taron took her hand in his and rubbed her fingers. His grip was warm and firm, sending little shots of awareness through her chest. "The terrace is surrounded by a force field. It keeps the cold air out, but leaves the room open to the view."

"Is that what shocked me?"

"Yes." His lips lifted in a slight grin. "So you might not want to touch it again."

She frowned. "You could have warned me."

"Yeah, I could have," he said with a shrug. "But then I wouldn't have an excuse to touch you."

"You need an excuse?" she asked quietly, watching him through her lashes.

"I don't know, slave. Do I?" he whispered as he tugged at her hand, pulling her close to him.

Her heart fluttered in her chest at the sultry look in his eyes. They darkened to chocolate and smoldered with a heat she felt clear to her toes. "You are my Master. According to you, you can touch me whenever you wish."

"True. But tonight I only want to touch you if *you* wish it." His mouth hovered just above hers. His whispered words brushed across lips like a silken caress. "Do you wish it, Lyssa?"

She loved it when he called her that and opened her mouth to say, yes, she wished for him to touch her, but a knock at the door silenced her confession.

Taron sighed. "That would be either our bags or dinner."

"Hopefully both," she said with a slight smile. "I'm starving."

Taron turned and walked back inside. Her gaze followed him all the way to the doors—or at least his backside anyway. He opened them and smiled at her over his shoulder. “How hungry are you?” he teased and stepped aside, allowing the table to be wheeled into the room, the luggage coming in behind it.

Her eyes widened at the wide array of food on the table. Most she didn’t recognize.

“Thank you,” Taron said as the man bowed, then left the room.

“My God. There’s enough here to feed six people.” She picked up what looked like a blue grape and plopped it on her tongue. It was sour and she grimaced. “Uh,” she groaned and waved her hand before her mouth, trying her best to finish chewing it. “What is this?”

Laughter rumbled through Taron’s chest. “Something you probably won’t eat again.”

“Very funny,” she grumbled around her chewing.

Her fingers worked loose the buttons of her coat and she shrugged, slipping it off her shoulders. The cool air of the room hit her bare arms and goose bumps worked along her flesh. Giving the coat one last look before laying it over the back of the overstuffed white chair, she brushed her hands down her wool slacks and sleeveless tunic. She might get cold and regret taking that off.

“I can move the table before the fire if you’re still a little cold.”

His deep voice startled her and she spun around to face him. “That would be nice.”

They moved the small table before the fire and sat down. Taron quickly loaded a plate then handed it to her before filling one for himself. She eyed the food warily. “Is the rest of it as sour as the other thing?”

Taron chuckled. “No. I think you’ll like the mollak, it’s the brown stuff in the center.”

“Where do they get this food?” she asked as she picked at it with her fork. “Somehow I don’t think they grow it here.”

“Actually, they do. They have artificial greenhouses below ground in the thermal caves.”

She raised an eyebrow. “Really? Interesting.”

As she chewed, she studied him. He didn’t seem like the type to work in a mine. He appeared almost refined and he certainly knew a lot about other planets and their customs, which meant he traveled a lot. “Taron, where are you from?”

He finished chewing slowly as his gaze met hers. “My father was Norgosen.”

“And your mother?”

“From Ricktorik.”

“Wow. Isn’t that a primitive planet? No technology allowed? How did they meet?”

Taron shrugged and Alyssa got the impression he was avoiding the subject. “Don’t know. Never asked.”

"Where are they now?" she asked, genuinely curious about him.

"Doing a report?" he asked with a quirk of his lips.

"No. I was just curious."

Taron sighed and set his fork down to reach for his glass. "My mother died several years ago, just a few months after my father ran out on us."

Inside, Alyssa cringed. God, no wonder he didn't want to talk about it. "I'm sorry. We can change the subject."

With a shrug, he resumed eating. "It was years ago. Long forgotten."

Alyssa didn't think so, but she didn't push him to talk any more about it. "What did you do after that? Have you been on your own?"

"Trying to find out if I have a wife?" he teased.

She jerked upright, staring at him in surprise. That wasn't why she'd asked. She hadn't even thought of him having a wife. "No. I just...I mean..." She sighed. "I just wanted to know a little more about you."

"Ah, I see."

Licking her lips, she stared at her plate. "Do you have a wife?" she asked with a frown. She would feel terrible if he did. She'd never been the "other woman" and didn't want to be.

"No. I am not now nor have I ever been married."

Relief seeped in her chest, but she quickly brushed it aside, convincing herself it was only because she didn't want to be the one he committed adultery with.

"After my mother died I was adopted by her best friend and her husband. I have two adopted brothers, who drive me crazy, two nephews who are the spitting image of their father and two beautiful sisters-in-law I would gladly give my life for. And of course I can't forget the twins on the way, which my brother doesn't know the rest of the family knows about."

Alyssa grinned. "He doesn't know they know she's pregnant or that she's having twins?"

He returned her grin. "That she's having twins. My adopted mother is a very astute woman. Can't keep anything from her."

She laughed and took a sip of the warm green liquid that filled her glass. It tasted like cinnamon and she licked her lips, capturing every drop. Warmth flooded through her as she raised the glass and took a second sip, again running the tip of her tongue around her lips.

Taron groaned softly. "Don't do that," he growled.

Glancing over at the pained expression on his face, she smiled innocently. "Do what?"

"I'm trying to eat and you're being seductive."

"Am I?" she teased. "I'm sorry. I was only enjoying the drink."

"Minx," he grumbled, making Alyssa giggle.

"What is this?" she asked before taking another sip.

"It's organas and very potent. You should probably eat something else before you drink any more."

She quickly set the glass back down on the table and dove into her food with relish. Suddenly she was very hungry. A couple of things had an odd taste she didn't care for, but for the most part the food was good, and she finished everything on her plate.

"Would you like some more?" Taron asked when she shoved her plate toward the center of the table.

Shaking her head, she reached for her drink to finish off the glass. "No, thank you. I'm full."

As she sipped her drink, Taron's gaze held hers captive. She wasn't sure if the tingling she felt was from the beverage or his stare. He had such gorgeous eyes, such kissable lips. She wanted to feel them against hers again. She wanted his tongue in her mouth, his cock in her pussy. Just thinking about how well he filled her made her wet with need.

His finger reached out and ran along the edge of her collar, his eyes thoughtful and sultry. Her breath quickened as his hot touch brushed along her flesh toward the back of her neck. With a quick flick he removed the collar and she stared at him in question, wondering what he was doing. Was he letting her go?

"Tonight we're not slave and master," he said quietly and dropped the collar on the table between them. "We're Taron and Alyssa."

She swallowed, her gaze glued to the smoldering question in his eyes. Licking her lips, she nodded and watched, breathless, as his hand moved to the back of her neck and pulled her to him, his lips hovering just a hairsbreadth from hers.

"Only if you wish it, Lyssa," he whispered.

"I wish it," she answered and moaned as he closed the distance and captured her lips in a kiss that sent her reeling.

## Chapter Eight

Taron stood and pulled Alyssa up in front of him. He wanted her so badly his whole body ached with the desire to feel her beneath him. He should have never started this, but now that he had he couldn't seem to get enough. All he'd been able to think about since they'd arrived was sinking into her warm, tight body.

Grasping the hem of her tunic, he lifted it over her head and dropped it to the floor, letting it fall into a puddle of soft wool, completely forgotten. Her breasts stood firm and enticing, her nipples beading as the cold air of the room hit her flesh. He leaned down and blew softly across them, making the buds pucker even more. Her gasp was soft and mingled with the sound of popping wood burning in the fireplace.

Her tiny hands flew to the waistband of his pants and tugged. The buttons gave way, freeing his already engorged shaft, and her fingers quickly wrapped around him, sliding along his length. He groaned in pure pleasure mixed with agony as her grip tightened, her strokes quickening to create a shattering rhythm.

He pushed her hand away and stepped out of his pants, kicking them aside, then quickly removed his shirt as well. Alyssa stepped back, her hips swaying enticingly as she pushed her pants down her hips. Once she had them off, he lunged for her with a growl, both of them landing on the bed in a tangle of arms and legs.

Alyssa giggled, her arms snaking around his neck as he settled between her splayed thighs. His length rubbed along her slit while his lips brushed across hers. They parted in silent invitation, but he kept toying with her, teasing them both.

"I could fuck you right now," he whispered against her lips.

"Then why don't you?" she asked.

Her voice was breathy and needy as her hips moved with his. Her juices coated his cock, making it slick and warm. He knew she would feel like heaven as her walls encased his cock in a hot grip, but he had other plans for her.

"I want to taste you first," he murmured against her neck as his lips worked a path to her breasts. "I want to fuck you with my tongue. Feel the juices pour from the walls of your hot little pussy and down my throat."

His tongue licked a slow circle around her areola before engulfing the whole tip in his mouth. With a moan, she arched her back, pushing her breast more fully into his face, and he sucked harder. She squirmed beneath him, her soft whimpers echoing in his ears and driving him closer to the edge.

Shifting onto his knees, he continued down her stomach, leaving a path of goose bumps with every flick of his tongue against her flesh. With his teeth, he tugged at her bellybutton ring and she squirmed, lifting her hips slightly off the bed. Her skin was so

soft, so smooth beneath his touch, and his fingers continued to explore every dip her curves created.

She was all feminine angles and valleys, her body designed for his. At first glance she was fragile, but first glances were deceiving. She was feisty and strong, her smart mouth entertaining and amusing. It wasn't just her body he couldn't get enough of, it was her personality – her spirit.

His palm moved to the inside of her thigh and pushed, spreading her legs wider. She complied, letting them fall open for him and giving him a perfect view of her pink, glistening pussy. He ran his hand over her smooth skin of her mound and smiled. "I like that you have no hair there."

She grunted an answer and her teeth bit down on her lower lip. Long lashes fluttered down over her eyes as he spread her labia and teased her clit with the tip of his tongue. She gasped and bucked her hips upward.

"No, no," he purred and placed a hand on her stomach, holding her down. "Be still."

"I don't think I can," she gasped, fighting against his hold.

"You will or you won't get what you want." His slid his tongue up her slit then circled her clit slowly. "And you want this, don't you, Alyssa?"

"Oh, God," she groaned, her hands fisting in the fur blanket beneath her. "Yes. I want it. I want you."

He closed his eyes, inhaling her sweet, musky scent. She smelled so good and tasted even better. "Then be still," he whispered. "Let me please you, *ni pahti*."

With a groan, he pushed his tongue deep within her depths, lapping up her cream like a man starving. Her hips moved slightly, the insides of her thighs quivered. He smiled, enjoying the fact that he was driving her to the edge. He brought her close, so close the walls of her pussy spasmed around his tongue, but he wouldn't let her come yet. He wanted to be inside her when she exploded.

Pulling away, he rose up and moved his hand beneath her hip, giving her a little push upward. "On your knees, Alyssa."

She rolled over and settled on her knees. She glanced at him over her shoulder, hunger and trust smoldering in the depths of her eyes. He liked it when she looked at him like that and his chest tightened with an answering hunger and something else – something deeper than just simple lust. Something he had no business feeling.

Closing his eyes, he tried to focus on the physical, not the emotional hold she had begun to have on him. With determination to keep it strictly about sex, he stared at her pussy and the rounded globes of her ass. Her juices glistened around her opening and he used two fingers to spread the cream along the cleft of her ass and around the tight rosebud opening of her anus.

She wiggled her hips and he inwardly groaned, wanting desperately to sink his cock into the tight bit of flesh. As gently as possible, he pushed one finger into the



puckered hole then added another. She gasped and thrust back against him, taking his finger deeper. She would need a lot more preparation there than he was prepared to give her at the moment. Right now he needed to feel his cock in her pussy. Needed to be buried inside her balls-deep with an urgency that he'd never experienced before.

"Damn," he growled and then plunged his cock into her pussy, not able to hold back any longer.

His whole body trembled as he sank his rod deep. She was hot as lava and tight as a damn glove. Her walls gripped his cock and quivered along his length, making him grit his teeth to keep control. He kept his fingers in her ass, moving them in time with his cock as he pulled out then pushed back in, sheathing himself balls-deep over and over.

With a moan, she dropped her head to the mattress. Taron bent forward and wrapped her hair around his hand then tugged, pulling her head back up. He leaned down and groaned in her ear, his cock plunging in and out of her depths. She panted, her breaths coming in short spurts as she thrust back against him.

"I thought about doing this the first time I saw you on that stage," he ground out. "Fucking you from behind."

To emphasize his words he pushed deeper, slapping his balls against her pussy. She hissed, "Oh, yes."

"It's better than I imagined."

Removing his finger from her ass, he slid his hand around to her clit. With a soft touch, he circled the sensitive bud and she gasped, "Oh, God."

"Does that feel good?" he murmured.

"Yes," she sighed.

He applied a little more pressure and her pussy exploded around his hard rod. "So does your pussy," he groaned as she spasmed around him, milking his cock with hard convulsions.

She let out a scream as he rose up and thrust harder, burying himself deeper and deeper. Her hips pushed against him, taking everything he was giving her and unbelievably asking for more.

She was incredible. The way she responded, the way she felt. Everything about her was perfect. His balls tightened into hard rocks as he continued to pound her pussy until finally he couldn't hold back anymore. With a loud shout, he spilled his seed deep within her hungry channel. His muscles shook with the intensity of his release and he knew no other woman would ever get that kind of reaction from him. They were amazing together.

With a contented sigh, she pulled away from him and rolled to her back. He watched as she threw her hands over her head, her eyes closed, her lips spreading into a satisfied smile. The realization that he would love to see that smile forever startled him.

He frowned. *I'm not in love with her. I don't have time for that.* He closed his eyes and sighed. *She's a good fuck. That's all.*

But deep in his heart he knew that wasn't all there was to it. He just refused to acknowledge it. Her flesh was still flushed from her release and appeared golden against the white of the fur. Very slowly, he skimmed his fingers up her thigh and ribs, stopping to palm her breast and pinch her nipple. She moaned and arched into his caress, her eyes still closed.

"That feels nice," she whispered. He leaned down and flicked his tongue across the hard nub. She giggled and squirmed beneath his persistent mouth. "That feels good too. You keep that up I'm going to want you to fuck me again."

He smiled and moved to nibble on the sensitive spot behind her ear. "That's the general idea. I'm going to fuck you so much tonight you'll beg me to stop."

His fingers moved to toy with her already wet pussy. "Don't count on that," she purred and moved her hips in time with the thrust of his fingers. "You can fuck me all you want."

"Good," he whispered against her lips. "Because something tells me I may never get my fill of you."

\* \* \* \* \*

Alyssa awoke sometime in the middle of the night, her body aching in places she hadn't even known existed. With a smile, she stretched against the soft, heated sheets. The warmth of Taron's body next to her caught her attention and she rolled over to stare at him. His chest rose and fell with the steady breath of sleep and she quietly watched him, thinking about all the things that had happened recently.

He was so handsome, with thick lashes lying across his cheeks, his lips full and enticing. Not to mention good in bed. Just thinking about some of the things he'd done made her pussy clench in renewed desire. My God. How could she want him again?

She was in deep trouble here. She'd begun to develop feelings for him and that wasn't a good thing. She needed to hate him so when it came time to leave it would be easier. But he was so hard to hate. He could be arrogant and infuriating but also gentle and funny. Sometimes she got a gut feeling he was hiding something. That there was more to him than he was telling her.

Letting her gaze roam over his muscular chest, she traced his light brown nipple with her fingertip then slipped lower to tug the blanket away, revealing his thick cock. She grinned mischievously as she ran her finger from the base of his fully erect shaft to the tip. Shifting position, she straddled his thighs and leaned down to run her tongue up his length. He moaned, but otherwise didn't stir.

Hmmm. Deep sleeper? Well, she'd wake him up.

Moving up further, she mimicked what he had done earlier and ran the tip of her tongue around his hardened nipple. Again he moaned and moved his head to the side, a muscle working in his cheek.

She wanted him. Wanted to feel his thick cock filling her, and she didn't want to wait until he woke up. Why waste such a tempting erection?

Positioning her pussy over the head of his cock, she sank down onto him, letting his full length stretch and fill her. She threw her head back with a sigh as his cock pushed to her womb, relieving her aching pussy. His hips bucked upward, lodging himself even deeper.

"Oh, fuck yeah," he whispered.

She moaned and rocked her hips in a circular motion, grinding against him. He felt so good, she couldn't get enough.

"This is a hell of a way to wake up," he mumbled as his hands traveled up to fondle her breasts.

In a surprising move, he cupped the back of her head and pulled her down for a deep kiss. He sucked and nipped at her tongue as it entered his mouth, sending little shots of pleasure up her spine. She moaned deep in her throat, loving the commanding way he took control of her mouth and body.

"Ride me, *ni pahti*," he whispered and pushed her upright. "Fuck my cock."

Arching her back, she reached behind her and gripped his thighs, digging her nails into his flesh. He groaned and bucked his hips upward, filling her beyond anything she'd ever imagined. When he slid his thumb between her legs to flick across her clit she lost it and erupted into a firestorm of extreme pleasure.

She screamed as every nerve cell erupted into a mass of molten sensation. Violent spasm after spasm clenched the walls of her vagina as every other muscle in her body quaked in release.

"Oh, God," she gasped as Taron pushed upward in the midst of his own shattering release, filling her vagina with hot semen.

With a sigh, she fell forward onto his chest and relaxed into a puddle. His arms lifted to circled her shoulders and hold her tight, his heat beating a frantic rhythm against her ear. He smelled of sex and hot male and she inhaled deeply, trying to commit the moment to memory. One she knew she would keep forever. Beneath her, she felt his heartbeat slow with hers and she snuggled closer, the warmth of his flesh soothing her tingling body.

They remained quiet, neither saying a word as they fell asleep in each other's arms, Taron's cock still buried inside her body.

\* \* \* \* \*

"So this is where the party is," Stefan said with amusement as he stepped through the veranda doors and onto the patio.

His brother Sidious, sister-in-law Mikayla, father Damon and mother Kaylar, as well as Alyssa's brother Anthony were all gathered around the table, sipping corniga. The warm Daego sun had begun to set, casting a soft golden glow over everything, even the lake just beyond the terrace.

"Party's always at my house," Sidious mumbled and Mikayla shook her head in amusement, her dark brown curls bouncing around her shoulders.

"Don't mind him. He's in a mood," Mikayla said with a wave of her hand.

"A mood?" Stefan mouthed with a frown.

"It's one of her many Earth phrases," Sidious said with a sideways grin before grabbing his wife's hand and kissing her fingers.

Stefan noticed his father reach beside him and pick a leaf from Kaylar's hair. When she turned to see what he held in his hand, she blushed. Stefan inwardly grinned. His parents were still so much in love and he was thrilled he and his brother Sidious had found what they shared. Apparently, if his mother's red cheeks were any indications, they'd made love in the garden earlier. Again.

Krista walked outside and placed her hand on Stefan's arm. He reached around her back and pulled her close to his side. Her brow creased in a frown and her eyelids dropped heavily as she laid her head against his shoulder. She looked so tired. Maybe making love on the way here had been too much for her, especially after the hectic morning she'd had. A twinge of guilt gripped him. "You want to lie down, *kisary*?" he asked softly.

"Not yet."

Mikayla walked over and gave her friend a hug. "Oh, sweetie. You look wonderful. How do you feel?"

"Tired and bloated, but other than that, fabulous."

"Stefan, what were you thinking bringing her out here this late in her pregnancy?" Kaylar asked.

"She held a gun to my head, Mother. Told me if I didn't take her she'd keep my child in her belly forever."

"Now somehow I doubt that," Kayla said dryly.

Krista smiled and swatted at his arm. "I did make him, although I didn't threaten violence. The house on Tilarus was way too hectic. I needed the serenity of the lake."

"Well of course you did," Kaylar said as she pulled Krista away from Stefan and headed her toward the bedrooms on the upper floor. "I was the same way when I was pregnant with Stefan. I hated all those people in and out of that compound."

Stefan held his hands out and glared in exasperation at his mother. She always took over and acted as though he couldn't do a damn thing.

"Get used to it, Stefan," Sidious said quietly.

Stefan glanced back at the three men still sitting at the patio table. Damon nodded his head at what Kaylar was saying, making Stefan, Sidious and Anthony chuckle.

"Don't think I didn't see that, Damon," Kaylar snapped as she and Mikayla walked with Krista into the house.

Damon rolled his gaze toward the stars quickly becoming visible in the night sky. "I swear that woman has eyes in the back of her head."

"I have no doubt," Sidious said dryly. "I was always amazed, as a child, just how much she knew."

Stefan grinned, remembering things about his childhood as well, and moved to take the seat Mikayla had just left. His gaze strayed toward Anthony, who sat across from him. His black hair was cut short, his eyes the same gray as his sister's. He was a big man, almost as muscular as Sidious but not quite as tall. Obviously a man that could take care of himself, but how would he take the news of his sister?

"I heard from Taron earlier," Stefan began.

"And?" Damon demanded.

"He thinks he may have found a way in."

"Excellent," Sidious replied, but he didn't look relieved.

"He also said they've found Alyssa." Stefan kept his gaze on Anthony as he sat straight in his chair, his eyes wide and worried.

"Alyssa? Where is she?"

Stefan sent his brother a telling glance, silently communicating that there may be a problem. Anthony's gaze moved from one of them to the other. "What's going on?"

"Alyssa is on Veenori."

"What?" Anthony jumped to his feet and exploded, just as Stefan had known he would.

Stefan held a hand up. "She's fine, Anthony. Relax."

Damon placed a hand on his shoulder. "Sit back down, son."

"What is she doing on Veenori?" Anthony asked, his voice full of worry for his little sister, as he sank back in his chair. Damon remained behind him, apparently aware Stefan wasn't through.

"We're not sure," Stefan said.

"Well, go get her."

"We can't. Somehow, we're not sure if by accident or on purpose, she found herself being sold as a slinoy..."

"She what?"

"Taron bought her, she's fine. She'll remain with Taron until it's safe for him to send her here. He can't just let her go immediately after buying her."

"What the hell was she thinking?" Anthony demanded and Damon squeezed his shoulders in support.

"Taron is a good man," Damon said. "She'll be well taken care of."

Stefan glanced toward Sidious with a sigh. "There's more but I want to go check on Krista. Send Devlin a communiqué, he'll fill you in on everything else."

"I want to talk to her," Anthony demanded.

Stefan shook his head. "No. She doesn't know who Taron is yet. She needs to remain ignorant of all this for now. Taron won't take advantage of the situation, Anthony. Let him do his job and he'll get both of them out of there." Stefan said firmly.

Anthony drug his fingers through his thick black hair. "When she gets back here, I'm going to kill her."

\* \* \* \* \*

Alyssa narrowed her eyes at Taron as he stood before her, dangling the collar from one thick finger. "I was hoping you would forget about that thing."

"Oh, come on, *ni pahti*. Don't you enjoy wearing this collar and being led around by a leash?"

She raised an eyebrow at him and he chuckled. The sexy sound rumbled from his chest, sending a little tremor down her spine.

"No. It just so happens that I don't. Couldn't we pretend we lost it?"

"No." He shook his head and moved behind her to clasp the collar around her neck. She reluctantly lifted her hair.

"I'm afraid not, Lyssa. This shows you're mine, although sometimes men don't pay attention to that."

"Then why bother with it?"

His hands squeezed her shoulders and she let go of her hair, letting it fall down her back. He leaned forward and buried his face in her hair behind her ear, inhaling deeply. "I love the smell of your hair."

Her insides melted at the deep timbre of his voice and she fell back against his chest. He sounded so sexy when he talked in that low, sultry voice. "I love the way you talk," she said with a grin.

His arms wrapped around her stomach, pulling her closer to his warmth. His fingers slid below her white tunic and cupped her breasts, giving them a gentle squeeze. "And I definitely love these," he purred.

She bit down on her lower lip, fighting the desire to rip his clothes off and fuck him again. She was insatiable where he was concerned. He removed his hands and she pouted at him over her shoulder. With a smile, he slapped his palm against her ass. The sting made her yelp and she reached around to rub at the burn. "You like doing that way too much."

"No," he said as he grabbed her wrist and tugged her into his arms, "I like doing *this* way too much."

His lips descended on hers before she could even blink in a kiss so commanding she had to grab his arms to remain upright. He tasted so good. The hint of sweetbreads they'd had for breakfast lingered on his tongue and she sucked at it, making him groan.

Flattening his palm against the small of her back, he pressed his hardening cock to her stomach. "See what I mean?" he whispered.

"I think I do," she whispered back and wiggled along his length.

"*Shorvick na bis torea*," he growled and pushed her a few inches away from him. "Minx."

She laughed, and turned to grab her coat. "You just can't handle it," she teased.

Taron raised an eyebrow in amusement and her smile widened. She loved teasing him. Ever since they'd arrived here he'd seemed different. More at ease and relaxed than he always was at the mine. She slipped her arms through the sleeves, her heart sinking slightly.

Last night had been incredible. Actually, every night with him had been incredible, but here had been different. There had been something more between them, but she wasn't sure what it was – or if it was even mutual.

Her hands shook as she tried to button her coat, preparing to go back out into the cold of the hallway. Taron walked over and brushed her fingers aside, pushing the buttons through the holes himself. "Don't want to go back?"

"I'm not looking forward to being cooped up in your room alone, no."

A knock at the door interrupted whatever Taron was about to say. "Enter," Taron snapped at the closed door.

The same man who had escorted them there last night stepped into the room and bowed. "The package is in your ship, sir. She is fueled and waiting for you in the cargo bay."

Taron returned his bow then handed Alyssa her hat. Leaning close, he whispered, "I guess that means it's time to go."

A small smile curved her lips, but her chest ached. She was falling so in love with him and she had to stop.

## **Chapter Nine**

Alyssa watched Taron's assistant leave after setting her lunch on Taron's desk and waited for the click of the lock. It never came and her heart raced radically. Could she now get out, explore the mine a little and try to find out who this "Vingosa" was? Maybe this was her one chance.

With her heart in her throat, she stepped over to the door and turned the handle. It gave way and she smiled widely, almost jumping in glee. Dressed in the black velvet pants and deep blue sweater she and Rhia had bought the other day, she crept out into the hallway. Wary, she eyed both ends of the long corridor. When she didn't see anyone she stepped further out and headed toward the right—the same direction Taron had taken her in when they watched the orgy.

Part of her almost balked. Should she do this? She remembered what Taron had told her about the men and she reached up to finger the infinity loop that dangled from her collar. Despite her clothing, surely with the collar visible they would think twice about doing anything.

Straightening her shoulders, she headed quickly down the narrow walkway. At the end she turned left into a wider, more crowded hall. She had to find a file room or at the very least a computer in a language she could read. The men watched her in interest, their eyes roaming over her in a way that made her shiver, and not in a good way.

What was she thinking? She didn't have a clue what she was looking for. How was she going to get any information? Ask one of these men? One in particular licked his lips as he stared at her and she cringed, imagining that long tongue flicking into her mouth. No way.

She spun around, heading in the opposite direction and back to the safety of her room, but quickly realized she'd gone the wrong way. She was close to panic with no idea how to get back. Her hands shook and she fisted them at her stomach to try and hide some of her fear. This was not the time to panic.

Three men followed her, dogging her every step, and she realized with dread what it was Taron had tried to make her understand. She would have never survived working this mine. These men would have torn her apart. Is that what they planned now? Could she fight them off if she had to?

She rounded a corner and found herself on the upper level of a docking bay. It was huge, but mostly empty. Men bustled around, stacking boxes to the side to be loaded later when the ships returned. Running to the railing of the second floor landing, she frantically searched the lower level of the docking bay for any sign of Taron. Silently, she prayed that he was down there somewhere.



\* \* \* \* \*

Taron dropped the box onto Morlak's desk. The heavy package landed with a thump that echoed against the rock walls. "Here's your package."

"Thank you," Morlak replied, his lips quirking in a grin. "Did you open it?"

Taron raised an eyebrow. "Does it look opened?"

Morlak studied the package. "No."

"It's your box, Morlak. I couldn't care less what's in it. Now if you'll excuse me, I have work to do."

Taron turned to leave the room, but Morlak's voice stopped him. "Wait, Taron."

With a sigh, Taron turned to face him, wondering what he had in store for him this time. "What?"

"Come by level seven, docking bay C at midnight. I have something I want to show you."

Taron nodded then turned to leave the office. It looked like he was finally in, but later tonight would tell. He would have even less time to spend with Alyssa now. That thought brought him up short. What did it matter? It wasn't like she was his wife or something. She was his slinoy, and only temporarily. He needed to remember that.

With a determined stride, he made his way through the stone-lined halls and into the lower level of the main docking bay. At this time of day it was mainly empty, most of the ships having already left for the assigned drop stations. Something in his gut made him look up toward the second level and the balcony that ran the perimeter of the bay. What he saw there or, more importantly, *who* he saw there, turned his blood cold. Alyssa.

Behind her were three leering men, stalking her. Damn it! What the hell was she doing out here?

Stomping up the stairs, he scowled at the three men, sending them scurrying in opposite directions. Alyssa's eyes widened in relief then clouded in anxiety as he stalked toward her, his anger rising with every step. "What did I tell you, Alyssa?" he snapped.

"To not go through the mine alone. Okay. I know it was wrong, but I was bored out of my mind and..."

"To quote you, 'bullshit'."

He stood nose to nose with her, ready to tan her adorable hide. Just thinking about all the things that could have happened to her made his chest tighten in fear. Fear of losing her. That thought made him even angrier. He didn't need to have feelings for her. This situation was hairy enough without bringing a woman and love into it.

"Taron, look—" she began, but Taron held up his hand, stopping her.

Grabbing her wrist, he tugged her forward then threw her over his shoulder. She squealed and slapped at his back. "What are you doing?" she demanded.

"Taking you back and making sure you don't do this again."

\* \* \* \* \*

Alyssa tried to draw more air in, but her position over Taron's shoulder prevented it. Her face heated from the rush of blood to her head as she hung upside down over his back. He carried her as though she weighed nothing, practically running up the stairs toward his rooms.

He had been furious with her, and rightly so. She could have been hurt, or worse. She pushed against his back, trying to bring her head more upright. "Taron, please. I can't breathe like this."

He ignored her and she blew out a breath, forcing her bangs from her eyes. *Damn man.* His door opened and she breathed a sigh of relief, thinking he would just set her down and leave again. But apparently Taron had other plans.

Setting her on her feet, he grabbed the hem of her sweater and pulled it over her head before she even knew what was happening. "Hey," she snapped through the thick yarn as it flew over her face. "What are you doing?"

"Making sure you stay put this time."

She snatched the sweater from his hands and held it before her breasts. Her ribs were sore from her ride over his shoulder and she winced at her jerky movements. Taron walked over to the top drawer of his dresser and pulled out a pair of handcuffs. Alyssa's eyes widened in shock. "You wouldn't dare."

"Guess again," he snarled and shoved her back onto the bed.

He grabbed one of her wrists in a firm grip and she fought against him, definitely not liking the idea of being tied up. "Taron, this isn't funny," she yelled, her voice rising in panic.

"Neither was your little stunt." With that, the lock clicked into place around her wrist.

Before he could attach it to the post she rolled away from him to the other side of the bed, but he was too fast for her. He quickly jerked her back, slipping the other end of the cuff around the metal bedpost. "Damn it, Taron," she snapped. "You can't do this."

"Wanna bet?" he snapped, then quickly moved to do the other one.

She kicked at him with her feet, desperately trying to stop him. She didn't like the idea of being bound. It infuriated her that he would go this far. This was worse than when he'd spanked her.

Her kicks had no effect on him and she growled in aggravation as the latch slid into place, locking her hands to the bed above her head. "You can't leave me here like this, damn it," she snapped, tugging desperately against the bindings.

With a murderous scowl, she growled and kicked at his leg with her foot.

"Careful or I'll tie your feet up too, slave."

His chest heaved, the muscles stretching his shirt across his wide chest. The brown of his eyes sparked fire as he stared down at her in anger. She'd never seen him so furious, but instead of scaring her the sight intrigued her. He was so gorgeous, even scowling at her in a murderous rage, and her body heated with the idea that she was helpless against him. He could do whatever he wanted to her and even as angry as she was she would welcome his ravishment.

With a determined set to his chin, he leaned forward and undid her pants, sliding them down her hips. They fell to the floor silently, leaving her naked and vulnerable to his heated gaze. "You'll learn to do as I say, Alyssa. One way or another."

She narrowed her eyes at him and curled her lip. "Go to hell."

He snorted and turned to leave the room. "Already been there." He smiled cockily at her over his shoulder. "They spit me back out."

"You are such an arrogant ass," she shouted as he shut the door. She growled and kicked her feet, her hands tugging at the handcuffs. "I can't believe the prick actually tied me up!" She huffed out a breath and glared at the closed door. "And fucking left me here."

\* \* \* \* \*

Taron strolled into the old, deserted landing bay later that night, cautious, but trying not to appear so. He didn't trust Morlak. To not look at everything as some sort of trap would be a mistake. Glancing around the room, he noticed Morlak and two other men he didn't recognize opening the lid of a metal crate.

"Morlak," Taron yelled. His voice bounced off the rock walls and echoed back to him, indicating just how large this empty hangar was.

Morlak spun around to face him. "You made it. Excellent. Come." He raised a hand, waving Taron over.

Slowly, Taron made his way over to the three men, his gaze wandering to the open crate. Inside were numerous guns. Some that shot bullets, some lasers, but all of them obviously expensive and new. Morlak watched him in interest, apparently trying to gauge his reaction.

"Interesting cargo, Morlak," Taron said as he reached down to pick up a gun. He turned it over in his hand, looking for any sign of who might have made it. The metal was good quality, the sites top-of-the-line, but there were no markings to indicate the manufacturer.

"How would you like to be wealthy?" Morlak asked, a small grin tugging at his lips.

"I'm already wealthy," Taron replied and dropped the gun back into the crate. It wasn't a lie. Taron Sinnar was very wealthy.

"Okay," Morlak drawled. "How would you like to be even wealthier?"

"I'm always open to making more currency."

"Good," Morlak said with a smile. "And I'm always open to bringing in new blood, so to speak. You can handle yourself. I think you would be perfect for our little circle."

"Circle of gun runners?" Taron purred.

Morlak sneered. "Yes. Do you want to know who they're for? Why we're hiding them?"

Of course he did, but it would be stupid to actually admit it. Taron shrugged. "None of my business. So long as I get paid, I couldn't care less where it comes from."

Morlak's grin widened. "I think you'll fit in just fine, Karmase."

\* \* \* \* \*

Taron stalled outside the door of his quarters. It was well past midnight and he was sure Alyssa would be asleep by now. Well, pretty sure. She had been damn pissed earlier, but then so had he. He needed to find out how she got out and make sure it didn't happen again.

His cock tightened as he thought about how good she'd looked lying there, her hands bound above her head, thrusting her breasts out. They'd heaved with her labored, angry breathing and her eyes had sparked with fire and passion. Even her skin had flushed from head to toe. She was magnificent angry and had been extremely hard to resist.

Even as mad as he'd been, he'd wanted her. Hell, he still wanted her. Glancing at the ceiling, he cursed fate. Why here and why the hell now? He knew now how Sidious must have felt when he met Mikayla, and why he'd fought his feelings for her for so long. Sidious had been undercover, just like he was now. The last thing Sidious had needed was a woman. It was the last thing he needed, but he was beginning to realize it was the one thing he wanted more than anything.

Taron was always teasing Mikayla about her smart mouth. More than once Krista had told him he'd end up with someone just like her. He'd always thought she was wrong. He wanted a sweet-tempered girl. Someone nice. Easy. But after spending time with Alyssa, easy was the last thing he wanted. He wanted wild, hot and complicated. He wanted Alyssa — smart mouth and all.

"Krista will never let me live this down," Taron mumbled with a sigh. "I've fallen in love with a hot-tempered wildcat."

Opening the door, he looked toward the bedroom where Alyssa lay, spread-eagle. Her eyes were closed, her head to the side. She looked so peaceful lying there, and so fucking tempting. Shutting the door, he removed his shirt and slung it across the back of a chair on his way to the bedroom.

For not the first time in his life he wondered if any of his father would come out in him after he married. Would he run off and leave his wife and child like his father had? No, he told himself with determination. He would never do anything like that. Ever. He

wasn't like his father and never would be. Or at least that's what he continually tried to tell himself.

His finger brushed a strand of hair from her cheek. Beautiful, long, black lashes fluttered across her flesh and he grinned. "Wake up, slave," he whispered.

Her eyes fluttered again. Was she ignoring him, pretending to be asleep? Feeling mischievous, he ran his hand up the inside of thigh, straight for the heat emanating from her pussy. Her eyes popped open and she kicked at him with her foot. He caught it mid kick, before it actually made contact with his chest, and smiled wickedly. "You're not still mad at me, surely," he purred, enjoying the way her eyes sparkled in anger.

"Yes, I'm still mad at you, you prick," she snarled and tried to free her leg from his grasp. "Let me go, damn it."

"You're not exactly in a position to be making demands."

"You tied me up and left me here!"

"You deliberately defied an order," he countered.

"An order?" she snapped, and with a huff, kicked her foot loose from his hold. "You are such a fucking jerk."

"That's not what you said last night," he said with a grin.

He held her weary gaze as he moved to the foot of the bed and snatched both her ankles, holding them against the mattress. She squealed and squirmed, fighting his grip.

"Admit it, slave. This turns you on more than you want it to."

Her movements stopped and she gaped at him, her gray eyes wide with surprise. "No," she snapped, "this doesn't turn me on. You don't turn me on."

It was an outright lie and he knew it. He hadn't missed the smoldering desire she tried desperately to hide behind the anger. "Did you think about me?" he asked as he slowly slid his fingers up her legs, making sure to hold them down so she couldn't kick him again. "Did you imagine me having my way with you while you remained tied to the bed, helpless and completely at my mercy?"

The gray of her eyes deepened and a muscle jerked in her cheek. Oh, she was definitely fighting it.

"No," she cried indignantly. "I definitely did not. I dreamed of strangling you."

"Really?" he purred as his palms pressed her thighs outward, giving him a perfect view of the juices coating her pussy. "Is that what made you so wet?" he asked as he dipped his head toward her labia.

"Don't you dare," she snarled.

His tongue slowly licked up her slit and she groaned, biting down hard on her lip. "I hate you," she groaned.

"Do you really hate me?" he whispered against the skin just above her pussy. His tongue flicked out to tickle her bellybutton and her hips squirmed beneath him. "Say it isn't so, *ni pahti*," he teased.

"I'll say no such thing," she growled and he fought hard to keep from chuckling.

Her skin was soft beneath his touch as he skimmed his fingers up her ribs and around her nipples. His tongue joined in the play, teasing the tight buds. Her breathing became more erratic as he covered the tip of her breast with his mouth, his teeth nipping at her engorged nipple.

"Damn you, Taron," she hissed then arched her back, pushing her breasts further into his mouth.

Alyssa tugged at her bindings, her fingers clenched and unclenched in frustration and desire. For what seemed like hours she'd lain there wondering what he'd do to her when he returned. She'd dreamed up all kinds of pleasurable things, but this was definitely more intense than anything she could have imagined. His lips were so tender as they worked a path up her neck to nip at her ear. She gasped as his teeth sank into the sensitive flesh just below it.

She wanted to feel his soft skin, feel the hard muscles bunch beneath her touch. She loved exploring his body, the hard angles and deep planes. Everything about him was magnificent.

It was hard to keep her eyes open. She felt drugged with passion and lust. She needed him. Needed to feel his thick cock plunging inside her over and over until she screamed. He rose above her, his knees on either side of her shoulders, and unfastened his slacks. She watched in utter fascination as his hard shaft sprang free, tempting her beyond reason. She wanted to touch him but her hands were still bound and she tugged at the cuffs in aggravation. If she couldn't touch him, she could at least taste him.

"I want to taste you, Taron. I want to feel the length of your cock against my tongue."

Taron's eyes widened then narrowed, the brown glowing like amber as he stared at her hungrily. Her words must have surprised him. She licked her lips seductively, hopefully startling and enticing him further. "Put your cock in my mouth, Taron," she whispered.

Slowly Taron lowered himself and traced her lips with the tip of his shaft. She stuck her tongue out, licking at the pre-cum. Taron groaned and a muscle in his cheek flexed, indicating just how close to losing control he was. She opened her lips and he eased his length inside, inch by inch. Her mouth sucked at him, enjoying his musky, salty taste.

He moved his cock in and out, fucking her mouth. His hand kept a firm grip at the base to keep it from going too deep and choking her. She sucked hard, her eyes glued to his. Her teeth scraped across the head and he closed his eyes, groaning softly.

"I like that," he sighed. "I like the feel of your mouth on my cock, Alyssa."

She liked the feel of it in her mouth. More than she thought she would. Pulling him deeper, her lips nudged at his hand, trying to move it out of the way. She wanted more

of him. All of him. In answer to her persistence he slid his hand back, pushing his cock further in her mouth. She relaxed her throat, swallowing as much of him as she could.

He hissed, the muscles in his jaw working frantically. Her cheeks hollowed out as she sucked harder, determined to make him spill his seed down her throat. But suddenly he pulled away. She gasped, staring at him in surprise. He stood over her, his hand slowly pumping his cock.

"Damn it, woman. You have one hell of a mouth."

"Put it back," she sighed, her words even shocking herself.

"No." He shook his head and positioned himself between her legs, the head of his shaft teasing the wet opening to her vagina. "I want to fuck your pussy, Alyssa. Now," he growled.

Before she could even utter a word of agreement, he thrust into her hard and deep, his cock practically splitting her in two. She screamed, her hands pulling at the cuffs, her legs lifting to wrap around his back. He felt so good. So huge. Her release was almost instant and she shattered, her pussy pulsing and clenching around his cock. He groaned and slowed his thrusts, prolonging her pleasure, and the sensations racing through her intensified.

"Taron," she screamed as another, stronger, orgasm hit, searing her flesh.

He continued to plunge into her, continued to demand more from her body. All that she could give him. With a groan, he slid from her pussy and unfastened the cuffs. Turning her, he helped her settle on her knees. She glanced at him over her shoulder in question, but he just grinned before sliding two fingers into her pussy. She moaned and rocked back against him, taking his fingers even deeper.

He removed his fingers and slid them along the cleft of her ass. Gently, he circled the tight hole of her anus. She started, wondering what he was up to. With one finger, then two, he pushed past the tight ring of resistance and she gasped at the unusual sensation.

"Am I hurting you?" he asked as he slowly stretched her, moving his fingers in and out.

"No," she sighed, intrigued with the burning need that had begun to develop there.

His other hand slid along her slit, toying with her clit in unrelenting circles. She groaned, moving her hips in time with the simultaneous movements of both his hands until she thought she would burst with need and lust. "Taron, please," she groaned. "I need you."

"Where, Alyssa?" he asked as he added a third finger to her ass. "Where do you need me?"

"There," she gulped. "I want you to fuck my ass."

She couldn't believe she was actually saying it, much less begging for it. She'd always insisted that spot was exit only, but she had to have him there. She had to feel his cock sinking into the one place she'd denied every other man.

With his thumbs, he spread her ass cheeks then pushed the tip of his shaft into the tight ring. She gasped at the fullness, the pain that bordered on pleasure. He stopped, allowing her to become comfortable with his invasion. When she didn't pull away from him he eased himself in further. It felt as though he was splitting her in two and she panted, trying to relax her body to accept all of him. He eased out, then pushed in again slowly, going much deeper this time.

She groaned and shoved against him, her body becoming more comfortable with the thick intrusion of his shaft. His cock was slick with her juices and easily plunged in balls-deep. His growl vibrated through her ear as he fucked her ass, gently at first, then harder – deeper.

His hand returned to her clit and flicked across the swollen bud. She moaned, her hand joining his at the juncture of her thighs.

"Oh, yes, *ni pahti*," he whispered in her ear. "Make yourself come for me."

He moved his hand, allowing her free rein to pleasure herself while he continued to pummel her ass. She could hardly breathe the pleasure was so intense. The first waves of her orgasm hit and she increased the pressure to the tiny nub. Her legs shook with the strain of holding back until finally she let loose, her screams echoing through the room.

Taron thrust harder, his cock plunging deeper. Her walls spasmed around him and he groaned, his own release just out of reach. Her anal muscles contracted around his cock, milking the very life from him it seemed, and he shouted as the first oncoming wave shook his muscles. With one final thrust, he spilled his seed deep in her ass along with what felt like his soul. His vision blurred and emotion unlike anything he'd felt before overwhelmed him, shaking him to the core.

He pulled free of her and turned her to her back. Softly he placed little kisses against her brow and cheeks, her sighs blowing across his lips on her breath.

"I can't believe what you do to me," she whispered.

"What do I do to you, *ni pahti*?"

She closed her eyes. "You make me feel alive."

A small smile touched his lips as he watched her fall asleep.

"May Norlicka have mercy on my soul, for you, Alyssa, are the very air I breathe," he whispered. With a sigh, he lay next to her and pulled her into the safety of his arms, where he wanted to keep her forever. "I just hope we both make it out of this alive to enjoy a life together."



## Chapter Ten

Alyssa awoke with a start at the sound of the outer wall sliding open. Glancing to her side, she realized Taron wasn't there and quickly grabbed the robe he'd placed at the foot of the bed. Was he leaving?

"Taron?" she called as she slipped her arms through the sleeves.

"Well." Rhia's voice carried through the open wall and Alyssa ran into the other room, staring in surprise at the tall woman. Her flame red hair was drawn back in a braid that hung down the middle of her back. The frost blue outfit matched her eyes almost perfectly. "I'm not Taron," she said. "But he did send me to rescue you."

Rhia's face lit up with a smile and Alyssa grinned back. "What are you doing here?"

"Exactly what I said. There's not a whole lot to do here, tourism-wise, but surely we can find something."

"Where's Taron?"

Rhia shrugged, adjusting the thin spaghetti strap on her shoulder. "Working, I suppose. He sent a message earlier and asked if I would take you away from here for a while."

Alyssa pursed her lips. "He's just worried I'll try and run off again."

Rhia raised an eyebrow and stepped further into the room. "You what?"

"I went out into the mine yesterday. He caught me and had a fit."

"Alyssa. You can't go out there by yourself. Those men would show you no mercy."

"I know that," Alyssa sighed, not sure she should tell Rhia the truth. "Now."

Rhia seemed close to Taron. If she told Rhia why she was really here, would she tell Taron? And if she told Taron, would Taron help her? Or was Taron involved? No. She couldn't think that way. She refused to even consider that he might be involved in her brother's murder.

"Well good. Just remember it." Rhia smiled devilishly. "Don't just stand there. Put on one of those outfits I bought you and I'll show you around town. You won't need the leash, but leave the collar on."

She liked the idea of that and ran quickly back to the bedroom to change. Thank God she wouldn't need the leash. Taron actually hadn't used it much lately, although he occasionally threatened to. He knew she hated it and was grateful he didn't force her to wear it. The collar was bad enough.

Choosing a pair of thin slacks and a sleeveless top in a soft yellow, she threw on a pair of sandals and glanced at her reflection in the mirror. Her skin had a glow that hadn't been there before, her eyes more sparkle.

She hated to admit it, but she was in love with him. She knew she could never tell him. What kind of future could they have? Living here was out of the question. Raising children here was even more out of the question. She would make the best of what she had and when their time was up she would move on. She had no other choice.

Grabbing the pearl clip they'd purchased as well, she piled her hair on her head and secured it with the jeweled ornament. As she tugged a few tendrils around her ears, she smiled, remembering how Taron liked to comb his fingers through her hair as she fell asleep in his arms. She would really miss that when they parted ways. Her smile faded.

"Stop it," she mumbled to herself and turned away from the mirror. "I'm ready," she called out to Rhia and went to follow her to the tiny ship parked on the landing ledge.

"You can fly one of these?" Alyssa asked in admiration.

"If you live here, you have to learn how. It's not that hard."

"Devlin teach you?" she asked as they climbed into the small speeder.

"He tried once," Rhia giggled at the memory. "After that one time, he let someone else do it. Only time I think I've ever seen my brother turn green."

Laughter bubbled up in Alyssa's chest and she covered her mouth. Devlin was such a large, intimidating man, she couldn't imagine anything turning him green.

The speeder lifted from the pad and shot out of the hole with a soft whoosh. The sunlight beamed down on them, heating their skin through the glass windows. In the distance, barren mountains dotted the landscape but provided little to no relief from the sun. Only the caves a short distance south of the city provided a cool reprieve. Eventually these mines would also be deserted, just like the others, their veins depleted of resources and minerals.

They remained silent as the ship quickly approached the city. The roads had remained dirt since the vehicles floated above the surface. There was no need for paved roads. Three-story buildings dotted the landscape for miles, their beige stucco walls blending into the dry ground. Slate roofs ranged in color from light gray to black, depending on the age of the building. Covered sidewalks helped to shield pedestrians from the hot sun.

Rhia parked the speeder on the roof of Devlin's bar and hopped out. Alyssa followed her down the narrow stairs and into the cool confines of the bar. "Where are we headed?" Alyssa asked.

"We're picking up our escort," Rhia threw over her shoulder. "Devlin refuses to allow me out in town without one."

"Around here that's probably a smart thing," Alyssa mumbled, remembering her own experience at exploring unescorted. "Rhia, do you know who Vingosa is?"

Rhia came to a stop and stared at her with a startled expression. "Vingosa? Vingosa who?"

Alyssa shrugged. "Don't know. Just Vingosa."

A strange cloud passed over Rhia's eyes, but before Alyssa could decipher it she turned away from her. "I don't think I recognize the name."

A frown creased her brow as she watched Rhia continue down the hallway and a second set of stairs. She was lying, but why?

Once on the lower level, Rhia smiled at the tall Veenorian at the end of the bar. "We're ready, Misha," Rhia said.

Misha stood and Alyssa couldn't help but gape at his unusual appearance. His long legs stretched, forcing him to his full nine-foot height. His green-tinged skin and lizard-like eyes made her shiver.

"Good. Let's do this quickly," he replied sternly.

"Relax, Misha. We'll be done when we're done."

"Walking through town with you, Mistress Rhia, is anything but relaxing. Your brother should be accompanying you. Less happens when he does."

Rhia snorted. "There hasn't been anything happening in quite a while, Misha."

"Okay, wait," Alyssa said, placing one hand on her hip and waving her other. "What exactly happens when you go to town?"

"Nothing," Rhia said with a shake of her head.

Misha growled. "Nothing my ass. Every time I take this woman to town some newcomer who doesn't know who she is tries to take her."

She stared at Rhia in shock. "Why on earth do you stay here?"

"It's not as bad as he makes it out to be. Besides, Devlin won't leave and I can't leave Devlin. He's the only family I know."

Alyssa smiled slightly at the stubborn redhead. "I can certainly understand that. I would never leave my family either."

"Now that that's settled," Rhia said with a smile, "let's go."

Trying to keep up with Rhia as they made their way through Veenori City was an experience in itself. The woman had long legs and took long strides Alyssa had to skip to keep up with. Misha remained close behind, his eyes ever watchful. At one point Devlin joined them, escorting the two women to Viclak's—an upper-crust diner and bar toward the middle of town—for drinks.

Devlin sat across from Alyssa at the small tile table. He leaned back and crossed his ankle over his knee, his full lips morphing into a sexy grin. "How's slinoy life treating you, Alyssa? You look well."

His muscular arm slid along the back of the chair beside him, forcing the top of his shirt to open wider and show off a smooth, tan chest. She couldn't stop from admiring the gorgeous hunk. Heaven help the woman he decided to seduce. She wouldn't stand a chance. Her gaze met his sapphire one and he winked knowingly, causing the heat of a blush to move up her cheeks.

Rhia sat next to her and Alyssa didn't miss the movement under the table as she kicked her brother. "Behave yourself," Rhia growled.

"What'd I do?" he asked innocently.

A sad smile tugged at Alyssa's lips, memories of her own relationship with Anthony tugging at her chest. Devlin and Rhia were obviously very close and it made her miss her own brother even more so. If only she hadn't made such a mess out of things here. She'd made zero progress and wasn't sure she ever would. An investigator she was not.

"Siblings are such a pain in the ass, aren't they, Alyssa?" Devlin teased.

"Rhia's not a pain."

Alyssa reached up to take the drink the waiter handed her and set it on the table. The glass was frosted and cold, a wonderful contradiction to the stifling heat of the planet.

"You don't know her like I do," Devlin said with a grin. "I can remember when she was younger, always giving her nannies trouble, always under my feet."

"I was not always under your feet," Rhia pouted.

"Please, Ri," Devlin purred while rolling his eyes, "you were always under my feet, following me everywhere, imitating me and mocking me."

Alyssa grinned at the image of a young Devlin and an even younger Rhia dogging his heels. "The two of you are funny."

She took a sip of her drink, letting the cold fluid cool her parched throat. Devlin studied her as though trying to read her mind and she squirmed, unsure why his steady stare made her so uncomfortable. It was as though he knew all her little secrets.

"Where's Taron?" Devlin asked out of the clear blue and she blinked in surprise.

"I don't know. The mine, I guess," Alyssa said with a shrug.

"He said he'd be by the bar later to pick Alyssa up," Rhia offered.

Devlin nodded, his eyes still studying hers. She licked her lips and looked down at the table, trying her best to avoid his probing gaze. When she glanced back at him, his lips quirked into a small grin. "I told Misha he could go and I would escort you back to the bar. Did you get the translator I needed?" Devlin asked as he turned his attention back to Rhia.

"Yes," she replied with a nod. "It's being delivered later this afternoon."

"Good."

Someone shouted Devlin's name and he glanced toward another table, raising his hand in acknowledgment. "I'll be right back. You two stay right here where I can see you."

"Yes, brother dear," Rhia drawled and Alyssa giggled at Devlin's exasperated expression and rolling eyes.

"He's so gorgeous," Alyssa sighed, her gaze straying to his wide shoulders and tight ass as he walked away.

"Yeah. And he knows it."

"What man who looks like that doesn't?"

Rhia laughed. "True." She looked to Alyssa and smiled apologetically. "You'll have to forgive his probing earlier."

"Probing?"

"Devlin is Dorian. He can sense emotions."

"He's an empath?" Alyssa's eyes widened in surprise.

"Yes, to some degree. The closer he is to someone emotionally, the stronger the connection. But he asked you about Taron to try and get an emotional response."

Alyssa narrowed her eyes. "Why?"

Rhia shrugged with a sigh. "Who knows? Maybe he's just being protective of Taron."

Lifting the glass to take a drink, Alyssa snorted. "Protecting him from me? What does he think I'll do to him?"

"Break his heart," Rhia offered with a grin.

The drink lodged in her throat and she coughed, trying to catch her breath. "I think it's the other way around, Rhia. I think I'm the one in danger of getting her heart broken."

"So you care for him then?" Rhia asked softly.

Of course she did, but was it the sex? Or something else? Something much stronger. "I don't know," she sighed. "I feel something, I'm just not sure what."

Rhia put her hand over hers, offering a show of silent support. "Don't overthink it, Alyssa. Just let it happen."

"It's not that simple. I can't live here."

A small smile touched Rhia's lips as she gave her hand a gentle squeeze. "Who says you have to? Don't make assumptions, hon. Remember what I said. Just let it happen."

Just let it happen? Who was she kidding? It had already happened. Now she just had to figure out what to do about it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Back at the bar, Alyssa silently watched the men and women saunter in. Scantly clad barmaids scurried around the room taking drink orders and warding off wandering hands. Some didn't and stopped mid-stride to enjoy a grope and feel from one of the patrons.

Several nude table dancers performed, shaking their assets for the interested table crowd. She couldn't help but stare at the same man she'd seen that first night. The night

Taron had made her come in front of everyone. But as her eyes roamed around the room, she realized no one probably paid her any attention. They were too busy watching everything else.

Rhia had kept her sequestered behind the bar with strict instructions that she wasn't to leave the spot. She would be safe there. But the second she saw Taron walk through the door her heart jumped. He looked incredible. The thin material of his black sleeveless tank stretched tight across his wide chest, his trim waist was outlined by the form-fitting tan cotton pants.

She gulped in air, shocked at the ever-present stirring of lust within her stomach. It was always this way, even when she was mad at him. He had a power over her she couldn't even begin to understand, nor did she really want to. If she looked at it too closely, she'd have to admit her feelings ran deeper than just lust and she couldn't do that.

His whiskey gaze met hers, sinking her heart into a frantic rhythm. It burned with desire and possession that sent shivers down her spine. Suddenly she wanted desperately to be near him, to feel his protective embrace around her. Without thinking it through, she ran from behind the bar and headed toward Taron.

Before she even got halfway, someone grabbed her from behind, his hot, smelly breath against her cheek making her cringe. Why couldn't she listen and do what she was told?

"Let me go," she snapped. "I don't belong to you."

"I don't care," he snarled, his arms tightening their hold. "You look too good to pass up."

"She's Karmase's slave," someone warned from beside them.

"Good. I've always wanted a reason to kick the bastard's ass. She's as good a one as any."

Alyssa's stomach flipped in fear for Taron. Her frightened eyes met Taron's gaze across the crowded room and she flinched at the raw anger reflected in their depths. Her gut told her Taron didn't have anything to worry about, but the man holding her did.

Taron stomped toward them, his gaze hot, fury and possessiveness shooting from the amber orbs. Her breath caught at the impressive sight.

"Let her go, Negosh. She doesn't belong to you."

"Fuck you," he drawled. "She's in my arms. She's mine. You shouldn't have left her here alone, Karmase."

Taron grabbed the man's wrist and squeezed, hard. The distinct sound of a bone cracking made Alyssa flinch. Negosh groaned then hissed in fury.

From the side, Devlin grabbed her hand and pulled her from Negosh's relaxed grip. She kept her eyes on the two men as Devlin tugged her several feet away, safe from the fight she could sense unfolding.

Taron drew back his hand and hit Negosh with his fist square in the nose. Negosh staggered back, his hand rising to try and stop the flow of blood gushing from his now-broken nose. "You son of a bitch," he snapped. "I claim her, Karmase. What are you willing to do to win her back?"

Taron snorted. "Whatever you want, Negosh. Name it. Winner takes Alyssa."

"No," she gasped and tried to break free of Devlin's hold.

"Stop it, Alyssa," Devlin hissed, his fingers tightening around her wrist. "Remember your place."

"But he can't do this," she cried.

"Would you rather go with Negosh?"

She instantly stopped struggling, her worried gaze never leaving the two men. Of course she didn't want to go with Negosh.

"I challenge you to a race, Karmase. Cycles."

"Where and when, Negosh?" Taron snarled.

"Here and now."

Devlin whistled and Taron turned to look at him with a questioning expression. "Use mine," Devlin said as he tossed something into the air. The small silver object flew across the room and landed in Taron's outstretched hand.

Taron nodded and turned to head outside with Negosh. Alyssa finally broke free of Devlin and took off after Taron into the hot Veenori sunlight.

Word had already spread and a crowd quickly gathered along the main strip. The cycles were brought around and Alyssa swallowed down a lump of pure fear. Did he know how to ride one of those?

"Negosh is good," someone to her left whispered close to her ear. "He's never been beaten. Looks like you'll belong to him now."

She curled her lip at the tall man. "We'll see, won't we?"

Moving away from them, she ignored Rhia's shout for her to come back and stomped toward Taron. He crouched on his haunches, studying the cycle, his thick fingers making quick adjustments to the wires sticking out of the side.

"Are you out of your mind?" she snapped.

He ignored her, his gaze remaining on the monstrous-looking machine he would be riding.

"Taron, you can't do this." She followed behind him as he moved from one side of the cycle to the other. It didn't seem to her that he was even paying attention. Instead he knelt down and began to fiddle with the plugs and wires located just below the seat. "Taron," she said again, trying to get his attention.

He stopped what he was doing and stood to his full height. "Why can't I do this?" he asked with a little aggravation as he looked down at her.

"From what I understand this man has never lost a race." She tried to make him see reason.

"He's never raced me." Taron shrugged his shoulders arrogantly.

She slapped her thigh in exasperation. "You have to be the most arrogant man I think I have ever met. Arrogance will not win this race for you!"

"No." He smiled. "Skill will."

Rolling her eyes, Alyssa wondered why she was even out here trying to stop him. Let him kill himself. Surely Devlin would see she didn't end up with...what's his name.

"You know..." Taron moved closer, pinning her against the side of the cycle, and she glanced up in question at his face. What the hell was he doing? "I have to wonder what it is that's motivated you to come out here and try to stop me. Could it be concern, possibly?"

"Don't flatter yourself." She narrowed her eyes and tried to look for an escape route. She refused to admit anything to him. Especially here.

"The race is about to start. How about a kiss for luck?" He touched the side of her face and softly ran his thumb along her bottom lip.

"How about not?" she replied, trying to ignore what his closeness and the look in his whiskey-colored eyes was doing to her.

"Come on, Lyssa." The corner of his mouth twitched as though fighting a smile. He tipped her chin up with his finger, bringing her mouth closer to his. His breath fanned across her lips as he whispered, "We fuck too well together for you to not feel anything for me."

"This has nothing to do with that, damn it."

"No?" he said with an infuriating grin that told her he didn't believe a word she'd said.

"I just came out here to try and talk some sense into you, but I see now that it was useless—"

Before she could finish her thought he covered her mouth with his. She hated when he did this, for no matter how hard she tried to play indifferent she always melted beneath his skilled kisses. There was just something about the way he kissed and the way he made her feel that made him so hard to resist.

With a slight whimper, Alyssa opened her lips beneath his and welcomed the onslaught of his tongue and the passionate kiss that followed.



## Chapter Eleven

Taron's arms snaked around the small of her back and molded her body closer to his. She smelled of jerrywine, a small red flower indigenous to Tilarus, and he inhaled deeper. Rhia must have gotten this scent for her. He loved that smell and when it mixed with Alyssa's own sweet scent, it was heavenly.

With a moan, he nipped at her tongue, sucking it further into his mouth. Her taste was so incredibly erotic. The voices behind him faded as he continued to plunder her sweet lips. He couldn't get enough. Her tiny hands fisted in his shirt, her nails scraping at the skin of his chest, and his cock hardened instantly. Damn, he had to get control of himself or he'd take her right here, crowd be damned.

"Race starts in two senahs," Devlin shouted.

Taron lifted his head and stared at Alyssa's shocked expression. Her eyes were wide with anxiety, desire, and... He grinned. Anger.

"You insufferable, arrogant..." she fumed, her lips pursing as she tried to think of something else equally as bad to call him.

He wrapped his arms tighter around her and pressed his hard cock into the soft flesh of her stomach. "Ah, I love it when you talk dirty."

"Ugh!" She growled and shoved hard at his chest.

He let her go and watched in amusement as she stomped back toward Rhia, who stood under the shade of the sidewalk overhang.

"Man your cycles," Devlin shouted as he took his place before them.

He raised his hand high in the air and waited for the two of them to take their positions. Taron hit the switch, starting the engine. The cycle purred beneath him as he straddled the seat, his hands gripping the handles in front of him. The sun beat down on his head as he studied the horizon in the distance.

"Three kilometers. First one to Porlacy Falls and back is the winner and retains possession of the slinoy Alyssa." Devlin eyed both men. "Are you ready?"

Taron and Negosh both nodded.

"Go!" Devlin shouted, then dropped his arm.

Taron revved the engine and braced himself against the sudden thrust of the cycle as it took off toward the falls, Negosh close behind.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alyssa watched him go with a sinking heart. Why did her last words to him have to be so harsh? What if he didn't make it back?

"Stop worrying." She blinked and noticed Devlin studying her, his brow creased in a frown. "He'll be fine."

"So you can tell the future as well as read my emotions?" she snapped. Immediately, she regretted her remark. "I'm sorry. You didn't deserve that."

Devlin shrugged. "I know he will be fine because I know he's a good driver. Don't forget, I've known Taron for a long time. Now," he said with grin, "come and watch the race from the roof. They'll be returning shortly."

Alyssa and Rhia followed Devlin to the flat roof of the bar. Several others came as well and they all lined the edge, watching the horizon for any sign of the two cycles. The heat came off the ground in waves, making the skyline appear fuzzy. She squinted, trying to focus in on the two riders in the distance, but it was no use. They were too far away.

A lump formed in her throat as she felt Rhia place her hand on her shoulder. Rhia seemed to know exactly what she was going through, even though half the time Alyssa didn't. How had things become so complicated? She had come here to find her brother's killer and she'd ended up falling in love. With a mine overseer of all things. Boy, wouldn't her mother be proud.

She rolled her eyes toward the hot sun and wrapped her arms around her stomach, trying to squelch the nervous nausea. Taking a deep breath, she concentrated on the two riders in the distance as their shadows loomed closer. From here she couldn't tell who was ahead, but it looked close. Too close.

"Please," she whispered as the two became more visible.

A cloud of dust surrounded them as their cycles stirred the ground beneath the vehicles. Her heart hammered in her chest as Taron's figure became clearer. He was ahead, but not by much. She clenched her fingers into fists as the two approached, making their way down the main street of the city. A black line had been drawn on the ground, marking the finish.

Time seemed to stand still for Alyssa and when Taron passed over the line first she closed her eyes in relief. Rhia hugged her from behind as the crowd below them erupted in cheers for the winner. "See. Everything worked out just fine."

Alyssa nodded and watched Taron continue to speed down the street. The cycles were going so fast it would take him several more feet to slow down. With a relieved sigh, she turned to stare in surprise at Devlin. His hand was held out, collecting money from grumbling men and women who walked by.

"Thank you," he said with a grin. "Always a pleasure."

"I can't believe you bet," Rhia said.

"Why wouldn't I? The man's a sure thing."

"You could have told me that," Alyssa grumbled.

"I believe I did," he answered with a grin. "Maybe you were just too worried about him to notice."

With one last smile, he took Rhia's arm and escorted her downstairs with the rest of the spectators, leaving Alyssa alone on the roof with her jumbled thoughts. The crowd below had dispersed, heading back into the cool buildings and away from the killer daylight. Shielding her eyes, she stared toward the blue sky. She missed home so much, but the thought of never seeing Taron again tore at her heart.

*I hate it here, but I love him. I must be out of my mind.*

"The race made for an interesting day, didn't it?"

Alyssa spun around with a start and gasped. Taron stood just a few feet away, his clothes and skin covered in dust. She smiled then raced toward him, throwing herself into his arms. He grunted then laughed. "You're going to be a mess. I'm filthy."

"I don't care," she mumbled against his neck. "Just please don't do this anymore."

"Ah, *ni pahti*," he sighed, "I would gladly do it again for you."

Slowly she pulled back and stared into his eyes. They sparkled with humor and love. She swallowed against the growing warmth that began to spread through her chest. Licking her lips, she shook her head. "We have to be out of our minds. This could never work."

"You have to have a little faith, Alyssa," he whispered before claiming her lips in a deep, sweet kiss.

Her whole body melted against his as she fell into the kiss, meeting his passion with a rising passion of her own. He never failed to do this to her. Make her crazy with need and passion. He made her feel alive and whole. But this was nuts. Could this really work and did she really want it to?

"Taron," she sighed, "We need to talk."

"Later, *ni pahti*," he purred and moved his fingers to undo the buttons of her top, revealing her aching breasts. His thumb brushed across her nipple and she moaned, arching her back and thrusting her breasts toward his touch. "Much later," he whispered before leaning down to capture the pert bud in his mouth.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Senator Marshe." Stefan stared at the tall man in surprise. "What are you doing here?"

The man grinned sheepishly. "I'm terribly sorry, Your Grace, but I needed to speak with you and your office said you were here."

Stefan frowned, both at the title and the fact his office would give his whereabouts without clearing it with him first. "It's fine, Marshe. Please come in." He stepped back and opened the front door to Sidious' lake house, allowing the senator to step inside. "And it's Stefan. We forgo formalities here."

"Of course...Stefan. Lovely home," Marshe said as his faded green eyes took in the massive mahogany entry.

"Thank you. Sidious' wife did most of the decorating."

"Antiques from Earth?" Marshe asked as he studied a table in the center of the foyer, running his finger along the edge.

"Yes. She's from there and it helped her feel a little more at home."

A frown creased the senator's brow. "Your brother spoils his wife."

"Yes," Stefan drawled, his unease growing. He'd never really trusted the Snorlakin politician. He'd taken the place of one of last year's assassinated senators and the whole situation had left Stefan with a bad taste in his mouth. There was something about his election that hadn't set right with him. But he wasn't sure what. "When you love your wife, like Sidious loves his, you give her whatever will make her happy. I probably have my brother beat when it comes to spoiling his wife."

A tight smile touched Marshe's face. "I've found over the years that developing feelings for a woman can only lead to trouble. I married for an heir, then sent her away. Much easier that way."

"Yes, well. That's just one of the things you and I differ on. Which makes me wonder why you're here."

Marshe turned to stare at him, his brow raised in amusement. "Where are your brothers?" he asked.

"One of them is here," Sidious drawled from the far side of the entry.

Marshe turned to him with a weary smile. "Sidious."

"Lord Marcone," Damon practically growled from his position beside Sidious.

"I see. Lord Marcone." Marshe bowed slightly toward Sidious. As he straightened a wicked grin spread his lips. "Why is it Taron...that is the adopted son's name isn't it...why is it he doesn't go by 'lord' as well? Where is he, by the way?"

"Out," Stefan said as he crossed his arm over his chest, leaning against the back of the main door. "And why he chooses to not use the title is really not any of your business."

"Will he be back soon?"

"What do you need with Taron, Senator Marshe?" Sidious asked.

"I understand he's part of the investigation into the weapons smuggling. I had some questions I wished to ask him."

"Who told you he was part of that investigation?" Stefan pried.

"Well, no one." He shrugged and brushed at a piece of imaginary lint on his blue jacket. "I just assumed."

"You assumed wrong," Damon volunteered.

Marshe sighed dramatically. "I know the three of us have had our problems in the past, but can't we put that behind us and work together toward the conclusion to this situation?"

"You may have your people fooled, Marshe, but not me." Damon strolled to the front door and gently pushed Stefan to the side so he could open the door. "I'm sorry you wasted a trip. Taron isn't here. He's out shopping for furniture for his home that is under construction on Tilarus. Perhaps you can catch up to him on his next trip to the capitol building on Rhenari."

Marshe frowned, his green eyes flashing fire. "I'm part of the Galactic Senate, Marcone. I have a right to know what's happening."

Damon pursed his lips, seemingly not the least bit concerned with Marshe's growing temper. "You are in my home, Marshe. You are asking questions about my son. You have a right to know only what I say you do. Like I said," his voice lowered, his gray eyes darkened to black as he stared hard at the senator, "you may have fooled your people, but I don't trust you. I know you're up to something and I'll find out what, sooner or later. Now," he waved his arm toward the open door, "have a safe trip back."

Stefan turned to Sidious to hide his grin from Marshe.

"Fine." Marshe thrust his chin out in defiance. "I can find information elsewhere."

Damon slammed the door shut just as Marshe strolled through it.

"What the hell was that all about and how did he know there's an investigation?" Sidious demanded.

"Good question," Damon sighed. "I don't like this. Marshe is fishing for information. There's no other reason for him to be here." He turned to Stefan with a worried expression. "I've always thought he was up to something, but I'm not sure about this. If he's involved, he's not in it alone. He's not smart enough for that."

"But who's he working with?" Sidious murmured.

"What about Taron's father, Vingosa?" Damon asked.

"We still haven't been able to find anything on him. If the man in the picture Anthony has is Vingosa, then he's very good at keeping himself hidden," Stefan said as he brushed his hair from his face in aggravation. "It's like looking for a damn ghost."

"You have to find him, preferably before he finds Taron," Damon snarled, then stomped off toward the back of the house, his mouth set in an angry line. "I don't want Vingosa to get another shot at killing Taron."

Stefan sighed. "Tell me again why we sent Taron?"

"Because he's the best?" Sidious replied with a raised eyebrow.

"I'm beginning to think we may have made a mistake. I have a bad feeling about this."

"You and me both," Sidious sighed, then turned to head back to his study.

## Chapter Twelve

Alyssa moaned into Taron's kiss, molding her body tighter to his. The hot sun beat down, heating the top of her head and her shoulders. Taron's flesh scorched the rest of her, fueling her desire and need for his touch.

His large hands moved lower, gripping her ass and lifting her. She wrapped her legs around his waist, grinding her already throbbing pussy along his growing length. Warm, firm lips devoured hers, making her giddy and wild. She held tight to his neck as he walked her toward the small runner parked a few feet away.

"Ever been taken against the side of a ship?" he asked with a grin as he pinned her against the cool outer shell of the ship beneath the shade of one of its wings. The covering was designed to remain cool, even in some of the hottest temperatures.

"No. But I have a feeling I'm about to be."

"Hell yeah, you are," he growled. "You drive me crazy, slave. Do you know that?"

"And yet you risked your life for me," she purred and wiggled her pussy against him as he tugged her shirt down her arms.

He groaned and held her hips still. "Stop squirming, minx, and get those pants off. I want you," he whispered against her lips.

She smiled and lowered her legs, but made no move to remove her pants. Instead, she worked the fastenings loose on his and tugged them down his hips. His massive cock sprang free and she encircled him with her fingers, squeezing just under the engorged purple head. He moaned and jerked his hips toward her. His gaze smoldered as she dropped to her knees and licked her tongue across the tiny slit, wiping away the drop of escaping pre-cum.

"You're killing me, Alyssa."

"I like your taste," she murmured and licked at him again. He closed his eyes and a muscle jerked in his cheek.

"I like the feel of your mouth on me," he growled and dug his fingers into her hair, tugging her closer. "Take me in your mouth, *ni pahti*."

Her lips opened, taking his thick cock into her mouth. She loved the feel of him beneath her tongue. All salty and musky. All man. Her fingers massaged his balls, testing their weight and size within her grasp as her tongue wrapped around his length, teasing him with light strokes.

A noise caught her attention and she opened her eyes, then jumped away from Taron with a start. Devlin stood a few feet away, watching them with an interested gaze, his sapphire eyes almost neon in desire. She swallowed at the sudden wave of lust that screamed through her. She'd never been with two men, but the thought of these

two gorgeous men smothering her with sexual attention sent a shock wave of desire to her belly.

Taron turned as well and smiled at his friend. "Enjoying the show?"

"Immensely. Is she as good as it looks like she is?"

"Better," Taron drawled and gripped the base of his shaft in his fist.

A shiver traveled down Alyssa's spine as she met Devlin's sultry stare. He wanted in on their little party and it made her pussy clench in hunger. What would it be like to be with both of them? She'd bet her life it would be incredible.

"Did you return my cycle in one piece?" Devlin asked with a devilish grin.

Taron snorted. "Nah, man. I wrecked it."

Laughter rumbled through Devlin's chest and Alyssa wondered what Devlin would look like without a shirt. She licked at her lips, then glanced at Taron. Both men watched her expectantly, as though waiting for her to say something. She may never have another opportunity to do this, experience sex with two men, and she made a quick decision to jump at the chance.

Leaning close to Taron, she whispered in his ear, "Have you and Devlin ever shared?"

He raised an eyebrow in interest. "Hey, Dev," Taron drawled with his sexy timbre, "she wants to know if we've ever shared."

"More than once," Devlin replied as he stepped closer and ran his fingers softly up her arm. "Are you saying that's what you want, Alyssa? To be fucked by both of us?"

"It's an intriguing idea," she admitted. "If Taron's willing to share me."

"Just this once," he whispered and pinned Devlin with a hard stare.

Devlin chuckled. "Once is all we need."

Removing his shirt, Taron turned her to stand in front of him, her back to his chest. "Once is all we need for what?" she asked, her voice squeaking with nerves.

"It's all we need to show you an afternoon you'll not soon forget," Taron murmured in her ear, and she shivered in anticipation.

"But not here," Devlin said as he reached into the ship and pulled out a small, square device. "The falls?" he asked, facing Taron.

"The falls are good," Taron answered and the two of them sandwiched her between them.

"Wait. What are we doing?" she asked, her voice rising an octave in her nervousness.

"We're going to transport to the falls," Taron replied.

"I've never done that," she squeaked, not sure she liked the idea of being transported.

"It'll be over in a flash, I promise," Devlin said, then placed a soft kiss on her temple.

Devlin raised the device then hit the small red button in the center with his thumb. She gasped as sharp tingles spread through her body. The area around them blurred and she screamed as the tingles intensified, bordering on pain.

"Relax," Taron whispered in her ear. "It hurts if you tense up."

But it was too late. She was already tense and the tingles only made her muscles contract more. Closing her eyes tightly, she tried to ignore it and leaned back against Taron while her fingers grabbed hold of Devlin's shirt, bunching the soft fabric within her tight grasp.

Finally the tingles faded and she breathed a sigh of relief as her muscles relaxed.

"Open your eyes, Alyssa," Devlin whispered.

She opened them to stare at the oasis around her. It was beautiful. Three cliff faces surrounded them, with water pouring from the top of one face creating a small pool at the bottom. It was a pure crystal blue and so clear she could see all the way to the sandy floor. Trees grew around the edge, creating shade and a welcome reprieve from the hot sun.

"This is amazing," she sighed. "Is this where you raced to?"

"Yes. Other than under the grove of trees a little to the north, this is the only water on the planet. It goes miles below the surface, circles around and comes back out here. But I think we can forgo the geography lesson for now, don't you?" Taron asked as his hands reached around and cupped her breasts, giving them a gentle squeeze.

She moaned and arched her back, pushing her breasts further into his hands. With growing excitement, she watched as Devlin removed his clothes, his sapphire eyes holding hers hostage with their smoldering intensity. Her heart beat a frantic rhythm as sudden nervousness hit her like ice water. Had she lost her mind? But as more of Devlin's incredible body came into view, those nerves were replaced by lust. White-hot lust that had juices pouring from her pussy.

The same black hair that hung around his shoulders sprinkled his chest and her fingers itched to sift through it. His muscles were almost as big as Taron's and she swallowed at the image of being squished between two such massive specimens. Three puckered scars on his chest were the only things disrupting the incredible beauty of his hard body. In the back of her mind, she told herself to ask Taron about those scars later. Right now she didn't think she could speak as Devlin dropped his slacks to the ground, freeing a cock that was almost identical to Taron's.

His shaft was long and thick, standing clear to his navel. The black hair on his chest pointed downward like an upside-down arrow toward his impressive erection. She swallowed at the idea of both of these massive cocks thrusting into her at once. Her nipples beaded and she licked at dry lips, watching mesmerized as Devlin walked toward them.

Taron's hands continued to massage her aching breasts, his lips softly biting at her neck. "If you don't want to do this, Lyssa, just say so and I'll send him away."

"No," she sighed. "I want to try this."



Devlin stopped before her and every nerve under her flesh tingled. Taron lifted a breast, offering it to Devlin, and he leaned down, flicking his tongue across her hardened nipple. She gasped, sagging back against Taron. His arm wrapped protectively around her stomach, holding her upright.

Two sets of hands moved along her skin, setting her on fire so hot she thought she would spontaneously combust. She closed her eyes, relaxing and falling headlong into the wild and erotic moment as they slid her pants down her legs, tossing them toward the edge of the water. Her pussy ached, screamed to be fucked, and she squirmed, spreading her legs in silent invitation for one or both of them to touch her there.

Taron's fingers slid along her slit from behind, making her shudder in pleasure, seeking a more firm touch. Devlin added his from the front, gently circling her sensitive clit. Her mouth dropped open as she gasped for air and Devlin covered her mouth with his, his tongue seeking hers. She moaned into his kiss. His lips were firm against hers, his taste erotic and hot. He kissed differently than Taron. Each man had his own way, his own style, and each made her melt into a wanton puddle.

Her fingers moved to sift through the hair on Devlin's chest. It felt soft and the muscles beneath it hard, creating an interesting contrast for her exploring hands. Her thumbs brushed across his nipples and he shuddered, his lips forming a smile against hers. "Taron's a lucky man," he whispered.

"I have a feeling I'm the lucky one," she sighed as Taron sucked on the sensitive spot behind her ear. Every muscle in her body quivered in lust and need that demanded fulfillment.

Devlin turned her to face Taron so that he could take his turn at kissing her. His lips moved across hers with a possessiveness that stole her breath, making her weak. Devlin's lips burned a trail across her shoulders, his hands moving down her back to smooth over her ass.

Through the fog that was surrounding her brain, she realized they were moving her sideways toward a flat rock. Devlin sat, then they turned her to face him, Taron's palm gently pushing her to her knees. She settled between Devlin's legs and eyed his hard, thick shaft standing straight between his thighs with interest. Her fingers slid up the muscled limbs, brushing at the coarse hair that covered the tan flesh.

The muscles quivered and bunched beneath her touch and she moved closer, wrapping her fingers around his massive shaft. His breath hitched and his beautiful sapphire eyes closed as she slowly worked her hand up and down his long length.

Taron moved to his knees behind her, his hands wickedly spreading her juices along the cleft of her ass. Leaning down, she licked her tongue across the head of Devlin's cock just as Taron slid one thick finger deep into her sopping pussy. She moaned against Devlin and he jerked his hips upward. The tip of his shaft nudged at the back of her throat and she sucked harder, thrusting her hips back against Taron's hand.

"Damn, Alyssa," Devlin groaned. "She keeps this up I'll explode quicker than I want to."

"She's a hot little piece of work," Taron said, then slapped at her ass with his palm.

She gasped at the sharp sting, then resumed sucking Devlin's cock. Taron added another finger to her pussy then pulled them out to circle the tight hole of her anus. She squirmed against him, wanting to feel his fingers thrusting there like they had in her pussy. "You want it here, *ni pahti*?" Taron purred.

Her head bobbed a yes, her lips unwilling to let go of the delectable cock filling her mouth. Taron sank two fingers into her ass and she shoved her hips back, pushing them deeper, the pleasure quickly overriding the slight bite of pain.

"She's fucking killing me," Devlin growled, then shifted, pulling his cock from her mouth.

Burying his hand in her hair, he pulled her up and captured her lips in a kiss that sent her senses reeling. They were driving her crazy, sending her over an edge she never dreamed she'd face. Taron grabbed her arm and tugged her away from Devlin to kiss her himself. She squealed into his mouth, her body so turned on and hot she could hardly breathe.

Slowly, he pushed her back until she landed on Devlin's lap, her back against his chest. She squirmed, rubbing her ass along his length. Devlin groaned and gripped her hips, holding her still. Her breath came out as pants as she watched Taron spread her legs, resting them on either side of Devlin, who then spread his, pushing her thighs out wider. She gasped as air hit her aching mound, her pussy clenching in desperation.

"Fuck her, Devlin. Get your cock wet," Taron murmured as his tongue licked at her swollen clit.

"Yes," she gasped as Devlin lifted her hips and set her down on the head of his shaft. Gently he pushed upward, filling her to the womb, and she screamed, "Oh, yes."

Taron's warm, wicked tongue continued to flick at her clit, licking the juices that coated Devlin's cock and continued to flow from her vagina. She wiggled her hips, forcing Devlin even deeper as her nails dug into his thighs, creating half-moons on his flesh. His groan vibrated against her back as his hand reached around to squeeze her breasts. "Damn, your pussy feels good, Alyssa. So hot and wet."

"Oh, God," she moaned as Taron increased the pressure against her clit. "Taron, please."

"Please what, *ni pahti*?" he asked, his words blowing across her pussy. "Do you want both of us to fuck you?"

"Yes," she groaned.

Devlin lifted her and repositioned the head of his rod at her ass. Gently, he pushed in, his cock slick with her juices. "Oh, fuck, she's tight," he groaned.

Taking a deep breath, she pushed against him, forcing his cock balls-deep into her ass. She threw her head back and bit down on her lower lip. The first initial invasion

was always the worst, but she knew once her body became accustomed, he would feel incredible.

"Look at me, Alyssa," Taron commanded.

She opened her eyes and met his hungry gaze. The amber depths shone bright with possession and love. She smiled, then ran her tongue along her bottom lip. Taron moved closer, positioning the head of his shaft at her drenched labia.

"You are so beautiful," he whispered just as he pushed his cock deep into her pussy.

The invasion startled her and she screamed, her lungs almost bursting from the pressure and filling pleasure of two men buried inside her. It was the most incredible feeling. Gently, they both began to move in unison, their cocks sliding out then pushing in together, their thrusts timed perfectly. Every part of her body screamed in pleasure so intense she thought she'd die.

Taron watched Alyssa's facial expressions as he and Devlin pleased her, looking for any sign of discomfort. What he saw made his heart burst. Her eyes shone with passion, lust—and love. Something he didn't expect to see and it touched him in ways he never imagined. He had no doubt he loved her and wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. But how angry would she be when she found out he wasn't who she thought he was?

"Taron," she sighed. "Oh, God. I'm so close."

"I know, *ni pahti*," he whispered against her lips. "And it feels so good. I can feel your pussy squeeze me. I can feel your throbs milking my cock."

"And your ass, Alyssa," Devlin purred from behind her, "it's so tight and hot. It feels so good."

"Come for us, Alyssa," Taron ordered. "Let it go."

She gasped, her lips dropping open in shock as her body erupted around him. Her pussy spasmed and convulsed around his cock and he groaned, trying to keep his own release at bay.

"Fuck, Taron," Devlin bit out. "I'm gonna come."

With a groan, he pushed upward and Taron followed, timing his release with Devlin's and spilling his seed deep into her pulsing channel. Every time he made love to her he felt as though he was losing a little more of himself. But in reality, he wasn't. He was becoming closer to Alyssa, more a part of her. The woman he'd come to love more than his own life.

"Oh my God," she whispered.

Taron watched her as she laid her head back against Devlin's chest and closed her eyes in rapture. Her face and chest were flushed, her lips swollen from their kisses. She'd never looked more beautiful. His gaze flicked to Devlin, who watched him with humor and just a bit of sadness. Taron was sure he was missing Skylar and remembering the one time they'd shared her.

"Tell her, you ass," Devlin whispered.

Taron turned quickly to Alyssa. Had she heard him? If she had, she wasn't showing any indication. Moving his eyes back to Devlin, he mouthed, "Later".

Devlin's lips lifted into an amused grin. "I think our little vixen could use a bath."

"In the falls?" she asked, her eyes still closed.

"If that's what you want," Taron said then placed a soft kiss on her nose. "While here at the falls, we're your slaves. Whatever you wish is our desire."

"Really?" she purred, her lips spreading into a mischievous grin that sent his heart racing.

"I think we're in trouble," Devlin replied with a chuckle.

## **Chapter Thirteen**

"Well?" Vingosa asked Senator Marshe as he stepped into his Rhenari apartment just below the senate chambers on the one-hundred-and-sixty-fifth floor of the capitol building. "What did you find out?"

Senator Marshe stopped and stared at Vingosa in anger. He slammed the door then moved over to the window to shade the glass. "What the hell are you doing here, Vingosa? You know we can't be seen together."

"Relax, Marshe. No one saw me come in here."

Marshe huffed in agitation. "You can't know that for sure. Do you have any idea how much surveillance they have in this damn place?"

"Yes, Marshe. I know exactly how much is here. What did you find out about the investigation?"

Marshe sighed and moved to the black-and-glass bar that flanked the far wall. Grabbing a bottle of Earth whiskey, he pulled down two glasses. "Nothing. Damon doesn't trust me and won't tell me a damn thing."

"Where's my son, Taron?"

"Out shopping, according to Damon. Furniture for his new home, supposedly."

Vingosa snorted, his deep brown eyes narrowing in humor. "Somehow I doubt that. He's working, but where?"

"I couldn't get any info out of Damon. There's nothing in the senate mainframe, either. If he's undercover somewhere, it's an outside job. For all we know he could be on Veenori now."

Vingosa pinned Marshe with a dangerous stare and Marshe swallowed.

"Maybe, but even if he is he has no idea we're behind this." Vingosa strolled to the couch and sat, stretching one arm along the back.

"Are you sure about that? We were never able to find the information Anthony had on you. He could have sent it to Stefan."

"He sent it to his sister," Vingosa said, sipping at his whiskey.

"Who, may I remind you, we haven't been able to find." Marshe downed half his glass at once, wincing at the burn. "I'd be willing to bet the Marcones have her."

"They don't have her. She's on Veenori."

Marshe slammed the glass down on the counter. "She's where? And why wasn't I told?"

"She was sold as a slinoy to one of the overseers. Apparently she tried to infiltrate the mine and find her brother's killer. Little does she know she's looking in the wrong spot."

A small smile touched Vingosa's lips and Marshe inwardly shuddered at the evil that emanated from his gaze. This was one man he never wanted to be on the bad side of. "You find this amusing?"

"Yes. In a way. As long as she's there, she's no longer our problem. Besides, it'll be easy enough to take care of her when we blow the place."

"Blow the place?" Marshe asked in confusion.

"Yes. It's time to move on. It's too risky to stay there."

"But why blow it up?"

"Too many people there know too much. If we pull out and they no longer get paid, they'll be more inclined to talk. We take care of the problem before that happens. Mines cave in all the time," Vingosa said with a shrug, "easy enough, and no one asks questions."

Marshe swallowed his bile but kept his mouth shut. The last thing he wanted was to be left in the mine with everyone else they wanted to silence. But how long before Vingosa wanted to silence him?

\* \* \* \* \*

Alyssa dove under the water, letting the cool liquid slide over her skin in soothing waves. It felt so good and she smiled as she burst through the surface. She brushed her hair back from her forehead and sighed. "I love it here."

"You look incredible. Like a water sprite," Taron said with a grin.

"I was thinking more along the lines of an Argonian water maid," Devlin added.

Taron nodded. "Oh, yeah."

"What the hell is a water maid?" she asked. Bending her knees, she sank below the water so that it rested just above her breasts. Taron and Devlin sat on the edge of the pool, their legs dangling in the water, their cocks hanging enticingly between their muscular thighs.

"It's similar to an Earth mermaid." Taron nodded toward her chest. "I don't know why you bother. We can still see them."

She glanced down at her breasts, just below the surface of the clear water, then shot them a sexy smile. "Maybe I'm trying to tease you," she purred.

"Maybe you need to be spanked," Taron purred back.

Devlin's lips formed a devilish grin that sent shivers of delight down her spine. "Now that would be a sight I'd love to see."

Taron nudged Devlin's shoulder. "You can help me. She enjoys being spanked, don't you, Lyssa?"

Alyssa's eyes narrowed at the two of them. Memories of the last time Taron spanked her ran through her mind and her nipples hardened in response. Okay. Maybe she did like being spanked. And just maybe the idea of being spanked by both of them at the same time was intriguing. So intriguing her body was already burning with renewed desire.

"The two of you wouldn't dare," she snapped, hoping to goad them into it.

Devlin raised his eyebrow at Taron. "Did she just challenge us?"

"I believe she did," Taron drawled in amusement.

"She's your slinoy." Devlin smirked as he waved his hand toward her. "You going to let her get away with that?"

"Absolutely not."

Alyssa began to back away, fighting the smile that tugged at her lips. This was going to be fun.

Both men jumped into the water and began to slowly stalk her toward the falls. The refreshing spray fell across her shoulders, cooling her exposed skin. With a squeal, she dove under the water and swam toward where the falls emptied into the pool.

A hand tugged at her ankle, pulling her back. She halfheartedly struggled against the hold before giving in completely. She and Taron broke through the surface at the bottom of the falls. She gulped for air, her hands shoving her wet hair from her face.

"You should know by now, slave. You can't challenge me and get away with it."

"What are you going to do, Master?" she purred playfully.

Devlin molded his body to her back, his hard cock pressing into her spine. She gasped and wiggled against him. Devlin groaned, his fingers biting into the flesh of her hip. "I think this woman definitely needs to be spanked."

She grinned and licked at Taron's lips. "Think you're man enough?"

Devlin's chest rumbled with his deep chuckle as Taron's eyes widened in surprise. "I think I've already shown you just how man enough I am, slave. But if you need a reminder, so be it."

With a growl, he bent and lifted her over his shoulder. She squealed, her legs kicking at the air as he trudged from the pool to the soft ground at the edge. His hand landed on her backside with a stinging slap and her whole body trembled in anticipation. The warm Veenori air hit her damp flesh, making her shiver despite the heat.

He set her on the ground then turned her to face Devlin. "On your knees, slave," he ordered.

Instantly she dropped to her knees, which put her eye level with Devlin's impressive erection. She smiled wickedly and reached out to run her finger down his length. His cock jerked and her grin widened. She loved the control she had over them. With a grin of his own, Devlin dropped to his knees as well.

"Bend forward," Taron ordered as his palm gently pushed between her shoulder blades.

She liked this side of him—the bossy, arrogant master, and every muscle in her body tensed with lust. Leaning forward, she rested a palm against the hard ground and with the other she massaged Devlin's firm balls, preparing to take him in her mouth. Taron went to his knees behind her, his hand softly rubbing across her hip. When the first slap hit she flinched but then sighed as a wave of pleasure surged through her veins. Her tongue flicked across the head of Devlin's cock, making him groan just as Taron slapped her other hip, heating her flesh.

Wrapping her hand around the base of Devlin's cock, she sucked him farther into her mouth. Behind her, Taron slid two fingers into her dripping pussy and she shoved her hips back, taking his fingers deeper. He went back and forth between fucking her with his fingers and slapping at her hips, and the combination nearly sent her over the edge.

Never in her life had she imagined she'd enjoy this kind of stuff. Spanking, ménage a trois, bondage. She'd loved it all and wanted to experience it over and over, but only with Taron. With him she knew she could explore her wild side without any shame or reservation.

Taron's fingers spread her juices along her labia, then moved to circle her engorged clit with gentle strokes. She moaned and moved with him, her teeth nipping at Devlin's cock.

"That's so hot, Alyssa," Taron groaned against her back as his lips nibbled along her spine. "Your sweet mouth engulfing Devlin's cock."

She moaned an answer, too far gone to say much of anything else. Devlin's fingers buried themselves in her hair, holding her head in place as he fucked her mouth. Her jaws ached from wrapping around his massive girth, but she didn't want to stop. She wanted to feel his cum spurting into her mouth and down her throat.

Taron rose up behind her and slid the length of his cock along her slit, teasing her. She groaned and moved her hips with him, desperate for the feel of his shaft thrusting into her, filling her to the womb. The fingers of her free hand dug into the dirt and she used the leverage to shove her hips into Taron's.

Finally, with a powerful thrust, he gave her what she wanted and plunged balls-deep into her tight passage. He growled deep in his chest and immediately began to move, pulling almost out then pushing back in hard. His balls slapped against her pussy as he fucked her over and over.

She sucked harder at Devlin's cock the closer she got to climax. Every muscle in her body quaked with the pleasure of her oncoming release. She clenched her muscles, clamping down on Taron's cock. The sound of his primal groan sent her soaring and convulsing as her body erupted into rapture. Just when she thought she couldn't take any more, Taron moved his hand around to toy with her clit.



She let go of Devlin's cock to scream as another, more powerful, orgasm gripped her. Determined to give them the same pleasure, she returned to Devlin's cock and sucked hard as her pussy continued to pulse and contract around Taron's cock. Their moans rose in unison and she inwardly smiled as they both found release at the same time—Taron filling her pussy while Devlin filled her throat. Her tongue lapped at his salty taste, getting every drop that escaped her mouth and slid down his cock.

"Damn," Devlin sighed. "I need to fucking sit down."

Alyssa giggled, pleased with herself and how well she'd done.

"The hell with sitting. I need a nap," Taron said.

Glancing over her shoulder, she grinned at Taron. Very slowly, she pulled away from him then pushed back, taking his still-hard cock deep into her body. She moaned and closed her eyes against the tingling sensation that spread down her legs.

"You're going to kill me, slave," Taron drawled. "Or is that what you had in mind all along? To fuck me to death?"

Alyssa laughed. "Somehow I doubt that anyone could fuck you to death."

"One more swim, then we need to head back," Devlin said, breaking the mood. "I have a bar to run."

"Rhia can take care of it," Taron said as he pulled from Alyssa's body and helped her to stand on shaky legs.

"I know she can, I just don't like for her to."

"Why on earth not?" Alyssa asked in exasperation.

Devlin shrugged, a tiny grin pulling at the corner of his lips. "I know she's capable. But I've been protecting her for so long it's hard to stop. I still see her as the tiny four-year-old who wouldn't let go of my leg all those years ago."

"You did a fabulous job with her. You should find a woman and get married. You would make an excellent father," Alyssa said with a smile, and she meant it. Devlin would make a great dad, there was just something about him that seemed fatherly. Maybe it was because of Rhia, or maybe it was just the way he was.

A sadness fell across Devlin's eyes and her smile faded. Had she said something wrong? She hadn't meant to upset him.

"I think my time for that has passed," Devlin said quietly.

"No it hasn't, Dev," Taron argued. "Skylar wasn't the only one for you. There's someone else out there."

"Maybe," he said as he stood and headed toward the water. "Are you swimming or not?"

Devlin didn't wait for an answer but dove straight under the water. Alyssa watched his lithe body skim along the bottom. "Who's Skylar?" she asked.

"A woman Devlin was deeply in love with. She was killed a few years ago. It happened right in front of him and he couldn't do anything to stop it."

"Oh, God," she sighed. No wonder he'd looked so sad. "I shouldn't have brought up having children and getting married."

"It's okay. He needs a good kick in the butt as far as I'm concerned."

"He must have really loved her."

"He did. And boy did he fight it."

Alyssa grinned and turned to stare at him. "Why did he fight it?"

"Well, Devlin is a big man," he said as he stared at her pointedly.

She shrugged with a frown. "Yeah, so?"

"So...Skylar was very small and delicate. Devlin's done some pretty nasty things in his life and for a long time he thought she was too good for him. As well as too small. But Skylar was pretty determined herself and one night she got Devlin a little buzzed and seduced him."

Laughter bubbled up in her chest. "She what? She got him drunk?"

"Yeah, well. He was almost drunk before she got there. I was in the office with him when she arrived. She sent me packing and made Devlin stay behind. I think Devlin kept drinking, thinking that if he got drunk enough he wouldn't be able to perform and there would be no danger. But it apparently didn't work out that way. According to Skylar, he had no problems performing and she loved every minute of it."

Alyssa covered her mouth with her hand to try and stifle the laughter. "Oh, gosh. I can't imagine Devlin drunk—or smitten, for that matter."

"He was. And when she was killed he tried to save her. That's where the scars came from. He took three rounds in the chest. One nicked his heart, another collapsed his lung. He almost died. It took Rhia demanding he not leave her to bring him back. But when he did, he wasn't whole. Part of his soul died with Skylar."

"That's terrible," Alyssa sighed as her gaze strayed to Devlin at the far side of the pool.

"Come on," Taron said as he pushed her toward the water. "Let's go swimming before he figures out we're talking about him and bites our heads off."

## **Chapter Fourteen**

Taron stood at the side of the docking bay, breaking down guns then burying them among the minerals they'd mined earlier in the week. Off to the side, Morlak spoke softly to the other men. All night he'd been making his way around the room, acting the lord of the manor. Taron clenched his fist to keep from running over there and knocking the crap out of him.

He had to keep reminding himself that he needed to stay on Morlak's good side. He needed to know who was in charge, and the sooner the better. He wanted out of here.

As he worked, his mind wandered to Alyssa. She'd fallen asleep when they'd returned, as soon as her head hit the pillow. It was no wonder. He and Devlin had worked her pretty hard. Taron grinned as he remembered how well she'd responded to them. How beautiful she'd looked pleasing them.

"You look awfully pleased with yourself."

Taron stood straight and stared at Morlak with a narrowed gaze. He needed to keep his mind on his work. Morlak should have never been able to sneak up on him like that. "Just thinking about all the money I'm going to make."

Morlak chuckled. "I have some good news. You're finally going to meet the man in charge."

The gun in Taron's hand almost fell to the floor. Could he be this lucky? He raised an eyebrow. "Really?"

"Yes. He has special instructions for us and he specifically requested just you and I be here."

Taron raised an eyebrow. "Why just you and I?"

"Normally it's just me and I pass on the information, but I told them you would be taking over. I've had enough of mine life."

A frown creased Taron's brow. Apparently Morlak hadn't been doing this long enough to know you didn't just walk away. He was now a liability to them. He had a bad feeling in the pit of his stomach over this one.

"Think you can handle being in charge, Karmase?" Morlak asked, his lips twitching in a slight grin.

Taron snorted, making Morlak laugh. "I thought so. Be here bright and early. They like to meet while everyone is preoccupied with the running of the mine."

"I'll be here."

*Hell yeah, I'll be here, and with any luck I'll finally find out who's behind this.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Slipping into his room as quietly as possible, Taron threw his shirt on the back of the chair and strolled softly into the bedroom. Alyssa was still asleep, her hair fanning out on the pillow beneath her. The blankets had been kicked free of her legs and he smiled, admiring the firm, tan thighs. She got hot at night and almost always kicked the covers free.

He quickly removed the rest of his clothes and climbed into bed beside her. She instinctively moved closer and snuggled next to him. "You're back," she whispered sleepily.

"Yes. Come here, *ni pahti*," he murmured and moved his arm so she could lay her head on his chest.

"I never got to tell you earlier what I wanted to tell you," she sighed as she shifted, trying to find a comfortable position.

"What did you want to tell me?" He sifted his fingers through her soft hair, then brought a strand to his nose, inhaling her flowery scent.

"I wanted to tell you why I was here."

"I know why you are here. You want to find your brother's killer."

Alyssa sat up with a start, her eyes wide in shock. "What? How did you know that?"

Sitting up, Taron placed a finger over her lips. "I know a lot of things. But we can't talk about this here. Tomorrow we'll go to Devlin's and I'll tell you everything. Okay?"

She eyed him warily before nodding her head.

"Good. Now let's lie back down and get some sleep."

"I can't sleep now," she sighed in exasperation as Taron fell to his back on the mattress.

He chuckled then grabbed her hand, pulling her down onto his chest. "Fine. Then instead of sleeping, I can make use of you in other ways."

Quick as a shot he rolled her to her back, pinning her beneath him. She squealed then glared up at him, her eyes spitting fire. "You're awfully presumptuous."

"No, I just know I'll eventually get what I want." He wiggled his eyebrows and the corner of her lips twitched, fighting a grin.

"And what might that be?"

He raised his eyebrow and pressed his hardening cock into her thigh. "Do you really need to ask?"

"Yes. And I really need you to tell me."

He smiled wickedly. "All right. I want your legs wrapped around my waist. I want your lips begging me to fuck you. I want you, Alyssa."

"Then what are you waiting for?" she murmured and pulled his lips down to hers.

\* \* \* \* \*

With a tired sigh, Stefan stared at his cup of coffee. The house was quiet, everyone asleep for the night, but sleep eluded him. He was too worried about his brother.

"I see you can't sleep either."

Glancing up, he noticed his father standing in the doorway of the kitchen. Damon looked just as haggard as Stefan felt. His shirt lay open, showing off a chest that was still as muscular as it had been thirty years ago, a waist that was just a trim. Even his hair was still long and thick. His father had aged well and Stefan hoped he would be just as lucky.

"No," Stefan sighed. "Want to join me for coffee?"

"Might as well. I'm not going to sleep anyway. I can't stop thinking about Marshe and Vingosa. We've got to find a way to connect them to all this. Otherwise we have nothing."

"I agree."

Damon sat down at the small table, his cup clanging against the tile as he set it before him. Sidious strolled through the door a second later. He stopped and stared at them in surprise, then snorted. "We're pathetic."

"Yeah and if we don't get some sleep we'll be useless," Stefan sighed.

Sidious leaned against the doorframe and crossed his arms over his chest. "Somehow I don't think coffee is going to help that situation."

"What would you suggest then, brother?" Stefan asked in amusement.

"Lots of strong alcohol and a good rousing fuck."

Damon choked on his coffee, making Stefan smile. "Well that's out for me. This pregnancy is wearing Krista out."

"Don't look to me to pick up the slack," Sidious replied dryly.

"I wouldn't touch your ass with a dirty stick, much less my cock," Stefan threw back, making Damon squeeze his temples, his shoulders shaking in silent laughter.

"Find something funny, Dad?" Stefan asked.

Damon raised his face and shook his head, his eyes still crinkling in amusement. "I was actually thinking about Sidious' suggestion of a rousing fuck. It's been a couple of days since—"

"Dad," Stefan grimaced and held up his hand. "Please spare me."

"What? You don't think your mother and I have sex?"

"You and Mom have sex?" Sidious gasped playfully.

Damon snorted. "Like you haven't walked in on us more than once."

"Oh, yeah. I remember. The image gave me nightmares for months."

Stefan chuckled and Damon narrowed his eyes at Sidious. "Very funny. You know your mother was right. The two of you are rotten."

"No man wants to think about his father doing to his mother what I do to... Well, you get the idea." Stefan raised his cup to take a sip of coffee.

"What's your problem? If your mother and I didn't have sex, then where did we get you?"

"I prefer to believe I was left on your doorstep by fairies," Stefan replied dryly, making Sidious chuckle.

"Immaculate conception," Sidious snickered. "I am, after all, the know-all, see-all of this family."

Stefan snorted. "You're the one that's most full of shit."

Damon shook his head, his eyes rolling toward the ceiling in amusement. "The two of you will never change."

A shrill beep filled the kitchen and Stefan glanced down at his pocket. "I forgot it was in there," he mumbled as he reached in to pull out his communicator. On the screen was a message to check his computer. "Looks like we may have some information."

"On what?" Sidious asked as he set his cup down on the table, his expression one of interest and dread.

"I'm not sure yet. It just says to check the computer."

"Well, then." Damon's chair legs scraped across the tile as he stood. "Let's check the computer."

The three of them made their way down the stretch of hall toward Sidious' study. Stefan immediately took the seat behind the desk, using his brother's computer to link to his own on Tilarus. It took the computer a few seconds to interface and he tapped his finger on the edge of the desk in impatience.

"Finally," he mumbled the second his password prompt showed up on the screen. Entering the six-letter code, he watched as the file downloaded.

"What is it, Stefan?" Damon asked as he stopped in his pacing.

Stefan frowned at the file as it opened. "It's from the men we had following Marshe."

Using a special lens, the photographers had been able to capture the images even through the tinting of the apartment glass. It was very clear who the two men in the apartment were and his heart lodged in his throat. It was exactly as they'd feared. Marsh was working with Vingosa, and they were pretty sure Vingosa was behind the arms deal.

Sidious came around behind Stefan. With one hand on the back of the chair, he leaned over to get closer. "Son of a bitch," he mumbled. "Is that who I think it is?"

"Looks like it." Stefan adjusted the picture, trying to zoom in on the man sitting down.

"Can we adjust the audio? Maybe we can hear what they're saying."

Stefan opened the audio portion and adjusted the sound, filtering out background and ship noise from outside. The man's voices came through loud and clear.

*"She was sold as a slinoy to one of the overseers. Apparently, she tried to infiltrate the mine and find her brother's killer. Little does she know she's looking in the wrong spot."*

*"You find this amusing?"*

*"Yes. In a way," Vingosa replied. "As long as she's there, she's no longer our problem. Besides, it'll be easy enough to take care of her when we blow the place."*

*"Blow the place?" Marshe asked.*

*"Yes. It's time to move on. It's too risky to stay there."*

*"But why blow it up?"*

*"Too many people there know too much. If we pull out and they no longer get paid, they'll be more inclined to talk. We take care of the problem before that happens. Mines cave in all the time," Vingosa said with a shrug, "easy enough, and no one asks questions."*

*"This isn't good," Stefan sighed.*

*"If Vingosa sees Taron, he's a dead man. Get him the hell out of there, Stefan. Now!" Damon demanded in anger. "We have what we need. He doesn't need to be there anymore."*

*"I'll go," Sidious volunteered. "You need to stay here with Krista."*

*"What about the bomb?" Stefan asked.*

*"Surely between Devlin and I one of us can figure out how to diffuse it."*

*"It's been a long time since you've worked with bombs, Sidious. Are you sure about this?" Stefan asked, worry for his brother choking him.*

*"What choice do we have?"*

Damon ran his hand through his hair, brushing it back from his forehead. "I'm going with you. Taron isn't going to take this well."

"Get your things together," Sidious said to his father as he headed out of the study as well. "Taron left the *Vultair* in orbit, we'll take her."

"You might want to take Anthony also. He'll want to be there for his sister."

Damon nodded and turned to leave. Stefan remained in the office, opening a channel to Devlin. He needed to let him know Sidious was on the way. At least now they had what they needed and could make arrangements to have Marshe and Vingosa picked up. The only other obstacle was getting everyone in the mines out alive.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alyssa followed Rhia into Devlin's office early the next morning. She was anxious to know what Taron wanted to tell her but he'd had to stay at the mine that morning and finish up some things. He'd made her leave with Rhia, promising to meet her back at the bar shortly.

Ever since the night before, a feeling of dread had settled over her, although why she wasn't sure. Maybe it had been Taron's comment. Or maybe it was something else.

Coming through the door, she stopped dead in her tracks at the sight of the two tall, blond men standing beside Devlin's desk. They were gorgeous, and practically identical. Each had long platinum hair, with shoulders to die for and eyes the color of storm clouds. Both had trim waists and firm thighs and both stood with a commanding air that screamed authority.

On closer inspection, one was definitely older than the other, by a good thirty years. Were they father and son? They certainly looked enough alike.

Turning to the younger, she took a closer look. She knew him. "You're Lord Sidious Marcone. You were a captain in the militia that tried to invade Earth several years ago," she said and pointed at Sidious. "You're the man who fed the president all that secret information and the informant I've heard so much about."

A small grin tugged at his lips. "Guilty as charged." He nodded toward the older man. "This is my father, Damon."

She smiled at the older man as he bowed in her direction, his eyes sparkling with mischief. "It's good to see you're well, Alyssa. And Rhia," Damon stepped forward and kissed the grinning redhead on the cheek, "you look as gorgeous as ever. When are you going to take us up on our offer and move to Tilarus?"

"When you become available," she teased, making Damon laugh.

"I don't think that will happen anytime soon."

"How is Kaylar?" Rhia asked.

"She's well and waiting impatiently for Stefan's wife to finally have her twins."

*Twins?* Alyssa glanced at Damon, then back to Sidious.

"Alyssa, where's Taron? We thought he would be with you." Damon asked, suddenly turning serious.

"He was supposed to be, but he contacted Rhia at the last minute to come and get me. He had some things he needed to take care of before he came here," Alyssa said.

"We need to find him," Sidious murmured to Devlin.

Devlin nodded, then opened the screen to his computer. "Easy enough with the chip implant."

*Chip implant?* "Wait. What's going on?" Alyssa demanded. "What do you want with Taron?"

"It's a long story but we need to talk to him," Damon said.

"You're the family he spoke of." Her heart hammered in her chest as realization dawned. Taron had said his brother's wife was about to have twins. Surely not. Why would the son of a Tilarian count, even the adopted son, work at a mine? "Taron isn't who he says he is, is he?"

"No," Rhia whispered as she placed her hand on Alyssa's arm for support.



Alyssa didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He'd lied to her, but then she'd lied to him as well. Or not really lied, but only omitted stuff. But this... Taron was the son of a Tilarian monarch? What was he doing here? None of it made any sense.

With a shake of her head, she backed out of the room. "Alyssa," Rhia called out, but Alyssa held up her hand.

"I just need to be alone, please."

Without a backward glance, she left, heading to the roof for some air and alone time to think. As she walked out the bright sunlight made her squint and the heat scorched the top of her head and shoulders, but she ignored it. She needed the time alone to get her thoughts in order and try to make some sense of it all.

Shading her eyes, she stared toward the horizon and the dark mountains in the distance. What now? Who was Taron really and had she been a complete fool all this time? He was the youngest son of a count, which meant he carried the title of lord, just like Sidious. That alone made him so far out of her league that it wasn't even funny.

What a sick turn of events. Thank God she'd never told him she loved him. A warm blast blew her hair and she shielded her face against the hot air. A small speeder hovered just off the edge of the roof and she scowled at the pilot as he turned sideways to face her. She wasn't in the mood for another horny jerk thinking he could have his way with her. The man grinned nastily, sending a shiver of fear down her spine.

He was bald, just like Taron, and broad in the shoulders, with tanned skin that had seen years of sunlight. She couldn't tell his height for he was sitting but she would bet he was tall. His gaze raked over her and she cringed in distaste. There was something about him, something familiar about his eyes...

"So you're Alyssa," he purred in the same Norgosen accent Taron used. "You've been a real bitch to track down."

She frowned and began to back away from the edge and the hovering craft. "Excuse me?" The more she looked at him, the more she realized why he seemed familiar.

"Where do you think you're going?" he asked as he raised a small gun and pointed it directly at her.

She gasped, glancing around for somewhere to hide. Could she make a run for it? Just as she turned, a sharp prick hit her upper arm. She raised her hand to pull the dart free, then wobbled as a strong wave of dizziness overtook her and she fell to the tile roof in an unconscious heap.

\* \* \* \* \*

Vingosa loaded the woman onto the speeder and, with a final glance to the roof, headed off in the direction of his ship, parked just outside the city. As they flew away, he studied her. Her black hair shielded her face, but it did nothing to hide the sexy body beneath the slave outfit.

"My son has good taste in women," he murmured as he brushed a stray lock from her brow. "It's a shame he isn't going to get any more time with you."

All the money he'd spent on informants had finally paid off. The day before he'd found out Taron's whereabouts. Right here on Veenori. And the topper had been finding out Taron had been the one to buy Alyssa. She'd come in handy later this morning when he confronted him.

*Won't Taron be in for a surprise,* he thought, his lips spreading into a nasty grin.

He couldn't wait to see the look on his face. It was time he finally got his annoying son off his back.

\* \* \* \* \*

Taron strolled into the deserted docking bay, his gaze seeking out Morlak. He found him quickly, his beady eyes searching the horizon through the open bay door. Taron frowned as a sense of unease settled on his shoulders.

The loud sound of thrusters being thrown into reverse vibrated through the cavern. Taron watched a small ship fly into the bay then frowned at the markings on the side that indicated it was a diplomat's ship. Well, they'd thought it was someone in the senate. Looks like they were right. But who was it? And would they recognize him?

The side door opened with a swoosh and four men stepped out, each carrying a gun. Taron's features drew up into a scowl as he recognized the tall man making his way down the gangplank behind the four armed men.

Senator Marshe.

The weakling senator wasn't smart enough for this, there had to be others involved, and Taron's gaze continually strayed to the ship, searching for anyone else he might recognize. Slowly, he moved to the shadows, hoping Marshe wouldn't recognize him right away. At least until he had a strategy. Unfortunately, he was outnumbered four to one. He doubted he'd get any help from Morlak. If anything, Morlak would probably go against him.

His thumb rubbed across the back of his hand, feeling the hard implant just beneath the surface. Was there a way he could contact Devlin with the chip? Without hurting himself, of course?

"Hiding, Taron Karmase?" Marshe stepped past the four armed men and sneered in his direction. *Damn.* "Or should I say, Taron Sinnar?"

Taron shrugged. "Interesting seeing you here, Marshe. I know you're not smart enough to put something like this together. Who are you working for?"

"Taron Sinnar?" Morlak croaked. "I swear, Marshe, I had no idea."

Marshe snorted but Taron's gaze strayed to the man stepping from the ship and the woman he was shoving before him. *Oh God. Alyssa.* His heart contracted in his chest at the sight of her slightly disoriented steps, the long silver blade at her throat. Her

frightened eyes met his and his gut clenched. How the hell was he going to get her out of this?

“Well, well, well,” the man hiding behind Alyssa sneered. “If it isn’t my son, the adopted lord of Tilarus.”

## **Chapter Fifteen**

Alyssa gasped, both at what the man had said as well as at the anguish and gut-wrenching fury contorting Taron's face.

"Vingosa," Taron growled through clenched teeth. "Why don't you stop being a coward and step out from behind the woman so I can wring your neck? I should have known you were fucking behind all this."

Vingosa snorted. "Is that any way to talk to your father?"

"You're not my father!" Taron snapped, the fury in his voice making Alyssa flinch. "You haven't been my father since the day you fucking walked out on us."

"You're his spitting image," Morlak whispered.

Taron glared at him and Morlak backed away, moving to stand flush with the rock wall behind him, his scaly face red in fear and anger.

"Let her go, Vingosa. This is between you and me. She has nothing to do with this," Taron demanded.

"She can identify me, Taron. I'm not a fool. I'm the reason she came here. I think it's only fitting she die by my hand, don't you? Just like her brother."

"Anthony isn't dead, Vingosa. So even if you kill us, there's still a witness who can put you away."

Alyssa gasped, her heart racing in her chest. Anthony was still alive? Was he telling the truth or was he just goading Vingosa?

"You're lying," Vingosa snarled.

"Am I?" Taron sneered. "You sure about that?"

Taron took a step forward and the tip of the steel blade bit into the flesh of her neck. She gasped at the sharp pain then held her breath, waiting to see what would happen. Taron paled, his eyes glued to the trail of warm blood that slid down her neck.

"No closer, Taron. Or I swear I'll slit her throat."

"What do you want?" Taron sneered, his hands fisting at his sides.

"Anthony's whereabouts."

"No," Alyssa whispered. "Taron, no."

"Why should I give you anything? We're dead anyway." Taron crossed his arms over his chest and glared menacingly at Vingosa.

"It will mean the difference between a slow death or a quick one."

"Fuck you," Taron snarled.

"Suit yourself." Vingosa shrugged and shoved Alyssa toward Taron.

She landed against his chest with an *oof*, then almost lost her balance as Taron grabbed her shoulders and forced her to the side. With a growl, he lunged toward Vingosa, but his father raised a gun and, in a move that shocked Alyssa, shot Taron just under the ribs.

"No," she screamed and ran toward him, catching him against her chest as he was thrown backward with a grunt.

She fell to the floor, Taron's heavy weight resting against her. Blood poured from his wound as she tried to maneuver from under him. He groaned and tried to sit up, but Alyssa shoved him back down and pressed her palm against the seeping wound.

"How could you?" she screamed. "He's your son."

"I'll find you, Vingosa. I swear it," Taron sneered angrily.

Vingosa laughed evilly and Alyssa stared at him in shock. *He's insane.*

"You won't make it out of here alive, *son*."

"What about me?" Morlak asked.

"What about you?" Vingosa sneered.

"I've been loyal to you. I've done everything you asked, and now you're just going to kill me?"

Vingosa pursed his lips in thought. "Looks that way, doesn't it?"

Pain sliced through Taron's stomach and lungs as he tried to stay conscious. His chip should notify Devlin that he'd been hurt and where he was, but how long would it take them to find him? He didn't have much time. His gaze strayed to a pale and angry Morlak.

"What the hell did you expect from a man who would shoot his own son, Morlak?" Taron asked dryly.

"My own son has been trying to put me away," Vingosa yelled. "Set the bombs. Let's rid ourselves of this mess then get the hell out of here."

Through blurred vision, Taron watched as two men set the bombs into the rock wall while Vingosa and Marshe boarded the ship. Morlak went down on his knees next to him. "Those bombs will wipe out every inch of the mine. Nothing will survive," he murmured as the men boarded Vingosa's ship.

"Can you tell what kind they are?" Taron asked weakly. "Maybe I can talk you through defusing them."

Morlak shook his head, his eyes straying sadly toward the massive hole in Taron's stomach then back to his gaze. His look said it all. They didn't have time for that. His wound would kill him long before they were finished with the bombs.

In silence they watched as Vingosa's ship left the cargo bay. Once outside, it turned and fired at the rock over the outside opening, causing a cave-in. The ground shook and Alyssa squealed and moved her body to protect Taron's as rock rained down on them, covering them in dust. The exit was now blocked by large boulders and debris.

"Son of a bitch," Morlak growled as he stared at the damage, waving his hands to dispel the dust.

Taron tried to sit up again, but Alyssa pushed him back down. "Alyssa, damn it. Stop," he growled around the sharp pain. He was too weak to fight her. Too far gone.

"No. You have to stay there. The more you move around, the more blood you'll lose."

"I'm a dead man anyway, *ni pahti*. I've got to try and defuse those bombs."

Her eyes widened in fear and sadness as she shook her head. "Tell me how."

He smiled slightly and touched the side of her face with his hand. His blood-soaked fingers left black blotches on her cheeks and he pulled his hand away, staring at it with a frown.

"Please tell me you're different than people from Earth and that black blood on your hand is normal and you're not bleeding from your liver," she whispered, her voice shaking with unshed tears.

He squeezed his eyes closed and blew out a harsh, gurgling breath. No. Black blood meant he'd been hit in the liver. He tried to clear the fog, the ever-growing fatigue. He didn't know how much time they had left. "Listen to me, Lyssa. You've got to get out of here. Go with Morlak and warn the others."

She shook her head, tears streaming down her face. "No. I won't leave you."

Breathing had become difficult and a coldness had seeped into his bones. He was so tired, so weak. He raised a shaking finger and pointed toward the rock wall. He didn't have the strength to defuse anything. Their only chance was to make a run for it. "There's a secret passage just behind you in the rock. You and Morlak go through that passage and get to the other side as quick as you can. Understand?"

"No," she snapped stubbornly, her head shaking firmly.

"Alyssa, please," Taron sighed.

"No. Damn it, Taron. I'm not leaving without you. So just suck it up and help me get you standing."

Taron shook his head, his eyes drifting closed. Morlak grabbed her hand, holding it still over his chest and slowly beating heart. "Feel his heart, Alyssa. He wouldn't survive it."

She choked on a sob and slapped at his chest. "Damn you, Taron. How could you do this to me?"

"Do what, *ni pahti*?"

"Make me fall in love with you, then leave me," she cried.

His lips spread into a slow smile and warmth spread through his chest. He could die a happy man. Alyssa loved him. "I love you, Alyssa," he whispered and lifted her fingers to his lips to kiss them. Her hands were so warm in comparison to his.

She hiccupped and leaned down to place a soft kiss on his lips. She smelled of jerrywine and he smiled. Turning his gaze, he narrowed his eyes at Morlak. He didn't have a choice. He had to trust him. "Get her out of here, Morlak. Go to Devlin and testify against Vingosa. Make him pay for this."

Morlak nodded. "You can be sure of that, Taron. I'll see the *vigic* rot in hell. Mark my words. The son of a bitch isn't going to double-cross me and get away with it."

Taron's eyes slipped closed and he felt his body slip away and fall toward a deep sleep. "I'll always be with you, Lyssa," he sighed.

Alyssa watched the slow rise and fall of his chest dwindle to practically nothing and her heart felt as though it had been ripped from her chest. In just a few short weeks, he'd become her everything and now she'd lost him. Her shoulders shook with sobs as he slowly slipped away from her.

"We must go, Alyssa," Morlak pleaded as he tugged at her elbow, trying to force her to stand, but she fought against him. She couldn't leave Taron.

A loud rumble from outside made her jump, and she jerked her head up to look toward the now closed-off exit. Another rumble shook the cavern and she braced her hand against the ground, trying to steady herself. Her gaze flicked to Morlak's in fear. "Now what?"

He shook his head. "It sounds like a ship."

"Are they coming back?"

A loud explosion made her scream and she ducked her head against Taron's chest as debris and rock flew around them. Pebbles nicked her shoulders, making her flinch as the sharp shards pierced her flesh. Once the dust had settled, she and Morlak turned to stare at the small ship that hovered just a few feet above the ground before settling amidst the debris.

"Who the hell is that?" Morlak asked. "I don't recognize the ship. Do you?"

She shook her head with a frown, but let out a sigh of relief the second she saw Devlin as he stepped from the ship. "Devlin," she screamed and waved her hand through the dust. "We're here. Hurry, Taron's hurt."

Devlin ran toward her, Damon and Sidious directly behind him, their faces drawn with worry. "What happened?" Devlin demanded as he dropped to his knees next to them.

"He shot him."

"Who shot him?" Sidious demanded.

"His father, Vingosa," she whispered in anguish. "Please don't let him die."

"Sidious?" Damon asked as he knelt beside him. Sidious ran a medi-scanner slowly up Taron's body, his eyes studying the screen carefully.

"It's bad," Sidious whispered.

"What about the bombs?" Morlak asked while wringing his hands. "We don't know how much time is left."

"Where are they?" Sidious snapped.

Morlak raised his hand and pointed toward the bombs that had been embedded in the rock behind them. "There."

"*Shetah*," Sidious growled. "Dad, get Taron to the ship and put him in stasis while Devlin and I try to defuse these things." He stood and glanced toward Morlak. "Are these it?"

"That I know of," Morlak said with a nod.

Damon placed his hand on Taron's chest then glanced up at Alyssa. "Put your hand on his chest as well, sweetheart."

She swallowed a bit of fear and placed a shaking hand over Damon's. "Have you ever transported before?" he asked.

She nodded. "Once."

He returned her nod and hit the red button on his transport device. She tried to relax but pain laced through her anyway, making her moan. Damon's hand twisted to squeeze hers in support and her heart warmed toward the older man.

Once the transport was finished Damon lifted Taron in his arms easily—for a man of his age—and laid him on the metal table in the center of the brightly lit room. She couldn't take her gaze off Taron long enough to study her surroundings. Maybe once he was better. "Can they help him?" she asked.

Damon glanced at her through his lashes as he shot medicine into Taron's neck with an injector gun. "We're going to do everything we can, Alyssa. Right now I'm putting him in stasis. Sidious was trained as a medic when he was in the militia. When he returns from the caves he'll work on him."

"Stasis?" she asked, her hand softly rubbing the top of Taron's head, wiping away the black dust that had settled on his skin. "You're freezing his body?"

"In a way. He's in a coma. His body functions have all but ceased temporarily. It'll help keep him alive a little while longer, but we can't keep him in stasis for long. There's a time limit."

"What's the time limit?"

"Two hours."

Alyssa swallowed her sob, praying they could fix him before time ran out and he died.

"Lyssa?"

The whispered name coming from behind her made her freeze, her heart racing in her chest. Was she hearing things? Slowly, she turned and stared in shock at Anthony. Taron had said he was still alive, but she hadn't expected to see him standing in front of her. Shaking hands flew to her mouth and covered the choked sob that left her throat.

"Anthony?" she sobbed, then ran toward him, throwing herself into her older brother's outstretched arms. "Oh, God. You're really alive. How did it happen?"



"We'll talk about that later," he whispered as his arms tightened around her back.

The sobs broke in earnest and she cried against his shoulder. "I can't lose him, Tony. I just can't. I love him so much."

"I know," he whispered. "I know."

Anthony led her from the room and down the hall to another one. It had a large table with a massive row of windows that overlooked the planet below them. It was beige in color, like sand, and she knew without even having to ask it was Veenori.

Sitting down at the table, she stared blankly at the coffee Anthony set before her. She just wasn't interested. She wouldn't be until she heard how Taron was.

"Are you okay, Sis?"

She glanced up at her older brother and gave him a halfhearted smile. He appeared older than the last time she'd seen him, even his hair had a little more gray. There was a long, nasty scar across his throat that made her flinch. Had Vingosa tried to slit his throat? Had he done to her brother what he'd threatened to do to her? She reached out and traced it with the tip of her finger. "Vingosa did this?" she whispered.

"Yes," he said with a nod.

"How did you survive?"

"I was lucky. Stefan found me before I lost all of my blood. He apparently didn't go deep enough."

She noticed the scratchy sound to his normally deep voice and realized the cut had apparently gone deep enough to damage his vocal cords slightly. Anthony's gaze strayed to the shallow cut that ran across her neck. Standing, he walked to the replicator and asked for a damp cloth. Once it appeared, he returned to her side and wiped at her neck, removing the dried blood.

"Who did this to you?" he asked, a muscle in his cheek jerking.

"Vingosa. He's Taron's father," she whispered, her eyes once again filling with tears. "How could he shoot his own son, Anthony? What kind of man is he?"

Anthony sighed and tossed the cloth back to the table. "I don't know, Alyssa."

"You knew?"

"Yeah. Damon and Sidious told me on the way here. I know that Vingosa didn't raise Taron, but are you sure about him, Alyssa?" His worried gaze met hers. "How do you know Taron won't turn out just like him?"

She frowned. "He's not like him, Tony. Taron's a good man. He's kind and gentle and—"

"And he took advantage of his position as your slinoy master," Anthony snarled. "Didn't he?"

"He didn't do anything I didn't want him to do," she snapped.

Anthony stood and strolled to the window, his gaze staring thoughtfully toward the stars. For several minutes he didn't say anything, just stared ahead. She knew her

brother well enough to know he needed time, so she wouldn't push him. He'd say something when he was ready.

Finally, when she was about to scream and rail at the too-silent room, he spoke. "I trust your judgment, Alyssa. If you love him he can't be all that bad, I suppose."

He threw her a grin over his shoulder and she smiled back at him, her shoulders sagging in relief. She would have hated it if Anthony really and truly disliked Taron. But if he didn't survive it was all a moot point anyway. Just thinking about living her life without him made tears well up in her eyes.

The door opened, allowing Damon inside, and he dropped into a chair next to Alyssa. His lips were clenched tight, his eyes narrowed and dark in fury. "I had to get out for a while. That shot really messed him up inside," he sighed. "Devlin said he'd come get us when they're done. What happened on the surface, Alyssa? How did Taron get shot and what the hell were you doing there?"

Alyssa recounted the events as best she could. When finished with her story, she glanced questioningly at Damon. "Did they defuse the bombs?"

"Yes and Morlak is onboard. Devlin has him locked in one of the rooms. He'll come in handy when we find Vingosa."

"If we find him," Anthony sighed.

"Not if...when," Damon said with a slight grin. "I didn't raise stupid children. The men Stefan hired to follow Senator Marshe put tracking devices on all his ships, as well as the one they knew to be Vingosa's. We're tracking them as we speak. It's only a matter of time before we find them. They think they've won. They'll be lax for a while." He raised his hands and rubbed at his forehead. "I just wish we'd gotten to Veenori a little sooner."

She placed her hand on his arm and gave him a reassuring squeeze. "He'll make it, I know he will."

Damon put his hand over hers and one corner of his mouth lifted in a wry smile.

With a sigh, he spoke. "I hate to ask this now, but where's the evidence your brother sent you?"

"Do you think you'll need it?"

"Yes. With what Anthony sent you and everything we have, it should be enough to keep Vingosa locked away for a very long time."

She nodded. "Good. It's in a safety deposit box on Earth."

"Once all this is over, we'll get it," Damon said.

"You're more than welcome to it. I would say I wish I'd never seen the stuff, but if I hadn't..." She turned to her brother with a trembling grin. "I wouldn't have met Taron."

Damon squeezed her hand and the warmth of his touch seeped into her cold fingers, and she rested her head on his broad shoulder. The three of them waited silently for news of Taron.

## Chapter Sixteen

The door opened with another *whoosh* and they all turned to stare at a haggard Sidious. Damon stood, his worried gaze locked onto Sidious. "Well?" he demanded.

Sidious leaned against the side of the door. "He should be fine. He's still under so the lovar serum I gave him can work quicker."

"Good," Damon said with a sigh of relief.

Alyssa let out a breath she hadn't realized she was holding and almost sank to the floor. He would be all right. With a smile, she placed her hand over her heart and shifted to gaze at Anthony, behind her. His hand had rested on her shoulder, giving her his silent support, from the moment Sidious had walked into the room.

"What's lovar serum?" Alyssa asked.

"It's a medicine that will help his injuries heal and make his blood multiply three times faster than normal. He lost a lot of it," Sidious replied.

"Can I see him?"

"Yes. He's down the hall, third door on the left."

"Thanks," she whispered and placed her hand on his arm as she walked by.

Sidious turned back to his father and didn't miss the murderous rage in his eyes.

"I want Vingosa," Damon snarled.

"Not as much as I do. Devlin is communicating with the men we have following him. He's on Korlatis."

Damon's eyebrow rose. "That's on the Eastern Rim. How long will it take us to get there?"

Sidious sighed and pushed away from the frame. "Even with the use of the gate, it will take us about twenty hours, give or take."

"Then let's get going." Damon left the room and headed toward the bridge at a brisk pace. "Tell Devlin to have the men notify us if he leaves. I don't want that son of a bitch getting away this time."

\* \* \* \* \*

Taron opened his eyes slowly and tried to focus his gaze on the dark room. Shapes were fuzzy and he blinked twice, trying to clear his vision. *Where am I?* he wondered with a frown. *Whatever the hell I drank last night sure did a number on me.*

His mouth was parched and he licked his lips with a grimace before trying to sit up. The second he did he regretted it as pain sliced through his abdomen. He fell back to the bed with a growl as images ran through his mind of the last twenty-four hours.

He'd been shot, by his own father of all people. He shouldn't be surprised. Vingosa had made it clear since as far back as he could remember that he'd never wanted a child.

With a sigh, he took another look around the room. His vision was getting better and he was able to make out a couple of pieces around him. The antique sailing ship on the dresser caught his eye and he realized immediately where he was. He was on the *Vultair*, in his own quarters.

*How the hell did I get here?*

It had to have been Devlin, but was Alyssa okay as well? Bracing himself, he tried one more time to sit up. Pain again sliced through his stomach and he gritted his teeth, determined to not lie in the bed another minute. He had to find out where Alyssa was.

Finally upright, he slung his legs over the side and took a deep breath. His hand shook slightly as he inspected the light pink scar across his midsection. It was healing quickly, but he knew from experience the pain would remain for at least a day longer.

"What are you doing?"

Taron glanced over his shoulder and caught Alyssa glaring at him. He relaxed in relief. "I was wondering where you were. Are you all right?" he asked.

"Much better than you," she snapped as she made her way over to his side. "You shouldn't be up. Sidious said you should stay in bed at least another three hours."

Taron snorted. "Sidious isn't here. Besides, he's known to be extremely overprotective."

She crossed her arms over her chest and narrowed her eyes adorably. His Alyssa was quite the spitfire and he loved it. She would certainly never be dull.

"All it takes is for me to push that button on your end table to have him running in here, Damon right behind him, and you know it. Is that what you want?"

Taron cringed. "Damon is here too?" he groaned.

"Yep. As well as Devlin, Rhia and Anthony."

"Oh God," Taron sighed as he remembered the trouble he'd had keeping Devlin in his recovery bed. He was sure it was payback time. His life would be hell for the next week.

"It's not that bad is it?" Alyssa sent him an amused grin. Amazingly, just looking at her sent his blood pounding through his ears.

"You have no idea," he groaned, making her giggle. He glanced up at her with a cheeky grin. "Did I hear you say in the mine that you were in love with me?"

Her cheeks turned red instantly and she stammered. "I um...I don't remember."

"You're a lousy liar, Alyssa. You always were. Just admit it."

"Okay," she drawled playfully. "I'm a lousy liar, I admit it."

Taron laughed and tugged at her hand, pulling her down on her knees before him. "That's not what I wanted you to admit, minx, and you know it."

Her beautiful features morphed into a scowl. "You are such an ass."

"Come on," he whispered against her lips. "Admit it."

She placed her small hand against his cheek, warming his cold flesh. He'd apparently lost a lot of blood, but the warmth shining in her eyes was all the heat he would need.

"I'm in love with you," she sighed, then her lips quirked into a tiny smile.

He smiled and placed his forehead against hers. "I love you too, my feisty little slave."

The soft sound of the door opening made Alyssa pull away from him, her cheeks blushing adorably.

"Not even fully recovered and already he's trying to seduce a woman," Sidious snickered.

Taron sighed and sat upright, sending his brother a halfhearted scowl. "You're one to talk."

Damon, Anthony, Rhia and Devlin strolled in behind Sidious. "How are you feeling, Taron?" Damon asked, his expression one of fatherly worry. *This* man was his father, not Vingosa.

"Like I've been shot," Taron joked. "And I'm cold."

Alyssa wrapped a soft Tilarian fur blanket around his shoulders. He smiled at her over his shoulder. "Thank you, Lyssa." He didn't miss the slight frown Anthony sent his way at the use of her shortened name. Alyssa had told him some time ago that Anthony had been the one to start that. He'd have to talk to him later and let him know he loved his sister and would never do anything to hurt her.

"You lost a lot of blood." Sidious sat in the chair flanking the fireplace. It was a silly thing to have on a ship, but something he'd wanted. For almost six years during the rebellion this ship had been his home and he'd wanted it to be as much like home as possible. He'd included a holographic image inducer that made it look like an actual fire burned within the grate. The thing even produced heat. "Your body is still trying to recoup its losses."

"I wish it would hurry the hell up," Taron growled.

"You also took a massive hit to the liver. The bullet pretty much obliterated it. The lovar serum should help it to regrow but it will take time, so stay away from Sidious' brandy stash until he gives you the okay," Damon ordered.

"Yes, Dad," Taron drawled, but the sudden spark of surprise in Damon's gaze caught him off guard. Surely Damon knew how he felt about him. Didn't he?

"I hope you know this is payback time," Devlin said with a grin. "It's time I repaid you for all that crap I took from you when I was injured."

Taron cringed. "I knew that would come back and bite me in the ass one day." He glanced around at the smiling men and Rhia. As much as he enjoyed the ribbing, he wanted some answers. "Where's Vingosa?"

"We're on our way to get him now," Sidious said, his expression turning serious. "We should be arriving at Korlatis within a couple of hours."

"Good. I want to be the one who arrests him."

"Taron," Damon cautioned, "you're not well enough for that..."

"I don't care," he snapped. "The son of a bitch is mine, Damon."

Damon nodded but said nothing more. Taron was sure the battle wasn't over yet.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Taron?" Sidious asked quietly. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

Taron narrowed his eyes at Sidious, who raised his hands in surrender. "All right. Just asking."

Closing the last button on his shirt, he turned to grab a small gun from Devlin. Most of the pain had subsided, but some still remained, making it hard for him to move with ease. He refused to let a little bit of discomfort keep him from seeing this through. He'd been after Vingosa for years and he was now finally in his grasp. He wasn't about to let him go.

With one final check of the gun's charge level, he placed it in the holder at his ribs. Raising his head, he met Alyssa's worried gray gaze. She hadn't told him not to go. She'd supported his need to do this himself, despite the anxiety evident in her eyes.

Walking over, he cupped her cheek and brushed his thumb along her soft skin. "Be here when I get back?" he asked with a grin.

A gentle smile softened her features as she leaned into his touch. "Of course, I will," she whispered.

"I love you," he mouthed silently.

"I love you," she mouthed back and moved out of the way so he could activate the transport device.

He planned on transporting directly into Vingosa's apartment. According to the scans he was alone. Armed militia soldiers waited for the word to apprehend his father, but Taron wanted time alone with him first. He had some things to say to the son of a bitch. With one final glance toward Alyssa, he winked then nodded toward Devlin to activate the transport.

Alyssa watched Taron disappear with a heavy heart. He still wasn't healed. What if there was a fight or Vingosa tried to shoot him again? Out of the corner of her eye she noticed a commotion and turned to see what was going on.

Damon stood where Taron had been, checking the bullets in his gun. He preferred the ones that actually shot rounds as opposed to the phaser-type gun that Taron used, which shot a laser capable of burning a hole through someone's midsection.

"Have the soldiers meet me at the back entrance," Damon commanded Sidious.

"Taron will have your head," Sidious said with a slight grin.

"I don't care. I'll be damned if I'll sit back and let that *vigic* try to kill him again. Besides," he added with a sigh, "I don't want Taron to have to live with killing his own father. You know as well as I do Vingosa isn't going to go willingly."

Sidious nodded and activated the transport. Damon faded into a fog then disappeared completely.

Anthony moved behind her and wrapped his arms around her shoulders. She leaned into his warm and comforting embrace, silently praying Taron would make it back in one piece.

"He'll be fine, Lyssa," Anthony whispered. "From what I hear, he's a tough guy."

"I know," she sighed, and deep in her heart she prayed she was right.

\* \* \* \* \*

Taron transported to the living quarters of Vingosa's apartment and immediately tensed, his gaze scanning the small room. The bamboo poles and thatched roof were typical for the tropical planet of Korlatis. The green waters of Milokis Lake lapped against the deck surrounding the small cabin nestled on the shore. Warm, flower-scented breezes blew through the open glass doors and ruffled the curtains that flanked the entrance.

His gaze narrowed at the cozy, rustic home. It looked more like a romantic hideaway he would take Alyssa to than a place his father would inhabit. The bamboo and linen furniture didn't suit Vingosa's more opulent taste, but then maybe that's why he'd chosen it. The place and atmosphere were so out of the norm for him it would be the last place anyone would look.

A loud bang sounded from behind him and he spun around, searching for the cause. A set of French doors stood partially open. Through the slit he could see his father throwing things into a small case, his movements unhurried, as though he didn't have a care in the world.

Inside, Taron seethed. What had his mother seen in this man? On top of that, how could a man shoot his own child? But then, wasn't he about to do something just as monstrous? He was perfectly willing to shoot Vingosa. Did that make him just as bad or did the situation warrant his actions? After all, Vingosa was a criminal. One of the most highly sought after in the galaxy.

Taking a deep breath, he decided it didn't matter. Vingosa would do his time and if he wouldn't go willingly he'd go in a box. He put his hands against the doors and silently pushed them wide.

"Surprise," Taron drawled, and felt immense satisfaction as his father stiffened before turning to face him. "Bet you didn't expect to see me again, did you, *Dad?*"

Vingosa's lip curled into a nasty sneer. "You're like a damn cat. Aren't you down to your last life yet?"

Nausea rolled Taron's stomach but he refused to let this man get to him. "Not yet, but it's not for your lack of trying."

"I'll have to work on my aim."

"You'll have plenty of time for that during your stay on Dellon Five."

Vingosa's eyes narrowed and glowed amber with anger and just a hint of fear. "I refuse. You'll have to kill me first." His lips spread into a nasty grin as he turned to drop the lid off the box. The loud bang of metal hitting metal reverberated through the room like the final nail in a coffin. "If you can do it."

"Oh, have no doubt, Vingosa. I'll do it," Taron snarled.

"You're too much like your mother. You don't have the stomach to actually kill your father."

"Like you have the stomach to kill your son?"

"I do what I have to do to survive. It's something your mother couldn't do. She had morals. A conscience."

Taron stared at the older man with murder in his eyes. He refused to think of him as his father. He was just a sick man who needed to be put in his place. "My mother was a good woman, which makes me wonder what the hell she ever saw in you."

Vingosa smiled at him over his shoulder and a shiver of apprehension snaked down Taron's spine. "Maybe I was just that good in bed."

Taron raised his gun and pointed it at Vingosa's chest. The need to shoot almost choked him in its intensity. "That's enough, Vingosa. Let's go."

Vingosa snorted and turned back to lift the box in his hands before turning to face him head-on. "I told you already. I'm not going to Dellon Five. You'll have to shoot me."

"Fine," he snarled and tightened his finger on the trigger.



## Chapter Seventeen

Taron stiffened as a shot was fired from outside, shattering the glass of the French doors leading to the outside deck. The bullet lodged in Vingosa's knee, splattering blood and bone fragments along the light blue tile. He dropped to the floor with a yell, his hands grabbing his leg. The metal box landed on the tile with a clang, spilling its contents around Taron's feet.

In confusion, Taron searched the deck outside the glass doors, his gun still poised to fire at the intruder. A tall, broad figure stepped through the door, the sun behind him keeping his body in shadow, but Taron knew who it was.

"Damon, what the hell are you doing here?" Taron snapped.

Damon didn't answer. Instead he stepped toward Vingosa, who desperately tried to reach an antique bronze letter opener that dangled from the corner of his desk. The toe of Damon's boot pressed down on Vingosa's knee, making him scream in agony before stopping his pursuit of the weapon.

"I think he's ready for Dellon Five, gentleman," Damon said over his shoulder to the two men standing behind him. Turning, he grinned down at Vingosa. "You really didn't think you were getting off that easy, did you, Vingosa? There's no way I would let you miss out on the exquisite accommodations at Dellon. You'll have your very own underground cell with a view of the popular lava flows. Should keep your room a very comfortable temperature—just below hellish."

Vingosa snarled up at Damon, his eyes narrowed in anger and pain. "I'll get you, Damon. I swear it."

Damon harrumphed, then the corner of his mouth lifted into a slight grin. "Somehow I doubt it. But please, feel free to give it your best shot."

Taron watched in stunned silence as Damon pushed down on Vingosa's knee one final time, eliciting a growl of agony from the man practically writhing on the floor. Despite how angry he was, Taron cringed at the thought of how much anguish that pressure against the wound had caused. The two soldiers moved forward and bound Vingosa's hands behind his back then helped him to stand.

"Vingosa," Damon began, "you're under arrest for treason and numerous counts of attempted murder. Get him the hell out of here."

"Yes, sir," the soldier said before hitting a transport button and disappearing.

"You're letting them take him alone? Aren't you afraid he'll get away?" Taron asked as he squatted down to pick up a piece of paper by his foot.

"Sidious and Devlin are going with them. They'll make sure he's settled."

Taron nodded, his gaze scanning the page in his hand. It was a list of names and contact information, even monetary amounts listed by each name that Taron could only assume meant how much money they'd put toward the cause.

*Unbelievable*, Taron thought with a sigh.

"Taron," Damon spoke quietly.

Taron looked up at the man he'd considered a father in aggravation. "Why, Damon?"

With a sigh, Damon leaned back against the desk and crossed his arms. "I didn't want you to have to do it."

"I had the right. Look at everything he's done to me in the past. What he did to my mother!" Taron snapped.

"You would have regretted it later. Despite everything he's done, he's still your father."

"The hell I would have!" he argued, although deep down he knew Damon was right.

In anger, Taron turned and walked out onto the deck, his gaze scanning the light blue horizon. A small boat could be seen in the distance, its sail unfurled to catch the wind. He felt Damon's presence behind him, but Damon didn't speak, just did as he always did—let him know he was there for him if he needed him.

"What did my mother ever see in him?" he asked softly.

Damon placed a hand on his shoulder and gently squeezed. "Don't be angry with your mother, Taron. Love is blind. It's a fact of life. Look at me, for instance. I fell in love with a woman who was forbidden."

"But Kaylar isn't a criminal," Taron sighed.

"No. In my world she was something much worse. A commoner," Damon said with a grin, making Taron's lips twitch despite his anger. "Vingosa wasn't a criminal when your mother met him. And to his credit, he did try for a while to be the man your mother wanted him to be." Damon shrugged. "He just wasn't the father and husband type. There was always something evil about him, something wild."

"How do I know that wild side won't come out in me?"

"There's no chance of that. You may have his looks, but in every other way, every way that counts, you are your mother. You have her compassion and heart, Taron. Never doubt that."

Taron nodded, but kept his gaze on the horizon.

"Come on, son. Let's gather up all these papers then go home," Damon said quietly.

"Home," Taron sighed. It seemed like forever since he'd been home and he was anxious to get back.

"Mikayla and Stefan have a surprise for you."

Taron turned to his father with a raised eyebrow. "A surprise? A surprise is not always a good thing when it involves Stefan."

Damon laughed. "Trust me. This is a good one. They finished your house."

"Furniture and all?" he asked with hope.

"Furniture and all," Damon replied with a nod, his lips spreading into a grin.

"Hot damn, no shopping," Taron said, making Damon chuckle.

"So," Damon started as he bent at the waist to pick up several pieces of paper to be sorted through later, "will this house have a mistress?"

Taron's body relaxed and he smiled the first real smile in hours. Just thinking about Alyssa made him forget everything else. "I think so," he answered, his smile widening at the thought of being an old married man like the rest of the men in his family. And if he knew Alyssa, married life with her would be anything but dull.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alyssa stuck her head in the nursery door and smiled. Taron sat in the chair holding Krista's tiny baby, Jacquelyn, whom he had lovingly nicknamed Jack, much to her mother's chagrin. Krista had quickly given in, saying no one but Taron could call her daughter Jack.

Over the last few days she'd realized just how close this family was. How willing they were to open their hearts and homes to people they considered friends. Even Devlin and Rhia were treated like part of the family while they were here. Anthony fit in quite well also, and had even been offered a job on Tilarus as a pilot for the many monarchs who called the small planet home.

She would have it all—a man she loved as her husband and her brother close by. Anthony had warmed up to Taron and the two now acted like close friends, teasing each other mercilessly. It was such a relief that the two men she loved most in the world got along.

There had been a tense few moments at first, but Taron had pulled Anthony aside and spoken to him quietly. Neither had told her what was said, but whatever it was, it had done the trick. The ice had been broken and things had gone smoothly from then on.

As quietly as possible, Alyssa strolled over and knelt by the chair. It was so amazing how someone so tiny could turn someone so large into a puddle of cooing fluff. Taron was an amazing uncle. The second he'd walked into the door Sidious' oldest son had come screaming through the house and thrown himself into his uncle's outstretched arms. Most of his first day back had been spent playing with the boys, wrestling and taking them for rides on his hovercycle.

The baby sneezed and scrunched her nose in the most adorable manner, making Alyssa smile and dream of having a baby of her own.

"She's beautiful, isn't she?" she whispered.

The tiny child wrapped her fist around Taron's large finger, her eyes drifting closed as she fell back asleep. Jack's brother Jonah was sleeping soundly in the bed close by. It figured the girl would be the hardheaded one and not want to go to sleep.

"Yeah," he whispered. "She's gonna be a looker. Krista and Stefan both seemed exhausted so I told them I'd handle this shift. It's been a rough couple of days for Krista."

"Stefan too." Alyssa rubbed her finger down the soft skin of the baby's arm. "He's been right there with her. They take turns, one taking Jonah while the other takes Jacquelyn, then they switch. Kaylar and Damon got them last night so Krista and Stefan could get some sleep."

Taron grinned. "I sent them down to the lake so they could relax."

"You just wanted to cuddle Jack," she teased.

"Well, that too." He sighed and placed a soft kiss on the baby's forehead. She drew in a deep breath and her lips quivered as though sucking at a bottle, making Taron smile. "I want lots of these, Lyssa."

"Girls?" she asked with a grin.

"Babies. I don't care which."

His expression sobered as he watched the sleeping baby and Alyssa placed a hand on his forearm, feeling the muscles twitch beneath her touch. She knew what was worrying him.

"You're not like him, Taron. You're like Damon and you're going to make a wonderful father, just like the man who raised you."

A small smile touched his lips as he looked down at her. "I had kept the name Sinnar even after Damon adopted me, for my mother. But now..." He sighed and rubbed his thumb across Jack's fist, soothing her. "I can remember as a child, even when Vingosa was around, Damon was more a father to me than Vingosa was. Damon was always there for me. Everything I learned, I learned from him." Jack sucked at her bottom lip, making Taron grin. "I've decided I'm taking the Marcone name and the title Damon offered to me at the adoption. Think you can tolerate being called Lady Alyssa?"

She glanced up at him, startled. *Lady* Alyssa? "I never gave it much thought. Will our children be titled as well?"

"No," Taron said with a shake of his head. "Only the children of counts are titled. The title of 'Lord' will not pass down."

"So Jack will be Lady Jack and Jonah will be Lord Jonah, since their father is a count?"

"Yes. This one will be special, though. Twins are rare, and having a girl with the first pregnancy is even more so among the Tilarans." His deep brown gaze locked onto hers and the pounding of her heart increased. "But you haven't really answered my question."

She smiled and leaned up to kiss his cheek. "I'll be happy with whatever name or title you choose. I love *you*, Taron. Not your name."

He grinned back at her then stood, placing a sleeping Jack in her crib. Turning, he grabbed Alyssa's hand and pulled her into his arms. "You're in for a rough life, Lady Alyssa," he said with a smile.

"Rough, huh?" She wrapped her arms around his waist and tilted her head back to meet his loving gaze.

"Oh, yes. It's widely known that being spoiled by a Marcone man is very rough indeed."

"Oooh, I'm shaking in my shoes," she whispered.

"You will be," he murmured against her mouth, then licked at her lower lip.

She grinned and pressed her breasts against his chest. He moaned in response and nipped at her upper lip, making her giggle. "Maybe if you spanked me, then I might be scared."

Taron's full lips spread into a sexy smile as his hand skimmed lower and slapped at her ass. Not hard, but it still stung through the thin material of her slacks, making her shiver from head to toe. She backed away from him seductively and grabbed his hand, pulling him along with her to their room.

His gaze fell to her neck and he stopped, his fingers reaching out to finger the gold latch that hung from her slave collar. "What's this?" he asked.

She shrugged and could feel the heat of a blush moving up her cheeks. "It's become a sentimental thing, I think. I enjoyed being your slave most of the time."

He smiled tenderly and moved to brush the backs of his fingers along her cheek. "You have it all wrong, *ni pahti*. I've always been the slave to you."

## **About the Author**

Trista penned her first ghost story at the age of eight. She still has a love of ghosts, but her taste and writing style have leaned more to the sultry side. She started writing erotic romance two years ago and with the help of her critique partners was soon published and she's been running full steam ever since.

Raised an Air Force brat, Trista surprised her family by marrying a Navy man. But just as she knew he would, her husband won them over despite his military choice. Together they've had three children, and she attributes their successful marriage to the fact he's away flying a lot. Separation does make the heart grow fonder. After all, if he's not there, she can't kill him.

All joking aside, her family and writing partners are her biggest form of support and encouragement. Trista's a big believer in happily ever after and although she may put her characters through hell getting there, they will always achieve that goal.

Trista welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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