

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

Hidden
AND
Tales of the
Shareem
Ry

Allyson James

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Aiden and Ky

ISBN # 9781419908880

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Photography and cover art by Les Byerley.

Electronic book Publication: January 2007

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TALES OF THE SHAREEM:

AIDEN AND KY

Allyson James

Chapter One

Encounter

The Shareem on the other side of the coffee bar swirled his tongue over the cream at the top of his cup and pulled it into his mouth.

Brianne d'Aroth went weak in the knees. She sat in a cooled room under cooled robes and still she wanted to melt into a puddle on the questionably clean floor.

He dipped his tongue into the cream again, coating the tip before drawing it into his mouth. He closed his eyes to savor the taste, a little smile on his face.

Every woman in the coffee bar leaned toward him as he swallowed, the hollow at his collarbone damp with sweat. His loose robes revealed a V of strong chest and light-colored curls licking sun-kissed skin.

His mane of blond hair was gathered at the base of his neck and flowed all the way down to...probably his backside. Too bad the table blocked her view.

Oblivious of every female growing wet between the legs for him, he licked up another dab of cream. This time a drop lingered on his lips. Smiling, he slid his tongue out to clean it up.

This should be outlawed, Brianne thought over the rapid beating of her heart. Maybe she should call the patrol.

But the Shareem wasn't actually doing anything. He was sitting alone, sipping his coffee.

The way he sipped it, *that* should be outlawed.

The Shareem opened his eyes and looked straight at her, deep blue eyes pinning Brianne in place.

Not that he could see much of her. Brianne had covered herself from head to foot in plain robes so no one would know who she was. She'd taken off her face veil so she could enjoy her coffee but was careful to keep her head down and not reveal her features.

The Shareem looked directly at her. All over. She might as well be sitting there stark naked.

His smile widened, as though he knew what she thought. Gods, sitting stark naked in a public place while he did nothing but *look* at her made her feel...

Mmm.

Shocked. Of course. Horrified. Amazed at his audacity. She should shield her face from his unwelcome scrutiny, turn her back and walk away in a huff. She should snap her fingers for one of her bodyguards to come and teach the Shareem his place.

And have him stop looking at me like that?

Forget it.

She did the boldest thing she'd ever done in her life. Brianne looked straight back at the Shareem and sent him a little smile.

Contact.

Adrenaline raced through her body, hot sensation pooling at the base of her spine. The Shareem acknowledged her smile with a sly quirk of his lips. Watching her, he dipped his tongue into the cream again.

She realized with startling clarity that he was picturing lapping the cream between her legs. Shareem could do that—make a woman think of nothing but him pleasuring her.

I'm going to die now.

With a smile on my face.

This could go no farther. Brianne should not be down in Pas City even if her bodyguards had stationed themselves casually around the back of the coffee bar. She should not be enjoying the surprisingly good coffee in the shabby bar with common workers and—dear gods—a Shareem.

She'd come out as she sometimes did to see how people really lived, the women and men she spent her life trying to help. It was difficult to see what they were like from inside the huge compound that was the ruling family's home. So on a regular basis Brianne dressed like an ordinary middle-class woman and wandered the streets, looking around, protected by a dozen discreet bodyguards in case of trouble, or worse, reporters.

She'd never expected to see one of the genetically enhanced Shareem. Shareem were more or less outlawed on Bor Narga, allowed to live if they kept themselves to themselves, if they didn't try to procreate or leave the planet, and if they subjected themselves to a barrage of inoculations every six months.

Brianne had just popped in on a whim to try the local coffee. And there he was.

She'd heard they could sense when a woman wanted one and contrive to be where she could find him. She wondered which woman in the coffee bar would be lucky enough to take him home today and felt a twinge of envy.

Her smile turned regretful. She'd go home and deal with her upcoming wedding to Dranis, who was boring and stuffy but had good DNA. Their children, who would be incubated at the Ministry of Families, would be healthy, look good on the digital feeds and have a fairly good IQ—not genius level, but enough intelligence to deal with being part of the ruling family of the planet.

Brianne had already had her hymen removed in a nice little celebration when she'd come of age. She'd be spared the embarrassment of sexual encounters because Dranis had no interest in sex, one of the reasons she'd chosen him. They'd give their DNA to the Ministry's lab and never share a bed.

Sex was for the lower classes, and even they strove to put their basic urges behind them.

The warm look in the Shareem's eyes said, *It's not embarrassing, sweetheart. It's the best thing you'll have in your life.*

She gave a tiny shake of her head. Maybe another woman could indulge, and a few upper-class women did, but not Brienne d'Aroth.

He understood her signal. He made the barest shrug as he leaned forward to sip more coffee, as though to say, *Hey, your loss, it could have been good.*

Probably it would have been very, very good.

Her heart still racing with awakened needs, she sent him another small smile, thanking him for being so utterly gorgeous to look at. His answering grin made her body temperature soar again, and a dark tingling began in her breasts. She needed to get out of there before she gave in to the temptation of him. She was already sweating.

She flung her veil over her face, slid from the stool and hurried from the coffee bar without a backward look.

As she half ran along the bazaar shaded with colored canopies she did not notice a detachment of her guard charge in the back way of the coffee bar and arrest the Shareem. Their monitors had registered Brienne's rise in adrenaline and temperature, then they'd seen her run out faster than they'd ever seen her move before.

Their orders were to arrest and confine any who dared assault their lady. When they entered the coffee bar they saw the Shareem and—well, everyone knew what Shareem did.

So Aiden found himself manacled and shackled and thrown into a ground transport before he could even finish his damned coffee.

* * * * *

"What did you say your name was?"

"Ky," Ky answered impatiently as the patroller in dusty leggings, a loose tunic and scarred boots checked her handheld one more time.

"Yes, there you are." The patroller looked proud she'd located Ky's information from the central computer at the Ministry of Non-Human Life Forms. "And you're looking for..."

"Aiden," Ky said for the third time. "He was arrested in a coffee bar and I want to know why."

"I can guess why." The patroller pushed buttons on her handheld, moving slowly. "He's a Shareem, isn't he? Here it is. He was taken to the jail block in Senoda."

"What for?"

The patroller peered at her handheld. "Sexual assault."

Ky stared at her a stunned moment. "That's bullshit. Shareem can't assault a woman. We're programmed not to."

The patroller, a tall woman only about five inches shorter than Ky, gave him an evil look. "You're the one who's full of bullshit. You Shareem put women in manacles. You whip them and pretend they like it. That one called Calder chases women through a pleasure palace of some kind. I've heard."

"And the ladies pay Calder a frigging fortune to let him do it. What happened, he turn you down?"

The patroller's face turned three shades of red. "Shareem are menaces and should have been terminated years ago. At least Aiden will be terminated tomorrow."

Ky's heart nearly stopped.

Ky and Aiden had been friends since the fall of DNAmo, the defunct factory that had set out to make the ultimate male to pleasure women. DNAmo had done the job a little too well, and the paranoid women who ruled the planet shut down DNAmo and outlawed the making of Shareem. Wouldn't want women lusting after sex and possibly going back to the time when women had been completely submissive to men, would they?

Only a few votes had kept Shareem from being terminated wholesale after DNAmo closed. Aiden and Ky had survived by helping each other during the chaos of the company's shutdown, and once the decision had been made to let Shareem live, they'd continued to share lodgings.

"Aiden didn't do anything. He can't. He's a level one."

"Meaning?"

"Whips and manacles are only used by level threes, like me." Ky leaned over her, six-feet-seven-inches of black leather and powerful muscle. "You want a little bondage, you come to me. Aiden is a level one. He's all scented oils and massage and sensual pleasures. He can make a woman come just by feeding her strawberries."

"Well, apparently he went a little farther than strawberries."

"Which I'm telling you is bullshit. He can't force a woman to do anything she doesn't want to. Not even Calder, as exotic as he gets."

"It's what's in the report." She flashed the handheld at him.

This was damned stupid, and yet the government of Bor Narga could easily terminate Aiden's life because everyone feared Shareem and sexuality.

"Who accused him?" Ky asked.

He didn't think the patroller would tell him. She'd bleat about confidentiality and all that shit.

She smiled. "That's what's going to clinch this. His accuser is Brianne d'Aroth."

Ky stopped in astonishment. Brianne was one of the many high-powered women of the ruling d'Aroth family. About fifty years ago the governor and her husband had

produced ten children and all those siblings had produced another five or six each, mostly female. Their family reunions looked like mob scenes on the digital news feeds.

The d'Aroths had been largely responsible for shutting down DNAmo and making the Shareem second-class citizens. That had been twenty years ago, and now one of their number was accusing Aiden of assault? It was too much.

From what he'd seen on the digitals, Ky had thought Brianne, with her sun-streaked brown hair and large brown eyes, didn't seem as bad as the rest of them. She was tall—all the ruling women had tall children—and her figure was what the digitals called lush and Ky called delectable. She was not in line to inherit anything, but she ran a lot of charitable projects and basically helped the ruling family look good.

She'd seemed more kindhearted than the other women in her family, and whenever Ky saw her on digitals he let himself have one or two cock-hardening fantasies about her.

Showed him how much he could trust reporters and digitals.

"What the hell is she talking about? How would Aiden even get near Brianne d'Aroth?"

"She was slumming?" the patroller suggested with a sneer.

"Fuck this."

Ky swung on his booted heel and strode off into the sunshine.

"Where are you going?" the patroller called after him.

To figure out what the hell is going on, Ky kept to himself.

Aiden was his best friend. When they'd first fled DNAmo ahead of the rampaging, trigger-happy patrollers, they'd hidden out in an abandoned shack that wasn't fit for weevils, and they'd taken turns going out scavenging food and water. They'd waited out sandstorms in the place, huddled together to keep off the worst of the dust, barely able to breathe.

Shit like that made a man your best friend, and you didn't let him get terminated because of some bitch's fantasy.

He strode into a train station and got on a train to go uptown, where the rich lived all clean and protected. Damn it all to hell.

Three hours later, the patrollers locked his struggling form into a cell in the Senoda jail block, generously letting him share the six-by-six space with his best friend Aiden.

Chapter Two

Incarceration

Aiden looked at Ky with the scowl he only wore when he was truly pissed off. Slowly and clearly, he said, "What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Trying to get you out."

Aiden pointed through the transparent, foot-thick wall. "You're supposed to be doing that *out there*."

The jails on Bor Narga were the cleanest and most efficient in the system—and the most demoralizing. Each cell was backed by a white wall, and that was all the prisoner got for privacy. The other three walls were made of thick transparent plastic built to withstand several thousand tons of explosives.

Prisoners had nothing, not even a place to sit down. Food was delivered at certain hours, and a toilet lowered from the back wall when needed. Prisoners were sterilized by sonic beams once a day. Everything was scrupulously clean.

Not that prisoners remained in these cells long. This jail was a waiting area in which unlucky detainees paced while their trial was prepared. These cells were for the worst offenders, those who usually ended up terminated. Termination was quick and painless, so Ky had heard.

Aiden and Ky were the only two in the block today. There were no guards in the corridor because there was no need for guards. They couldn't escape.

Ky folded his arms. The jailers had taken their clothes but left them with the loincloths Shareem usually wore. Ky's was leather. The black chain on Ky's right biceps tightened.

"I went to the house where Brianne d'Aroth lives," he said.

Aiden's ultra-handsome face took on a look of amazement. "What for? What did you do?"

"I didn't do anything. Couldn't get past the front gate. I just wanted to know why she decided to accuse you of assault."

"Is *that* who accused me?" Aiden looked amazed. "Why? I've never seen the woman before, except on digitals."

"She was in the coffee bar today."

"Ah." His eyes softened as he recalled the incident. "So she was the female under all those veils."

"What happened?" Ky asked impatiently.

"She smiled at me. I smiled back. Then she walked out."

"So you never touched her."

"I never got near her. Closest was about twenty feet."

"That's not how her bodyguards tell it," Ky said. "Anyway, I got pissed off, and they arrested me too."

"Great."

"Yeah, I'm an asshole. I wasn't thinking straight."

Aiden leaned against the transparent wall. He had been face-sculpted before birth, an experimental technique at DNAmo. The result was that he had a perfectly symmetrical face, almond-shaped blue eyes and a handsomeness that was almost blinding. Women stopped in their tracks when they saw his face.

Ky had a face that could charitably be called plain, but it wasn't his looks that made women follow him. Ky was a level three, made a little stronger, a little bigger in the body than the level ones and twos.

Ky rumbled on. "And now no one knows we're in here, and we'll both be terminated and swept under the rug. The Ministry of Non-Human Life Forms likes to keep Shareem problems quiet."

"You didn't tell anyone?" Aiden asked. "Not Judith or Braden?"

"Didn't have the chance."

Aiden said nothing, but Ky knew he'd blown it. Braden could have put them in touch with Rees, who had taken a rich woman to be his lifemate. Talan d'Urvey was not as powerful as Brianne d'Aroth, but she still had some pull. For a shy little lady she had a core of steel.

Ky said, "I have a feeling that after our last stunt, they won't be lenient."

Aiden grinned suddenly. "You mean when you auctioned me off in the street?"

Ky had stood Aiden on a block in the middle of Pas City and pretended to sell him to the highest bidder. Women had flocked to watch, causing a near riot. The patrollers had not been amused.

"Yeah, that was fun," Ky said. "Except we pissed off the patrollers, more so when all those women paid to get us out."

"It was for a good cause," Aiden pointed out.

They had held the auction to distract all the patrollers in the district so that their friend Rio could get himself off-planet unhindered.

"I know. I don't think that will help us any."

Aiden blew out his breath. "Well, it's been a nice almost-life."

"Hey, we're Shareem. We're not supposed to worry about things like this. No real feelings, right?"

Aiden did not smile at Ky's attempt at humor. "We're screwed, my friend."

"Now that you mention it, I'd love to have screwed one last time."

Aiden opened his mouth like he wanted to say something, then thought better of it. "Yeah."

"Remember Judith's birthday?" Ky said, thinking of their friend who ran a bar in the heart of the city. "Just the three of us. Her on the bar."

"Naked," Aiden said. "All spread out for us."

"Me pouring that sweet liqueur over her body."

"Her getting pissed because it was her most expensive stuff."

"I'm not surprised," Ky chuckled. "It was tasty."

"What I really liked," Aiden said slowly, "was when we were licking her pussy together and our tongues got all mixed up. Me tasting her on your lips."

Ky felt his cock start to rise. "Yeah, that wasn't bad. Surprised me."

"Made it twice as good."

Ky considered. "Well, maybe not *twice* as good. It can't have been that good for you kissing me."

Aiden got an odd look on his face. Ky mused that it hadn't been bad, feeling Aiden's strong lips and his hot tongue flickering briefly across his. Different to feel another man's whiskers burn his mouth, but not bad. It had turned Judith on pretty hard.

Aiden crossed the short space of cell between them. Ky looked up in surprise just as Aiden slanted his mouth across Ky's in a bruising kiss.

* * * * *

"What do you think of Shareem?" Brianne asked her fiancé Dranis m'Aren as they strolled in the starlit garden protected by the highest-tech force fields in existence. The brutal desert waited outside for the unwary, but under the canopy the air was still, the night bright with stars.

Dranis walked with his hands behind his back, his long coat bumping his knee-high boots. He was about ten years older than Brianne and handsome in a bland sort of way. His parents had been too careful in planning his face, so his handsomeness was somewhat vapid.

The Shareem in the coffee bar had exuded sensuality. The blond man had been face-sculpted by an artist, that was obvious. Small imperfections like one side of his mouth quirking higher than the other kept his face from being overly perfect and dull.

And his eyes. Hot blue and beautiful, they'd fixed on Brianne and she'd felt pleased, ready for climax.

Her meditation coaches told her that unhealthy sexual yearnings should be exercised out of the body, but even after several hours of working out, Brianne's yearnings lingered. What might have happened if she had taken the Shareem's unspoken invitation and walked with him to her private transport?

The seats of her hover car were softest plush and just wide enough for a Shareem to lay on top of her with his warm weight...

She broke off the thought, her face hot. No wonder Shareem were outlawed. They distracted a woman's thoughts and made men like Dranis look dull and ineffectual in comparison.

Well, she'd always thought Dranis boring, but she hadn't really cared before. Husbands were for donating DNA, nothing more. Dranis had his own life, and she had hers. Marriage was a business decision, especially in the d'Aroth family.

Wouldn't it be fun, her mind taunted her, if you had a Shareem all to yourself? Even for a little while?

Dranis snorted suddenly, and she jumped. He sat down on a bench, flipping his coattails out of his way. "Shareem? I don't think anything about them. They're just animals, aren't they?"

Brianne shrugged as she sat down next to him. "They look human enough to me. Two arms, two legs..." *Bodies to die for, eyes that made you think things you'd never dream of thinking.*

"That's where the resemblance ends," Dranis said. "Animals, Brianne. Created for rutting women stupid enough to be taken in by them. Which you never will be. I know your IQ."

"Of course not," Brianne said dryly. "I am far too intelligent."

"Exactly."

Finished with the conversation, Dranis looked up at the night through the clear force field. "No place like Bor Narga for stargazing, is there? Don't know why anyone ever wants to leave."

"Shareem aren't allowed to leave."

He glanced at her, surprised. "Well, no, they have to be controlled. Can't have them roaming the galaxy ravishing everywhere they go, can we? They need to be contained."

"Because they're animals?"

"Because they can't be trusted. How embarrassing for Bor Narga if we let them spread their tainted genes everywhere."

Sudden anger washed through her, and she stood up abruptly. Dranis regarded her in surprise.

"I have some work to do," she lied, then whirled and walked quickly away.

"All right," she heard Dranis say behind her. He couldn't have cared less.

Brianne really didn't have any work to do, but she thought if she stayed a moment longer she would kick Dranis in his boring behind.

Animals for stupid women, that's what Dranis thought. Complacent idiot.

Shareem were human enough. From what she'd read, they could pour pheromones over women and stir the women's own endorphins, subtly seducing without even

touching them. In the coffee shop Brianne had been ready to grope herself under her robes, sliding her fingers into her own wetness. Right there in front of everyone.

It had nothing to do with her IQ and everything to do with her being female. And alive.

Why had she decided to go into that coffee bar today? Just looking at the Shareem had ruined her concentration. She couldn't finish any work, she snapped at everyone and she couldn't stop fantasizing about him.

His hard body against her skin, sweat and heat sliding, his lips covering hers, tongue probing her mouth.

But Brianne didn't like sex. Did she? Sex was for commoners. For women base enough to rip off their clothes and kneel in front of him, to grasp her own breasts while she opened her mouth wide for his cock.

Sweet gods.

Brianne brushed her hand over her brow, feeling hot liquid in her quim. What had he done to her?

Her communications terminal beeped softly at that moment, a welcome distraction. She breathed a sigh of relief and touched the screen to answer. "Yes, who is it?"

The voice of her receptionist purred, "Lady Talan d'Urvey, my lady."

Brianne started. Talan d'Urvey was a wealthy highborn woman, quiet-spoken and kind. She was also notorious for having paired up with a Shareem, a tall, impossibly gorgeous man named Rees. Brianne had seen his holo pic in the digital tabloids. Lady Talan lived with him openly, defying convention and almost getting herself shunned. *Almost*—ladies couldn't quite bring themselves to blackball her, because Lady Talan was one of the wealthiest women on Bor Narga.

Strange that Brianne should see her first Shareem today and then get a call from Talan d'Urvey.

"Put her through," she said tersely.

A moment later the picture of a young woman with dark red hair and blue eyes filled her screen. A serenity lingered about Lady Talan's face as though she'd found the secret to happiness. Or maybe that came from having sex with a man who could constantly flood her with endorphins.

Talan did not look pleased at the moment. She glared at Brianne, her blue eyes tense.

"Lady d'Urvey," Brianne said politely, expecting to be asked a question about some charity or other they were both on the board of. "What may I do for you?"

"Lady d'Aroth, why did you have Aiden arrested?"

Brianne blinked. "Aiden?"

"Did you not even ask his name?" Lady Talan asked angrily. "Shareem have names, you know. You could at least do them the courtesy of using them."

Brianne sat back with a bump. "Shareem? *Arrested?*"

"Yes. He's in the high-security jail at Senoda."

Brianne's jaw went slack, her mind racing. Of course. Her monitors. Her alert bodyguards monitored her heart rate and adrenaline levels when she was out, especially when she left their sight, so they would know if anyone tried to attack her. They were trained to deal ruthlessly with an attacker.

When the Shareem had looked at her and made her heart go pitter-pat, the bodyguards had assumed... And then she'd run out of there like there was a fire under her robes—or at least between her legs.

She started babbling to Lady Talan. "I didn't know... I'll see to it... I'll take care of it, I assure you. Thank you for bringing the problem to my attention."

Brianne d'Aroth, articulate and well-educated, jabbering like a schoolgirl trying to explain her truancy. She signed off, not lessening Lady Talan's scowl.

She laid her hands on her desk and drew a deep breath. Then she jammed on the intercom and shouted for her chief bodyguard. "Harbourgh! What the *hell* did you do?"

Chapter Three

The Bathhouse

"...and all charges will be dismissed," the colorless woman said. "Lady d'Aroth sends her deepest apologies."

The robed lawyer who let Aiden and Ky out of jail looked less than happy to do so. She apparently shared the view that Shareem were best kept locked up if they couldn't be terminated.

Clad once again in his black leather leggings and jacket, Ky grinned. "Thanks, darlin'." He swatted her behind as he strode past her and out of the building.

Out on the sun-blasted road Ky waited for Aiden to catch up. Aiden had resumed wearing his sleeveless tunic and sun-blocking robes.

"Making friends wherever you go," Aiden said mildly.

"Hey, she pissed me off. All charges dropped — *a mistake*, little Miss Brianne d'Aroth decides."

"Her bodyguards made the mistake. She didn't even know."

"Whose side are you on?"

"You didn't feel her pheromones." Aiden smiled. "Beautiful face and a great body under those robes. You've seen her on the digitals."

"Doesn't mean I like her," Ky growled. "Besides, she's a d'Aroth."

"Lighten up. We're still alive."

Ky stretched, locking his fingers together and raising his arms above his head. His loose dark hair moved in the breeze, stretching down to touch his leather-clad ass. Two women in the uniforms of city workers paused to gaze at him appreciatively.

"Watch it," Aiden said with a grin. "We'll be right back inside."

"Screw that. Bath?"

Aiden nodded and they moved off to find public transport to take them back to Pas City.

Their enterprising friend Judith had recently set up a bathhouse where Shareem could swim, bathe and enjoy themselves without hindrance. Shareem could bathe at home in their own water showers, of course, but they found they liked having a place they could hang out without worrying about patrollers. Judith's bar was another place they could talk, though patrollers sometimes came in to police it. Judith had kept the bathhouse a closely guarded secret, and the Shareem weren't telling.

Ky knew that Judith sometimes let women—carefully screened and sworn to secrecy—sit in observation rooms and watch the Shareem bathe or swim. The Shareem

knew and didn't mind. If women wanted to stare at them, fine. That's what Shareem were for, to be looked at, wanted, sought out.

Judith made plenty of money on the baths and spent it all on her Shareem. She regularly added luxuries, including cascading waterfall showers, massages and steam rooms.

How to pamper your sex slave, Ky thought as they left the hover train and entered the building that housed the baths.

They went into the scruffy shop Judith maintained in front selling cheap trinkets and art reproductions. But Shareem knew that in the back room was a latch that let a part of the wall slide back, admitting them into halls that led to marble rooms and the bath chambers.

As soon as the wall sealed behind them, Ky started to strip off his clothes. A Shareem had no shame about his body—the natural state for them was naked. Shareem covered up to go outside only because the patrollers would love any excuse to arrest them and besides, the harsh Bor Nargan sun would fry them to a crisp.

In the bathhouse with only Shareem—and maybe a few voyeurs looking through false walls—clothes were superfluous.

Ky bundled his clothes onto a wicker shelf at one end of the huge steaming pool. "I'll be glad to wash the stink of jail off me."

"You were sterilized," Aiden pointed out, also stripping. "Cleaner than you've ever been in your life."

"Don't say *sterilized*. I don't like that word."

Aiden snickered but shut up.

Ky walked to the edge of the pool and slowly lowered himself in. The bite of heat on his legs and belly and cock felt damn good. Judith was a goddess. The tiny ring that adorned his right nipple glinted under the water.

He moved to a seat and watched Aiden finish folding his clothes. Aiden was like that—neat, folding things, keeping his room in the apartment they shared tidy. Ky had seen Aiden naked before, had for twenty years, but today he noticed.

Aiden's body was like a taut bow, not as bulky as Ky, who had been made to be a Dom. Aiden was tall and muscular, but he wore his frame almost elegantly. The golden hair that dusted his chest and twisted around his balls was a little darker than the sweep of hair on his head. He had a tight ass curving to strong thighs.

The black chain on his right biceps was thinner than Ky's. Level one chains were the thinnest of all.

The kiss in the cell had been brief. Aiden had laughed afterward, backing away, saying, "What the hell? We're going to die."

Ky hadn't answered. Dark feelings had swirled through him at the feel of Aiden's tongue in his mouth, and he'd thought many things.

First that he hadn't minded all that much. Second that he liked the taste of Aiden's lips and wouldn't mind tasting them again. Third that his body temperature was heating to dangerous levels and he needed release.

Fourth that Aiden's kiss reminded Ky of DNAmo and its experiments, experiments he never wanted to remember.

Aiden slid into the pool and ducked under, water darkening his blond hair. He found a seat, leaned his head back and closed his eyes. They didn't speak. Aiden and Ky could sit in companionable silence for hours, not needing to converse.

Not even about the kiss. When it was important, they'd come to it.

Ky closed his eyes and enjoyed the feel of the cool bench on his backside, the lap of water against his shoulders, the warm relaxing steam.

"You're still brooding," Aiden said. "I can feel brooding all the way over here."

Ky answered without opening his eyes. "I'm a Dom. Being bound and helpless goes against the grain. I want...hmm."

"You want to Dom someone. Call Judith. She'll be on her knees with the collar on before you finish asking her."

"Not Judith."

Brianne d'Aroth. When he'd watched her on the digitals he knew she'd make a good submissive. He'd seen it in her eyes. Smart and competent *and wouldn't she look good with nothing but my chain around her neck?*

"You'll never get near her." Aiden had the knack of always knowing what Ky was thinking. "You want to punish her, but even if she agreed, you'd never get past her bodyguards."

"Maybe."

Ky had methods, honed over years of experience, of getting women to come to him. Eagerly. Brianne would be no different.

"You're crazy," Aiden said.

"No shit."

"Why's he crazy this time?" a Shareem voice said, and Ky opened his eyes.

Braden, another level three, banged into the room, the closing door echoing against the water. He wore a white tunic and black leather leggings which he began stripping off his Shareem-bulked body.

"He wants a woman." Aiden watched Braden stuff his clothes onto the shelf and approach the pool.

Braden had long black hair, brown skin and a chest shadowed with muscle. His face was different, square-jawed and lean, not as handsome as the face-sculpted Aiden but not as plain as Ky.

"We all want a woman," Braden answered.

Instead of easing himself into the water he plunged in with a huge splash, going under and coming up fast, throwing his hair back in a wet arc. Ky impatiently wiped water from his face.

"One particular woman," Aiden said.

"Oh. Not as easy." Braden swam through the warm water. "I heard the two of you got locked up."

"News travels fast," Ky said.

"It does among Shareem. As soon as you went in we heard." Braden paused. "I called Rees."

Shareem usually went to Rees when things went bad. Ky had never figured out what level Rees was, and Rees wasn't telling. He had been an experimental Shareem at DNAmo, not encouraged to fraternize with the rest of them. Whatever the researchers had done to him had left him aloof even now, but the man was damned resourceful.

"That pretty little thing he bamboozled into marrying him has friends in high places," Braden went on. "She's why you're out, gentlemen."

"Lady Talan d'Urvey." Aiden's lips curled into a smile. "I wonder if she'd like an oil massage as a thank you?"

"Only if Rees lets you," Braden said.

"He could watch. I'd make it worth his while."

The blue in Aiden's eyes widened to spill over into the white. A Shareem aroused. Braden grinned, *his* eyes going bluer, and Ky knew his own eyes were joining the blue-fest. The thought of pretty Talan lying on her stomach, her dark red hair in a knot while Aiden slid oiled hands over her didn't help Ky's rising temperature.

Aiden made up his own oils, blending formulas that could bring a woman to climax when she sniffed the bottle. Aiden claimed that the right oil with the right woman made the experience with a level one as good as a sub had with a Dom.

Rees would watch Aiden slowly rub Lady Talan's body, while she squirmed against the table. Rees would be rock-hard, maybe holding a whip so he could spank his wife when Aiden was done for daring to enjoy another Shareem's touch.

Ky's body temp rose higher. Braden's cheekbones were flushed and Aiden smiled, a faraway look in his eyes. The water would start boiling any minute.

"Stop," Ky said, his voice harsh. "I haven't released, and I'm not doing it in front of you two."

"I might have to find a private room too," Braden said, his hand stealing under the water.

"Level threes," Aiden said mildly. "Can't hold it in."

"Bite me," Ky returned.

Aiden shot him a thoughtful look. Ky instantly remembered Aiden's male scent as he pinned Ky against the transparent wall in the jail, and the rough taste of Aiden's tongue slicing into his mouth. Ky returned the look, his skin heating.

Braden wasn't paying attention. "We should change the subject. Except I can't think about anything but fucking."

"How's Calder?" Ky asked abruptly.

The blue in Braden's eyes receded a little. "He's a pain in the ass. So about the same as usual."

"He ever coming to Judith's again?"

"Give him a break."

"Hey, *we* don't care what he looks like," Ky said. "I mean, look at *my* face."

Braden laughed. "I'll tell him you said that."

Calder rarely left the elaborate compound he'd built for himself with the fortune he made from women who wanted to be with him. He chose what women he'd pleasure from an endless list of applicants, some from off-planet. The women were allowed to be with him only once, and Calder made the experience unique and worthwhile.

He did not visit the baths no matter how many times Judith asked him, because Calder would not undress in front of other Shareem. He had been ruined long ago at DNAmo, his body disfigured by chemical and plasma burns. Ky didn't know the full story of the incident, and Calder never offered to explain.

Ky also didn't know the extent of the damage because he'd never seen anything but Calder's face. Calder's *shape* was fine—he dressed from head to toe in tight black leather, covering his hands in formfitting gloves. The leather outlined a body as tall and honed as Ky's.

Calder usually kept his face covered, easy to do in the desert climate of Bor Narga. Most people wrapped sun-blocking cloths around their heads and donned goggles to keep the deadly sun at bay. When Calder went out, he looked no different from other Bor Nargans—apart from his Shareem body and his ability to bring women to their knees wherever he went.

He'd had reconstructive surgery performed by Dr. Laas, one of the original DNAmo scientists and a genius at genetic sculpting. She'd said that the reconstruction had given Calder back his life, but she could never make him the perfect Shareem again. The burns had been too extensive, stripping him down to muscle and bone. She'd barely been able to save him.

Artificial skin and grafts helped, but according to Dr. Laas almost every inch of Calder's body was brutally scarred. One side of his face had escaped except for slight pulling around his mouth, but the other side was a scarred ruin.

His cock must be in good working order, Ky thought, because women couldn't get enough of him.

No one knew exactly what Calder did with women in his pleasure palace—they could have tea and cakes for all Ky knew. A woman who'd gone to Calder had once told Ky, *It was worth it, every minute of it. Sometimes I dream about it, but when I wake up I'm safe again.*

Ky was curious, but he'd never violate Calder's privacy and ask him. Shareem didn't do that. They'd been so scrutinized at DNAmo and now by patrollers that it was an unwritten code that they left each other in peace. Braden was the closest thing Calder had to a friend, and even Braden didn't know that much about him.

Ky came out of his thoughts to find Aiden talking about their incarceration at the hands of Brianne d'Aroth.

"Brianne d'Aroth?" Braden mused. "I see why you'd want to ravish her if you could. She's lickable."

"I liked her," Aiden said. "Even if she did get me arrested. In the coffee bar, when she was watching me, she acknowledged she wanted it, but knew she couldn't have it. She didn't pretend not to be interested."

Braden grinned. "Lucky for her you're a level one. Nice soothing sex. If she'd seen me or Ky and started fantasizing about a chain between her nipples, hands bound, the slap of a strap on her sweet, smooth ass..."

Ky stood up, water cascading from his naked body, cock ramrod stiff. He was still angry at Brianne but Braden's description put him over the top. Not only that, it gave him an idea he'd work out later. "I'm out of here."

If he didn't release soon, his body could overload, killing him. Sex wasn't just fun for Shareem, it was a release valve. Sex was survival. Ky had gone too long today, the stint in jail not helping.

"If you need a lady, I'm sure there are a few watching." Braden glanced at the smoked glass at the end of the room.

It didn't help Ky thinking of women behind the glass, flushed with need, hands stealing to their thighs or breasts while they fixed their gazes on his body. His heart rate increased, temperature far above what a normal human could tolerate.

"Set the shower for freezing," Braden snickered as Ky grabbed towels and moved toward the inner rooms.

* * * * *

The ice-cold water didn't do much to relieve Ky's tension. He held his cock in one hand, the swollen tip hard and dark. He braced himself with his other hand on the cool shower wall, willing the cold to penetrate his skin.

He let his head drop back as his fingers dipped to his balls, smoothing their tightness. He let his anger spin into his Shareem wanting, first imagining Brianne d'Aroth as he'd seen her on digitals, all prim and neat and businesslike, then imagining her with her clothes open, her brown hair mussed and her eyes filled with hunger.

He would do it.

He opened his eyes to see Aiden leaning against the wall opposite him. Aiden's cock was stiff and straight, but he made no attempt to stroke it and give it comfort.

"The water doesn't get any colder than this," Aiden said. "It would ice up in the pipes if it did."

"Shut up." Ky squeezed his cock, forcing his fingers tight around it. He felt Aiden's gaze going to his cock, watching what Ky did. Aiden's eyes were hot blue, the color pushing out the white.

Ky's body tightened. He thought of Aiden's kiss in the cell, the rough masculine feel of it. His lips had tasted good, salty and smooth.

Aiden's sculpted face ran with water, his hair slicked back, his throat exposed where he rested his head against the wall. What would Aiden do if Ky crossed the tile floor, grabbed Aiden and kissed him? Ky imagined Aiden's startled look changing to that slow smile of pleasure he got when he liked what someone did to him.

Ky would lick all the way across his friend's lips, maybe dip his tongue inside that Shareem mouth and taste him again.

Even better if Aiden were in manacles, a leather collar around his throat.

Ky groaned. His hand tightened on his cock and he spilled his seed, letting it wash harmlessly away with the water. He leaned on the shower wall, breath coming fast.

"Feel better?"

Ky looked up at his friend, unable to stop his imagination from putting Aiden in a collar, making him obey every command. Aiden met his gaze as though he knew exactly what Ky was thinking.

"It's forbidden," Ky said automatically.

"If we never did what was forbidden, we'd all be dead by now."

"You have a point." Ky straightened up, breathing a little easier now that his cock wasn't such a flagpole. "I'm going to punish her."

"Brienne d'Aroth? You just got out of jail, you want to go back in?"

Ky went to Aiden, moving slowly, controlling himself. "She almost killed you. She owes you. And me."

Before Aiden could reply Ky slanted a kiss across his mouth, brief and hot, meant to singe more than caress.

Forbidden, *right*. The researchers had watched avidly as Ky had done what was forbidden. He opened his mouth to say this, then his brain darkened and refused to form the words. Damned programming was still there. *You'd think after twenty years...*

He backed away, mind blanking out the memory again. Aiden watched him, his eyes filled with blue, his Shareem pheromones covering Ky and making him stiff again.

"Do you want me to help?" Aiden smoothed one finger across Ky's cheekbone. "With Brienne d'Aroth, I mean."

Ky grinned suddenly. He licked Aiden's lips from one end to the other, enjoying his friend's startled look. "Oh yeah. I'm counting on it."

Chapter Four

The Message

Shareem.

The word shone softly on Brianne's console screen the next morning. It had come in as a text message, that one word, nothing else. Her console could not trace it.

Her heart beat faster as her fingers hovered over her touch pad. She could send a reply—but to who and where? What if it was a journalist trying to get a good story about how Brianne d'Aroth could not resist Shareem?

Best to ignore it.

She removed her fingers from the keypad, finding her palms slick with sweat. Her instincts told her the message came from no journalist.

But she could not risk it. Publicity about yesterday's incident was not what she needed.

They're just animals, aren't they? Dranis had said, sincerity ringing in his voice. He'd been puzzled by her question, and Brianne had been surprised by her answering anger.

She should care nothing about Shareem, not even when they'd been arrested for daring to look at her. They were not part of her world, she never need see them or know about them.

And yet the Shareem in the coffee bar had been so incredible. He'd known she reacted to him, because all women reacted to him. It had been a normal afternoon for him.

I want to see him again.

Brianne got abruptly to her feet. She could not have these thoughts. She could not go anywhere near Shareem. Another highborn woman might indulge in Shareem, but not a d'Aroth. She lived her entire life on the screens of everyone's digital readers.

Not entirely.

As an adolescent she'd learned how to fool the surveillance cameras and the journalists and her own bodyguards to slip out from time to time. Later, when she realized how dangerous it was to wander around alone, she'd ceased. Sensible Brianne, always thinking logically.

She left her rooms before her thoughts could take her places she didn't want to go. Outside, in the vast hall of the elegant compound belonging to the d'Aroth family, her bodyguards snapped to attention. She gave them a cordial nod, then walked past on the way to her endless rounds of meetings. A normal day. Nothing special.

When she returned that evening, tired and irritated at certain council members, notably those from the Ministry of Non-Human Life Forms, several messages waited on her console.

One was from her grandmother about a business matter from one of the meetings. Two were from friends who wanted to talk about preparations for the wedding. The last one was unsigned and contained only one sentence.

Enjoy your dreams.

Brianne's fingers grew cold as she darkened the console.

Was this seduction? Or stalking? Maybe it was one and the same with Shareem.

Brianne moved to her research terminal and brought up the public database of the Ministry of Non-Human Life Forms. Nothing on Shareem, although much on a sand mollusk thought to have been extinct that some biologist had just found in the southern deserts.

The Shareem are a part of Bor Narga's history, and all anyone can talk about are mollusks.

Brianne used her codes to tap into the nonpublic databases. There she found the Shareem, locked away behind several code walls like dirty laundry. She could pull up only the most general information about them—more was hidden behind doors she could not open.

What she found was a brief description of DNAmo and profiles of the Shareem themselves. Short blurbs of information accompanied a holo photo of each, probably provided so the patrollers could keep tabs on them.

Brianne moved through the database to find the Shareem she'd unintentionally gotten arrested. Aiden.

Oh my.

Even the slowly rotating Ministry holo shot could not disguise the perfection of this man. A tail of golden hair reached all the way to his backside, swept back from a square forehead and a symmetrical face.

Face-sculpting was not unusual, though considered the height of vanity, but this man was an art form. Most people got face-sculpted when they were adults and tired of their original looks, but Aiden had been created to be beautiful before he was born.

His makers had programmed his bones to grow to exact proportions, his muscles to fall over them in perfect patterns. His Shareem blue eyes were of the exact size to be sensual, not too big, not too small.

A woman could feast her gaze on this man and never grow tired of him, which was the point.

Brianne's quim was filling again. She thought of the way he'd lapped cream from his coffee, the way his tongue had curled it into his mouth like he'd never tasted anything so good. She suspected that every woman in that coffee bar had thought *will he smile like that when tasting me?*

Mmm.

If she thought of him when she went to bed, she'd enjoy her dreams indeed.

Maybe that's what the message had meant.

She started to sign out of the database, then had another thought. A second Shareem had come to find out what happened to Aiden and had been arrested by her bodyguards as well.

Would an animal be that worried about his friend?

What had the second Shareem's name been? She'd seen it on the report her head bodyguard had reluctantly showed her.

Ky.

Brianne tapped in the codes and another Shareem rose from her screen. She dropped back in her seat, breath rushing from her lungs.

Holy mother goddess.

Ky had not been face-sculpted or body-sculpted. He was nowhere near as handsome as Aiden—he was not even as handsome as Dranis.

What he had was raw sexuality that singed her like heat lightning in the desert. He was built like a god—one of the brutal warrior gods that no one, not even another god, wanted to mess with.

His arms held strength, muscles bulging as though the skin just contained them. His shoulders were broad and powerful, his waist tapered. The modest holo photo did not show his hips and below, but from what his torso looked like, his lower body was sure to be fantastic.

Brianne touched her hands to her face and found her cheeks burning. What was the matter with her? Aiden hadn't had this much of an effect on her, even in person.

Ky's face was hard and powerful, his eyes so burning blue that they seared her even from the holo photo. It was as though he looked right at her instead of at whatever patroller had burned the photo long ago.

Gods, what it must have been like to take his picture.

She knew now who'd sent the messages. Not Aiden, who'd enjoyed a sensual moment with her in the coffee bar. Not the Shareem who'd known she liked watching him lick cream from his cup.

Not Aiden at all.

Ky.

The words seemed to leap from his image, coupled with his burning stare. *Enjoy your dreams.*

Brianne moaned softly. She wanted to touch herself. No, she wanted *him* to touch her. She wanted to watch Aiden run his tongue around the inside of his coffee cup while Ky stood behind her, pinning her in his strong arms and dipping his fingers into her quim.

Gods, why did she want something so depraved? Not only one Shareem, but two? Had she lost her mind?

On impulse, she split the screen and pulled Aiden and Ky up side by side.

Mistake. Her imagination fed her images of Aiden coming closer, maybe bringing the cream with him to lick from her throat while Ky played with her clit, his breath hot in her ear. She could even feel the abrasion of Ky's cheek against hers.

Her juices flowed faster, and she instinctively pressed her legs together, squeezing tight, tight, tight. A half sigh, half groan escaped her mouth.

She found herself snaking her hand between her legs and pressing hard. No, not enough. She leaned back in the chair, inching her robes up her thighs and sliding her fingers to her quim.

She'd done it before in the dark of her bedroom when she'd turned her body monitors off. She had done this when she'd turned eighteen and had been interested in the sexual reactions her body could have, before she'd learned how to firmly suppress them.

Brianne rocked in the chair, her fingers stroking her quim, her mind whirling with images of the Shareem. Aiden drawing his tongue down her throat, licking between her breasts and around her navel.

He'd sink to his knees and press his able tongue against her clit, his tongue mixing with Ky's fingers. They'd bring her to lovely, lovely climax and she'd scream and jerk against Aiden's mouth. He'd suckle her and Ky would rub her.

A cry escaped her, tearing through the empty room.

Yes, yes, *yes!*

"My lady?" The door slid halfway open and one of her guards peered in. "Everything all right?"

Brianne jerked her hands from under her robe and jabbed her console to erase the holo pics. "Yes," she gasped.

The guard stared at her. She must look strange, sweating and breathing hard, her face bright red.

"I heard you call out," he said.

"I'm fine." She sprang from her chair and tried to smooth her hair. "I was reading something is all."

The guard gave her another long look, then shrugged. "As long as you're all right."

"I'm fine. Thank you for your diligence."

He nodded and closed the door. Brianne let out her breath, her hands shaking as she steadied herself on her desk. Dear gods, if her body monitors had been on, her entire guard would have descended on her and whisked her to the hospital.

And she'd only been imagining things. What would it be like to be with them in reality?

She shivered. And smiled. And shivered again.

Brianne touched her finger to her lips and pressed it to the console screen. "Good night," she whispered.

She went to bed that night without body monitors and did what she hadn't done since age eighteen. Then she had some very interesting dreams. In the morning, when she opened her console, she found a message waiting.

Sleep well?

Shaking all over, Brianne sat down and pounded out a text message on the keypad.

YES!

* * * * *

Ky chuckled as he read the one word on the console screen. "I'm enjoying this."

"Remote bondage?" Aiden said.

"I'm getting under her skin. Now for the next step."

He tapped the console's pad, sensing Aiden approach and look over his shoulder. Aiden's pheromones slid over him, comforting and soothing as usual. Level ones were made to make you feel good.

"She'll never do it," Aiden predicted.

"She might."

"Getting her to think about us is one thing. Getting her to meet us in person is something else."

Ky sent the carefully worded message. "She'll refuse at first, but then she won't be able to resist. This is fun. I should have tried this years ago."

"Instead of going straight for the manacles?" Aiden slid his fingers across Ky's bare shoulder. "The art of slow seduction can be—good."

Ky felt his muscles automatically relax under Aiden's touch. Level ones were bred to soothe—even a friendly pat on the back made you smile and your skin warm.

Lately it was doing more than that. Under his clothes, Ky grew long and stiff.

This was getting dangerous. He hadn't thought of the experiments the jackass scientists had done on him at DNAmo for a long time. *White lights, pain, spreading his legs in pleasure.* He closed his eyes.

He knew Aiden could sense his arousal. Aiden was Shareem, of course he could. Aiden's pheromones changed, becoming less soothing and more seducing. Broad fingers slid down Ky's bare chest and touched his small gold nipple ring. Ky's cock stretched farther, pressing the tight leather into an obvious bulge.

Aiden flicked the nipple ring with one finger, then eased his hand down to cover the length of Ky's cock. He pressed his palm against the bulge, sliding down it in one long stroke.

Ky laced his fingers around Aiden's wrist, stopping him. Aiden glanced sideways, his Shareem-blue eyes darkening.

Ky slowly shook his head. Aiden's expression went still.

The kissing had been fine. Hell, Ky wanted to explore the kissing and see how far it could go. Nothing had happened except a stir of pleasure when they'd kissed. Anything more might trigger...

If he and Aiden were going to experiment—shit, he hated the word *experiment*—they needed to go slowly.

Ky moved Aiden's hand upward again until Aiden's fingers rested on Ky's nipple ring. That was fine.

Watching Ky carefully, Aiden drew his fingertip around Ky's flat areola. "Do you want me to go?"

Ky looked up in surprise. "Go where?"

"Anywhere." Aiden's expression was guarded. "Anywhere not here."

"Why? Because you want to touch my body?" He made a show of shrugging. "I know I'm irresistible, I'll just have to live with it."

He rose from the chair, shaking off Aiden's touch. He caught a glimpse of his friend's face before he turned away, and stopped, disquieted. Had he seen *hurt* in Aiden's eyes?

He and Aiden had been friends forever, and he figured they'd go on being friends until their Shareem bodies wore out from all the sex they had. Then they'd be dead and taken to the gods together.

"A kiss and a fondle isn't going to turn me into a recluse," Ky said. "If you were Braden, on the other hand, I'd have thrown your ass out."

"Braden's another Dom." Aiden's voice was low, sensual. "I'd want to be a sub."

Ky's cock leapt again at the thought of seeing Aiden in his collar. "You'd make a crappy sub. I've never seen you be obedient."

"Doesn't that add spice? When you have to train the sub?"

They looked at each other. Aiden was taller than Ky by half an inch, his shoulders just as broad but not as loaded with muscle.

"Come here," Ky said.

"Why?"

"See? You're already disobeying. You'd suck at being a sub." He smoothed the hair off Aiden's forehead. "We're friends, you and me. I probably would have died after we ran from DNAmo if not for you. I'm not letting that go to hell because you want to kiss me. Friends should be able to kiss without it being a big deal."

Aiden watched him with a neutral expression. It was always hard to figure out what was going on in Aiden's head, whereas Ky's emotions were right out in the open.

That was one reason they got along so well—their differences. Ky's weaknesses were Aiden's strengths and vice versa.

Ky leaned forward and licked Aiden's lips from side to side as he had the night before in the showers. Aiden didn't move, but he responded with slight pressure, kissing Ky's tongue.

More. Ky wrapped his strong hand behind Aiden's neck and pulled him into the kiss, snaking his tongue into the other man's mouth. The spicy, dark taste of Aiden made his cock harden still more.

Pleasure, his body said. *There is much pleasure to be had here.*

Aiden was made to please with slow, soothing pleasure. Ky had been made to please with punishment and the sting of the lash. The combination would be explosive.

And so damn dangerous.

Ky eased his mouth from Aiden's. He waited a moment, but nothing happened, and he slowly let out his breath.

Aiden hadn't touched him the whole time, standing as still as a desert snake trying to decide whether to flee or strike. Ky had his hand firmly against the nape of Aiden's neck, holding him as fast as an iron collar.

"This," Ky murmured. *"This I can do."*

The bastards at DNAmo had at least not taken away the joy of kissing his best friend.

Aiden's eyes filled with blue, and Ky kissed him again. Their lips bumped and explored, tongues tangling. The heat of Aiden's mouth fascinated Ky, and he delved to the corners of it.

His cock swelled as he tasted and probed, liking the feel of Aiden's breath on his face and the scent of him so close. Ky felt pulsing at the base of his staff, ready to go at this new sensation.

Aiden splayed his hand across Ky's chest, his thumb flicking the nipple ring. At the tingling sensation, Ky's seed threatened to burst from him.

"If I don't stop, I'm going to come in my pants," he said against Aiden's cheek. *"The great, powerful Dom you live with."*

Aiden pulled away slightly, but his hand remained in place on Ky's chest. *"We should stop then. I'm not paying for your laundry."*

Ky's clouded mind tried to come up with something witty to say, but the console chimed just then, saving him the effort.

He turned away, breaking the contact, his body temperature in the stratosphere.

"The lady can't resist," he said.

Aiden followed him to the console. Ky brought up the message which contained one word.

No.

Ky laughed and twined his fingers together, cracking his knuckles. "She's on the hook now. Later today, we reel her in."

Aiden folded his arms over his hard chest. Ky could read the signals rolling off him, the chemicals sliding through the air to mix with his. There were two very erect Shareem in the room, that was for sure.

"Good," Aiden said quietly. "I'd like to see her again. In the meantime..."

He feathered light fingers through Ky's hair. Ky reached up and pulled him down for another long, satisfying, tongue-filled kiss.

Chapter Five

The Train

When the next message came, Brianne nearly panicked. *I can't want this. I can't.*

Warm afternoon sun slid through the shielded windows of her office and touched her fingers on the keypad of her console. A text message blinked softly.

You are ready.

Her hands slick with sweat she typed, *No.*

She sent the message, trying not to feel disappointed in herself. The Shareem would soon tire of the game and move on to another woman.

What she'd read about Shareem told her they could not touch a woman until she said they could. It was a built-in mechanism to keep them under control. No Shareem could ravish a woman, whatever Dranis thought. Once she said no, the Shareem had to leave her alone. So that was that.

Brianne let out her breath as she tried to put the incident and the messages behind her. She needed to concentrate on her upcoming functions, a charity for the small communities beyond the dry sea and a project to allow children in the poorer parts of town to learn music.

The console chimed softly and a new message spread itself on her screen.

Take the last outbound train of the afternoon from Pas City toward Elred. Move to the front car after the stop at Ahjed. We will have two hours of uninterrupted journey.

Good gods, the Shareem called Ky must be sitting at his console right now. His dark brown hair would be tumbling to his waist, his intense blue eyes fixed on the screen, waiting for her reply. Her cold sweat returned.

It would be so easy for her to turn the messages over to her head of security, to let him track down the Shareem and punish him for stalking her. That would be the wise thing to do.

Her imagination returned to the coffee bar and the blond Shareem dipping his tongue into the cream, blue eyes fixed slyly on her. Her heart beat swiftly.

She wrote, *What part of no don't you understand?* and sent it.

Not a moment later came the reply. *You are so ready.*

Brianne slammed her hand to the console's off button. She rarely turned off her console, because she received important messages all the time, but she couldn't take any more of this.

She pictured Ky smiling his Shareem smile on the other side of the screen, knowing she'd be on that outbound train. No matter what she tried to tell herself, she knew deep down inside that she'd go.

She wouldn't be able to resist.

* * * * *

As the hover train shot her northward, Brianne understood why the Shareem had wanted her on the service to Elred. This late on a weekday evening, very few travelers were interested in the remote communities along the canyons to the north. After Ahjed, the front car was completely empty.

Hover trains were steered from the rear, the car guided by grav fields which interacted with the field of the track. The front car gave a view of miles and miles of nothing fading to dark as the glaring sun set.

Brianne touched controls to opaque the windows between the front car and the one behind it, although no one sat in that car either. Alone, she sank into a seat and watched the walls of the box canyon close in on the train.

Two hours ahead was Elred, a small community of crystal miners and people who wanted to retire someplace quiet and remote. Deep wells dug by state-of-the-art equipment allowed people to exist in the dry canyon where water hadn't flowed above ground for at least a million years. She'd been there once at a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new well. Very few had turned out for the event.

When the door of the car opened behind her she tensed but didn't turn. She knew the Shareem entered—she could feel the strange combination of excitement and relaxation pour over her as it had in the coffee bar.

"Close the door," a male voice said.

She jumped, thinking he meant for her to get up and do it, but she heard another man rumble in the affirmative and then the door closed. Dear goddess, *both* of them.

Brianne looked around in alarm. The blond Shareem she'd seen in the coffee bar turned from closing the door and bathed her in a slow smile. Her blood heated and she swallowed, knowing he remembered every detail of her reaction to him. He carried an intricately carved box under his arm, which he set carefully on a seat.

The Shareem with him looked like he had no humor in him at all. Dark brows drew together over his Shareem-blue eyes and his bulging arms were folded across his leather-clad chest.

This was Ky, she recognized from his holo photo in the ministry's database. He was not as tall as Aiden but more massive, his dark hair flowing in tangled waves to his waist. A level three, made for bondage and domination, not just sex—more sex than a woman could handle. Walking sexuality.

I came here to apologize to them. Nothing more.

Her tightening quim told her she lied to herself.

She dipped her head in a cordial nod while Aiden smiled and Ky scowled. She could at least be polite.

"I am Brianne d'Aroth," she said.

"We know who you are," Ky rumbled. His voice was rough and grating, used to command.

"I sincerely apologize for the inconvenience of your arrests." Brianne was expert at saying the proper thing even when agitated. "My bodyguards acted without my knowledge. I assure you, the mistake —"

"Strip," Ky said abruptly.

"—will be made up to you... *What?*"

"Strip," Ky repeated, unmoving. "So I can paddle your ass."

"Level threes like to get right to the point." Aiden casually opened the carved box revealing a row of glittering bottles resting on black velvet. His voice was lower, quieter, more seductive. *Come with me, darling, and I'll make you feel good*, it said. "We can't force you. You might enjoy having me help you out of your clothes, but if Ky does it, he won't be gentle."

Brianne glanced at Ky whose hard face gave truth to the words. "Because you're a level one?" she stammered at Aiden.

"Yes," Aiden said. "Level ones are about pure sensuality. Oils smoothed on you so my hands glide over you. A piece of silk brushed over your skin. Water trickled down your back to slide between your ass cheeks."

She swallowed, feeling each sensation as Aiden described them as palpably as if he were doing them.

Aiden lifted a bottle from the box and cradled it in his palms. "Ky will tie your hands and spank you until you do whatever he wants. I'll smooth your body with oil and do whatever *you* want. Which would you like first? Maybe Ky to punish you and me to soothe it all better?"

She looked from one to the other, backing up a step. "I didn't come here for—anything sexual. I came to apologize, to offer recompense. Nothing more."

Ky moved toward her. "Yes, you did."

"Did what?" He confused her.

"You came here for something sexual. If you didn't want that, you would have sent a note."

She shook her head. "I have no intention of having sex. Ever. I've never had sex. Not with a man."

Aiden's smile widened. "Then you have had it with a woman?"

Brianne gasped. "No, of course not."

"There's no shame in enjoying a woman."

"I meant that I'd gone to the clinic," she said hastily. "I'm not a virgin. But I've never..."

"Had a man inside you," Aiden finished. "Had his cock fill you until you moaned with it, never had him make your pussy wet."

A vision suddenly shot into her mind of Ky buried deep inside her, his muscled arms bunching as he drove himself into her. Aiden would hold her head in his lap, hands soothing as Ky fucked her.

And *fucked* was not a word Brianne d'Aroth was used to using. They were doing something to her, the pair of them.

Mirth danced in Aiden's eyes as though he knew what she'd just thought. The two of them had every intention of doing something to her, his look said.

"Remove your clothes," Ky said. "I'm losing patience."

"I'd do it," Aiden advised. He caressed the glass stopper of the bottle, finger moving lovingly around it.

Her heart squeezed. "What if someone comes in?"

"They won't," Aiden said. "This train is mostly empty, only a few hardy souls in the back who don't look like they'll move until the last stop. We're alone."

Ky added in a soft voice, "If they do come in, what will they see? You naked for us?"

Brianne blushed. She'd never been bare in front of anyone but her doctor, a middle-aged woman who saw the human body as a collection of biological components. Never in front of a man, or anyone who'd be interested in her in a sexual way. She didn't *know* anyone interested in her in a sexual way.

Ky took another step toward her. Brianne looked at his large hands and could almost hear the fabric of her robes tearing. She grasped the top clasp. "All right. I'm stripping."

She touched the catch that held her robes in place and the magnetic seals came apart. She wore no body monitors, having removed them and left them in her apartment. She'd left her pagers, too. She'd told her bodyguards that she would spend the rest of the afternoon and evening meditating and didn't want to be disturbed. Everyone on her staff understood, thinking she needed to recover from her "ordeal" yesterday.

She'd come out here alone with no way for her bodyguards to find her.

She had to be out of her mind.

But they were Shareem. They could not harm her. Their programming made it so that they would do only what she wanted.

In their own special way.

The look on Ky's face told her that he'd push the boundaries as far as possible, never technically violating his programming.

Brianne's heart beat swift and hard. She let her robes fall, catching them before they could touch the floor. Aiden took them from her, smoothing them over a seat. Beneath the robes Brianne wore a plain sleeveless tunic of costly fabric that skimmed her body.

She sensed their pheromones rise as they looked at her. Ky had a definite bulge in the front of his leather leggings, and Aiden's eyes were brilliant blue. Two Shareem males aroused.

Because of *her*.

It was exciting making men excited. Dranis had never been excited in his life.

"Keep stripping," Ky said.

Brianne put her hand to the clasp at the back of her neck. "I am betrothed," she said.

Aiden smiled. "We know. We saw it on the digitals. You could have brought him along."

The idea of Dranis going anywhere near Shareem or having sexual thoughts at all made her snort with laughter. "That would never happen."

"He wouldn't give you pleasure?" Aiden asked, sounding genuinely curious.

"Not Dranis. I am not marrying for that."

"Why not?"

"She's highborn," Ky said in disgust. "She's the highest-born of all. They never marry because they like someone."

"I have to," she flared. "I have to make this marriage. It's expected of me."

"So you picked him out, why? Because he wouldn't bother you too much?"

"You know nothing about it."

"I know more than you think."

They stopped, Brianne breathing hard, Ky holding her gaze.

"Leave her be, Ky," Aiden said softly.

To Brianne's surprise, Ky shot Aiden a sideways look then nodded. Aiden caressed the bottle again and for some reason Brianne felt soothed, like he had stroked her skin.

"Highborn women," Ky said again though his voice was not as harsh. "You almost got Aiden terminated and you didn't even know it."

"My bodyguards acted without my authority. They thought I was in danger."

"Good thing our friends found out," Ky said. "Or you might have apologized to Aiden too late. I would have lost my best friend. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Of course it does. I would have felt terrible. I already do feel terrible."

Ky shot Aiden an ironic look. "It would have upset her. Poor little thing."

"Ky," Aiden said in a warning tone.

Ky ignored him. "What are you going to do to make it up to us?"

"What do you want me to do? I am very wealthy as you keep pointing out. I can make a generous donation to anything you wish. I truly want to apologize."

"As if money could make up for it."

Aiden lifted his hand. "Hey, wait a minute. I like money."

Ky reached into a pocket and pulled out what looked like short strips of leather attached to a handle. Her eyes widened. "What is that?"

"A flogger. Are you brave enough to take it?"

She kept her gaze fixed on the leather. "To take what?"

"Your punishment. You said you wanted to make it up to us."

"And that will clear things between us?"

"It will be a start," Ky said.

The blue in Aiden's eyes had widened again, and Brianne felt a strange lassitude come over her. They truly had suffered, and she should have been more observant about what her bodyguards were up to. It had been her responsibility. If it made them happy to have Ky spank her with the flogger, then...

She swallowed. *Spank. Flogger. Oh gods.*

Ky sent her a small smile. "Are you brave enough, little princess?"

"I'm not a princess."

"You are in everything but name. Pampered, spoiled, highborn, hiding behind shielded walls. Can you take a Shareem?"

"Of course I can." Lassitude, excitement, worry and need rolled together to make her shake.

"Can you? Show me."

He didn't believe her. Ky expected her to cry off, to tell them to stop, to snatch up her robes and run to the back of the train where other passengers lingered. He had brought her here fully believing she'd never go through with it. His half-smile told her so.

Enraged, she grabbed clasp at the back of her tunic and wrenched it open. The tunic unfastened automatically and she pulled it off along with her underwear. She did it quickly, nearly ripping the garments in the process. He thought she was afraid, did he? A weak highborn woman too timid to strip in front of a Shareem, too weak to take the attentions of a level three?

She was completely naked before she realized what she'd done.

Aiden roved his gaze up and down her body, his face still. "Now that is perfection."

Cool air touched her skin and her clit began to tingle. The sun had gone, the sky darkening, streaked with burning pink.

She was naked in a *train*. In front of two *Shareem*.

Ky didn't waste time admiring her. "Turn around and put your hands on that pole." He indicated a vertical pole attached to the end of a seat. "Above your head."

Brianne obeyed. She'd kept her shoes on, soft embroidered slippers made for an afternoon's meditation. They made no noise as she walked over to the pole. Drawing a breath she grasped the cold metal, her arms reaching high.

She felt them behind her even as her fingers closed around the hard pole. Ky in cool leather touched her on one side, Aiden in linen that smelled of male and scented oil touched her on the other.

The strange relaxation she'd been feeling increased, making her limbs warm and loose, widening her mouth into a smile. Pheromones poured over her, making her nipples tighten and her quim wetter than she'd ever felt it.

Her smile turned to a gasp when Ky wrapped leather tethers around her wrists and secured them to the pole.

She turned to him, eyes wide, but he did not look at her. His dark hair slid over his leather tunic, his eyes as intensely blue as Aiden's.

Aiden removed the stopper from his bottle, scenting the air with dark spice and flowers. "Do you like this one?" he asked. "I have others. This one seems to fit you."

The odor reminded her of the jasmine that flowered in her force-shielded garden as well as cinnamon and cardamom, expensive spices shipped in from off-planet. Cinnamon and cardamom were her favorites.

"Yes," she breathed.

Aiden poured a stream of oil into his palm then eased the scented warmth onto her skin. A feeling of deep contentment mixed with excitement swirled through her. Aiden's strong hands smoothed her shoulders and down her sides, then across her waist and upward to her breasts. His fingers slid over her nipples, teasing them into points.

"You like this." His breath touched her ear.

Who wouldn't?

"Oh yes."

"Enjoy it," Ky said. He'd moved to her side again, leather brushing her skin. His eyes had filled with blue.

He flicked his gaze to Aiden, and she thought she saw a brief spark of pain. He caught her focus on him and quickly masked his expression.

"Why are you doing this?" she asked.

"Because you had us arrested," Ky answered at once.

"And then you let us out," Aiden said.

"I couldn't let you die," Brianne babbled. "It wasn't fair. You're not animals."

"So many think we are." Ky's body brushed hers, his erection obvious.

"I do not."

"She has a kind heart," Aiden said. "I can feel it." He pressed his hands under her breasts and laughed softly.

Ky slid a broad hand along her oiled belly and twined his fingers with Aiden's. "It's beating so fast."

"I can't help it," she breathed.

"She likes when we both touch her," Aiden said. "She likes two men."

Brianne gulped. "Two? I've never even been with *one*."

Their hands moved together over her breasts, Ky's calloused and hard, Aiden's strong but gentle. Heat pooled in her belly and between her legs, and she moved her hips, thrusting without knowing why.

"I think she wants something," Aiden said, chuckling.

Without speaking, the two let their hands rove across the sensitive skin of her lower abdomen and brush the curls at her pussy. She pressed her hips forward, wanting to rub herself on their hands.

"Lovely," Aiden murmured.

The scent of the oil and the touch of the Shareem made her lethargic. They were able to do that, she'd read, calm a woman with their touch. She certainly needed to be calmed. As the train swayed through the darkening desert, her heart beat rapidly and her body felt like fire.

Their fingers tangled at the join of her legs, Ky's touch rougher than Aiden's. *Touch me, touch me. Please don't stop touching me.*

"She's going to come," Ky's voice held curiosity. "So soon."

"Do you want to come, Brianne?" Aiden whispered.

"Yes." She moved her hips. Last night, she'd climaxed for the first time since she'd made herself stop exploring herself under the bedclothes at the age of eighteen. Once again, she was at the breaking point, wanting, *needing*, to come.

"Not until I allow it." Ky's mouth pressed her ear, his rough whiskers abrading her cheek. "You are not allowed to come until I give you permission."

She whimpered. She needed release. Her skin burned, her blood so hot.

"Do you want to come?" Aiden asked again. His voice was soft, low, soothing.

"Yes. *Please*."

"Not yet." Ky's voice was stern.

"Oh gods."

She would die if they didn't let her come. She moved her hips into their hands, rubbing hard. "Please, Ky. Please let me."

"You would disobey me?"

Her heart gave a wild beat. Ky's body was hard next to hers, his heat and scent spilling over her.

"I have to come," she whispered.

"When you are with me, you obey me. If you don't, I punish you."

"Punish?"

"With a spanking," Aiden said on her other side. They were so close their bodies touched, sandwiching her in. "Ky is very good at it."

"How do you know?" she asked, words slurring. "Has he spanked you?"

Aiden stilled a moment, then he laughed. "No."

"Not yet," Ky rumbled.

Brianne looked up at him. His eyes were pure blue, skin flushed. He growled something, then pulled Aiden to him on the other side of the pole. Startled, Aiden nearly fell, then caught himself on the pole, biceps bulging.

Ky kissed him. He kissed Aiden fiercely as Brianne watched, their hands still tight against her quim. Ky's tongue thrust into Aiden's mouth, firmly exploring.

Brianne got lost in the pheromones rolling off the two Shareem. They swamped her senses and her knees began to buckle. Her quim swelled and tingled and she screamed with it. A dark wave swamped her as she came, bucking into their hands.

Ky turned his head and transferred his kiss to her, his tongue prodding her lips open, invading her. Aiden joined him, his lips on Brianne's mouth, his tongue tangling with Ky's. The three-way kiss went on and on as though neither man could stop.

She knew they could send chemicals into her body to induce excitement and lassitude. That could be the only explanation for why she licked and kissed them like she couldn't get enough.

When Aiden drew away, she tried to follow. "No."

Aiden chuckled. Ky broke the kiss and took a step back, taking away his delicious warmth.

"You came," he said, his breathing hard.

Brianne's own breath came in gasps and she stayed on her feet only because she was tied to the pole. "Yes. Thank you."

"Without my permission."

Her heart raced. "I didn't mean to."

Aiden shot her a smile. "Why not? You mean I'm losing my touch?"

"No. Your – touch – is wonderful."

Ky leaned into her, his hard body a sudden menace. "You were supposed to wait for my permission."

"I couldn't." She gave him a defiant look. "You knew I wouldn't be able to wait."

He pressed against her, leather covering her bare skin. "You knew I'd punish you."

She held her breath. He wouldn't *really*. She was a d'Aroth, of the ruling family, and he was – less than human according to the Ministry of Non-Human Life Forms and most people on Bor Narga.

But she knew that in this train, right now, Ky didn't give a damn who she was or how far above him she was on the social ladder. He was the Dom and she'd agreed to play by his rules.

I don't understand his rules.

"You have a choice." Ky drew the handle of his flogger across her lips. The leather tasted salty and smelled of him. "You can prove to me you can take your punishment, or I can walk away." He dragged his tongue around the swirl of her ear. "Maybe you can get free before the train stops."

Brianne tested her bonds. Aiden had not tied them tight enough to cut into her wrists, but enough that she could not loosen them. He'd known exactly how to do it.

The train would stop, and there would be Brianne d'Aroth, naked and bound to a pole. What a lovely story that would make on a digital.

She swallowed. "I can take it."

Aiden touched her back, his fingers calming. "Are you sure?"

He sounded slightly worried, which worried her. She nodded, biting her lip.

Ky stepped behind her. She felt the loose, cool strands of the leather on her backside. "Get ready," his breath warmed her ear.

"I am—"

Her words cut off at the cut and sting of the leather. Once, twice, three times. And then Aiden's hand soothing away the hurt.

She closed her eyes and let out a half groan. She'd always wondered why on earth a woman would let a man do this to her, but she hadn't understood the joy that would wrap her entire body, the pleasure of surrender.

"Again," she whispered.

"Are you sure?" Ky's voice held a note of surprise.

"Very sure." She dragged open her eyes and looked up at him. "Please."

His eyes flickered. Aiden's hand on her backside smoothed and soothed and felt so good.

Ky gave Aiden a curt nod, and Aiden took a step back. The flogger stung across her backside and hips, *slap*, sting, *slap*, sting. She could almost taste the Shareem chemicals in the air, pouring excitement and happiness over her until her knees started to buckle.

Aiden held her up with one strong hand. The lash continued to flicker over her skin, stinging, but not too hard, wielded by Ky's expert hand. Aiden caught some of the strokes on his thigh and arm, but he didn't flinch. In fact, his flush deepened as he held her under her arms, fingertips stroking her flesh in calming circles.

She had a sudden vision of Aiden stark naked and kneeling on a train seat while Ky spanked him with the flogger. His cock would stand out at a hard angle and he'd moan softly with pleasure.

The vision triggered her release. Aiden, eyes filled with blue, thrust his large hand against her quim, rubbing and stroking as she came.

As her last gasp died away, Ky stepped aside and folded up his flogger. Brianne rested her forehead against the pole, breathing hard, her body flooded with a joy she'd never felt before.

Aiden stroked his hand through her hair, fingers soothing. He smelled warm and male, and she loved him standing so close. If Ky would close up on her other side like before, perhaps touching her as Aiden did, she'd be content.

The train chose that moment to slow. Brianne made a sound of disappointment.

"Almost there," Ky said.

He reached up and with a few twitches of his fingers, had her bonds undone. She gave him a look of surprise. The knots had been so tight and unmovable before.

Ky tossed her silk tunic to her. "You should probably get dressed."

Brianne caught the fabric and pressed it to her skin, no longer ashamed of being naked in front of him. He stood too far away from her, out of reach. She wanted to wrap her arms around him and lean her head against his chest and say, *Thank you for showing me what pleasure is like.*

She wanted to know if he liked how she looked, if he'd enjoyed touching her and spanking her as much as she had enjoyed him doing it. *Please make some sign that this was special to you.*

Ky remained still, his expression unreadable. It was Aiden who slid his warm arms around her from behind and pressed a kiss to her cheek. "You are delectable. I knew you would be." Another kiss. "The train doesn't go back until first thing tomorrow, so you'd better find a place to stay."

Brianne had known that and had already made arrangements to stay in what passed for luxurious accommodation out here, keeping up her "meditation" pretense.

Ky tucked his flogger back into his pocket. "She'll have a private transport come meet her. Her kind always do."

She began a hot retort, but stopped because of course she'd arranged private transport to her hotel. He read her well.

Ky gave her a knowing look, then he turned and walked away. Her gaze riveted to his leather-clad backside, likely as he wanted it to. He pulled open the door to the next train compartment—fortunately empty—and sauntered through.

Aiden tilted her head back and kissed her on the lips. "You were beautiful, Brianne. Sweet dreams."

A wink and a smile, and he followed Ky out of the car.

Brianne remained where she was, clothes against her chest, heart beating hard. Reality began to trickle past the Shareem pheromones and the endorphins they'd stirred inside her.

She'd just had sexual play with two men—two *Shareem*—in a train car. And loved every minute of it.

This is my punishment, she realized. Not Ky's flogger stinging her, but knowing what it felt like to experience true sexual pleasure and knowing she'd likely not have it again.

Ky had gotten his revenge, and she'd walked right into it.

The train jerked and the lighted station ahead loomed large. Brianne jumped, gave a little squeak, and hurriedly threw on her clothes, finishing just as the hover train jolted to a halt in the barren station.

As she departed the train, she looked up and down the empty platform but saw no sign of the two *Shareem*. They were gone.

Chapter Six

Two and Three

Aiden and Ky headed for the small inn near the train station that took Shareem, the landlady not caring much who her customers were as long as they paid in advance.

Ky transferred money from his account, it being his turn to pay, and they went up the stairs to the room they usually took, small and over the dank kitchen.

Aiden quickly closed the door and leaned on it. His face was flushed, eyes filled with blue. "I'm never doing that again, being with someone that sexy and not releasing. I'm dying."

Ky didn't answer, but began stripping off his clothes. He needed to release too and his brain was too tense for him to answer. Aiden closed the storm shutters that were encased with dust, and sneezed.

"Sandstorm might be coming," he said. "The wind smells wrong."

Ky didn't care right now about Bor Narga's winds kicking up walls of sand that could tear flesh from bones. He'd weathered a sandstorm in this inn before. The shutters had held but leaked sand inside and made the sheets gritty.

Ky finished taking off his clothes and unclasped the leather that held his thong in place. He fetched towels from the bathroom and spread them on the bed and then opened Aiden's box of oils.

As Aiden watched, Ky pulled out an amber-colored bottle, the oil in this one smelled a little of chocolate. He liked the exotic scent and Aiden always kept some made up for him.

"I bet Brianne's hotel room is lush," Aiden said. He stripped off his tunic and let it fall on the floor. "The bed must be soft and smell good with her in it."

"The hotel won't let Shareem in," Ky said.

"Don't ruin my fantasies. She was hot, you have to admit."

"Yes. That's why I need release." Ky sat on the edge of the bed and stretched out his legs, parting them. "If she'd been boring, I'd be watching a digital."

"If you watched a digital about farming right now you'd still be excited." His blue gaze drifted along Ky's groin. "I've never seen you this hard."

"I had incentive."

Ky poured oil into his palm and slid his hand up his shaft from balls to tip. He closed his eyes at the sensation, which was slightly relieving but not enough. More oil, another soothing stroke.

His cock was hard and dark, the large tip almost purple. He knew Aiden was right—he'd never been this aching before, even after teasing a woman without releasing himself. But the scent of Brienne covered in Aiden's oil and the taste of her skin, the heat of her pussy had been good. So *good*.

Even better had been Aiden's fingers caressing his as they both stroked her, and Aiden's tongue hard in his mouth. The combination of woman and man—he'd never felt anything so potentially explosive in his existence.

He pleased himself in long, squeezing strokes, trying to build the excitement so that he could release before he ignited. The excitement heightened, but not near enough. It didn't help that Aiden watched, his eyes betraying his arousal, not to mention the elongated cock that sprang out when he tossed aside his loincloth.

Usually they released without paying attention to each other, but after yesterday, something had changed.

"Come here," Ky ordered. "Help me."

Aiden sat next to him on the bed. "What do you want me to do?"

"Touch me. I need to come."

Aiden moved his large hand toward him. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. For the gods' sake. Before I die."

Aiden brushed his thumb across Ky's tip. Ky groaned and thrust his hips upward. "More."

Ky held his cock firmly at the base while Aiden played with his tip, Aiden's Shareem body roasting hot against Ky's arm. He turned his head to see Aiden's perfect face, his eyes riveted on Ky. Their mouths hovered near each other, not kissing but breaths tangling.

Not enough.

"Stand up," Ky said.

Aiden unwound his fingers from Ky and rose to his feet. Ky stood and faced the bed, pressing his thighs against the hard mattress. Aiden seemed to know what he wanted. He stepped behind Ky, his cock pressing against Ky's ass, and snaked his hand around to Ky's front.

Ky poured more oil directly on his shaft and he and Aiden smoothed the oil over it together. He studied Aiden's brown fingers and his own browner ones against his staff, liking the contrast, and *damn* did he like the feel.

Ky did a few strokes then let Aiden take over. Aiden's expert fingers traced Ky's flange then drew down either side of his staff to his balls. Aiden's breath was warm in his ear, his hardness gently nestling between Ky's buttocks. Ky groaned softly, liking the scent of Aiden mixed with the scent of Brienne still on them. He closed his eyes.

So this was what it was like to give yourself into the hands of a level one. They were experts in sensuality, able to soothe and excite by simple touching.

When their touch moved beyond the simple, they became masters. Aiden knew exactly how much to play and squeeze, exactly how much pressure to use on Ky's stem and when to circle the tip with light fingers. Aiden tickled and played with Ky's balls, before closing his hand completely around his shaft in one smooth stroke. Oil welled up under Aiden's fingers and beaded around Ky's flange. Aiden's hand moved in sensual rhythm, up and down, stroke by stroke. His body warmth covered Ky, his free hand splayed across Ky's abdomen.

Ky leaned back against him. "No wonder you're always happy," he gasped. "If this is how you bring yourself off."

"It's a gift," Aiden murmured. He nibbled Ky's ear.

As a Dom Ky didn't allow anything so playful as ear-nibbling. But Aiden could do it. His best friend, his roommate, his confidant.

His lover?

What would it be like to be his lover all the way? To slide an oiled cock into Aiden's tight ass and run his hands over his perfect body? To have Aiden moan with bliss and beg him for more?

Ky felt a twinge in his left arm and hastily drew a black curtain over the vision. *Too dangerous. Don't go there.*

Aiden stroking him didn't seem to be a problem, but then it was nothing different than what a woman would do to him.

Stroking me. Kissing me. I'll have to be content with that.

Ky could do much more with Brianne d'Aroth. That was allowed. Besides, she had a sweet ass. He'd flogged it red then watched as Aiden soothed the hurt away. If he could do that again, then share her with Aiden, or maybe tie Aiden up and only let him *watch* Ky fill Brianne, he'd be a happy man. His heart leapt and his cock did too. Aiden chuckled and licked his ear.

The sandstorm hit, shaking the walls and banging the shutters, building in intensity until it sounded like a thousand pieces of machinery rumbling all at once.

"Damn storms," Aiden muttered.

"Doesn't matter. No one will hear us. This is *fucking* good."

"Why haven't we tried it before?" Aiden asked.

Ky knew damn well why, but now wasn't the time to explain. This was the time to lean against Aiden and let Aiden do his thing.

"I love your cock," Aiden said in his ear. "I love watching you fuck with it. You're a master."

"I've practiced."

"You're Shareem. But it's more than that."

Ky thought he might explain, but Aiden fell silent. Ky pressed his own fingers against his sac, feeling the seed pulse. He pinched a fold of skin, wanting to prolong the delight.

Aiden's body was roasting hot against his back, and Ky could tell his friend was building toward climax. His cock rubbed Ky's ass like he wanted to come in, but wouldn't without permission.

Not yet. We gotta take it slow.

Aiden gasped. "Oh no."

"What?" Ky asked thickly.

"You're so fucking good." Aiden made a noise of pleasure and bit Ky's ear. "I'm coming."

"Doesn't mean you can stop."

Aiden squeezed Ky hard, just as Ky felt Aiden's hot seed cover his backside. The pulsing inside him built to the breaking point, and he could no longer hold it back.

"Sweet gods." He groaned his release as thin ropes of come shot through Aiden's fingers and onto the waiting towels.

Aiden grabbed Ky by the nape of the neck and started kissing him, the deep hot kiss of release.

"Do me," he said, his eyes still an aroused blue. He took Ky's fingers and wrapped them around his already hardening cock. "Do me now."

Ky hesitated a moment, wanting badly to touch and caress his friend in return. He waited just long enough for the warning twinge to begin in his arm.

Alarm swirled through him and he let his hand drop. "No. I can't."

He didn't imagine the hurt in Aiden's eyes this time. He saw it plainly—along with his anger.

The sandstorm escalated, beating at the shutters and sending a thin stream of sand through the cracks to sting their eyes.

"Stuff a towel or something in that damn window," Ky said.

Wiping his eyes, his erection hot and heavy, he stalked to the bathroom where it took him a half-hour to coax water from the reluctant pipes.

When he returned from his unsatisfying shower, he found Aiden dressed and watching a digital, the sound turned up to be heard over the storm. A sheet protruded from the crack in the shutters and only a tiny trickle of sand spattered to the floor.

The two did not speak for the rest of the night.

* * * * *

The train left Elred after dawn, carrying people into the city to work. There was one first-class car and Brianne was its only occupant.

Brianne sat back in the private compartment and sighed as the train headed for open desert. She could not quite believe she'd ridden in this train last evening in the working-class car and let two Shareem pleasure her.

When she'd awakened this morning she'd groggily imagined it a dream, but when she'd come fully awake, the reality rushed back at her. She lay in a bland hotel room instead of her own bed, and she had indeed let Aiden tie her to a cool pole and Ky slap her with a flogger.

She blushed at the memory, but part of her warmed in excitement. It had been real.

She'd called Harbough, the captain of her guard, and informed him that she'd stayed in Elred overnight so as not to interrupt her meditation. His look had said, *whatever*, but he'd murmured a respectful, "Yes, m'lady."

She thought of the slick feel of Aiden's hands spreading oil on her body, the growling impatience of Ky, the sting of leather across her backside, the way her heart had leapt when Aiden and Ky had kissed each other in front of her.

Their tongues had probed each other's mouths, eyes closing, lashes resting on strong cheekbones. It never would have occurred to her that seeing men kissing each other would turn her on so.

Then again, they had been two very attractive, *sexy* men.

Ky had a rugged sexiness she'd never quite forget. His growling voice, his hard body, the way his blue gaze bore right into her. Aiden's sinful handsomeness also made her heart flutter, but not in the same way as Ky's did.

Gods, please don't tell me I'm falling for a bondage master who hates me for imprisoning his best friend.

She couldn't fall for anyone. *I'm getting married and will create a daughter who will head committees and smile for the digitals.*

The girl-child would have the best combination of genes from herself and Dranis. That meant she'd have brown hair and brown eyes and a pleasant face, not too pretty, because women of Bor Narga should admire her but not envy her.

Why did Brianne suddenly see a toddling girl-child with bright blue eyes and a winsome Shareem-like smile? She'd be adorable.

She stopped the thought. Shareem could not impregnate women, they were forbidden to on threat of death. They had inoculations every half year to keep them infertile.

Why is this the first time I've thought that practice cruel?

She could do something about it. She was Brianne d'Aroth and she had the power of her position. She was good at helping make the lives of the poor and working class a little better, why not the lives of Shareem?

Would anyone listen to her if they knew she'd just enjoyed letting two Shareem pleasure her? Or would they think her as besotted as Talan d'Urvey?

The difference was, Talan had boldly stayed with her Shareem and married him. It was likely Brianne would never see hers again.

Why do I think of them as mine? They are the ones who coerced me out here. I couldn't possess them if I tried.

Strange that the world saw them as sex slaves when they were so clearly in charge of any encounter.

A sense of someone watching her broke this troubling train of thought. She turned to see Aiden in the corridor outside her compartment, his fingers pressed to the window. He studied her like he might study a strange plant specimen in a botanical exhibit, head tilted to one side, lips twitching like he might burst out laughing any minute.

He smiled a broad smile when she looked at him, then he made a face against the window and she laughed.

She touched the control to noiselessly slide open the door panel. "Please come in. There's plenty of room."

Aiden's tall body dwarfed the doorway. "Shareem aren't allowed in first class. I was on my way to the loo. There's a line at the one in the other car."

"Why should you ride on crowded benches when you can sit on cushions? I'll pay the difference in fares."

His grin widened. "Hey, I could get used to being your boy toy." He winked. "You sneak me in here, and I'll do it."

"Ky as well."

His smile faded. "Ky's in one hell of a bad mood this morning. But I'll tell him."

He sent her another warm glance then turned and sauntered away. He certainly knew how to make a woman look at every inch his body. Brianne closed the door again and waited, wondering if he'd come back—with or without Ky.

Brianne d'Aroth never broke the rules. And now here she was wanting to allow not one but two Shareem into her train compartment. She doubted the train attendant would refuse to let a member of the d'Aroth family do as she would, but if her grandmother ever found out...

Twenty-eight years old and I'm still worried about being called in front of my grandmother.

But Clothilde d'Aroth, ruler of Bor Narga, was a formidable woman and didn't take embarrassment to the family lightly.

Aiden did return twenty minutes later, Ky in tow. Well, maybe not *in tow*. Ky proceeded him by five paces, his face dark.

The compartment had seemed roomy, but when Aiden and Ky arranged themselves on the sofa opposite her, they nearly crowded her out. Aiden stretched out his long legs and rested his head on Ky's shoulder. Ky folded his arms and stared out the window. Clearly Aiden had talked fast and long to get Ky to come here at all.

Brianne touched a control to gray out the windows for privacy. She'd already darkened the outside windows against the glare of the morning sun, though they could still watch the scenery rushing by. She offered them chilled wine from the small bar built into the wall, which Aiden gulped down with relish and Ky refused.

"So this is how the rich travel," Aiden said, returning the crystal goblet to its holder. He sat back again, smothering a yawn. "Sorry. I always fall asleep in trains."

"Except yesterday," Brianne said.

Aiden grinned, his eyelids drooping. "I had something fun to do yesterday."

Ky said nothing. He leaned his shoulder against the wall and blatantly looked out the window. Most people's eyes flickered as they tried to focus on things rushing past a train, but Ky's remained fixed.

Aiden yawned again. His eyes closed and he slumped onto Ky's shoulder and was soon snoring softly. Ky sat in silence, not looking at Brianne.

The train swayed on its hover track, buffeted by wind left over from last night's sandstorm. Aiden swayed with it, lost in sleep, his blond hair falling loose to Ky's lap.

When Ky turned his head and looked down at his friend, his face softened. The look was almost imperceptible but Brianne, studying every nuance of Ky, saw it.

"You care for him, don't you?" she asked.

Ky flicked his gaze to her. His eyes looked almost normal now, irises no longer expanded in arousal. But Shareem eyes would never be quite "normal". They were larger than most men's and made to shine with seductiveness, to pin a woman in place at all times.

Ky did not answer, and Brianne went on. "That is why you are so angry with me. For getting him arrested and putting him in danger."

"Aiden is my friend."

The harsh words dragged out of him. Aiden slept on, eyes heavy and closed.

"I read that Shareem didn't have emotions," Brianne said. "Or not much anyway. But that's wrong, isn't it?"

He scowled at her. "Why were you reading about Shareem?"

"Because I know nothing about them. My ignorance of you almost got you killed. That makes me feel ashamed."

She wanted to tell him, *I learned, I understand, I want to help*, but his forbidding gaze made her close her lips.

"All Shareem were nearly killed twenty years ago because of d'Aroths," Ky said. "They shut down the labs, threatened to terminate the lab rats."

"I know. That's why I'm ashamed."

He studied her from under lowered brows, his mouth a grim line. Last night he'd spanked her and kissed her and touched her. He'd wanted to chastise her, punish her the only way he knew how.

Aiden had been there for pleasure alone. He'd forgiven Brianne already, she sensed, but maybe Ky never would.

"You care for him," she repeated. "Why shouldn't you?"

Ky studied Aiden's head against his shoulder. "Because it's forbidden." He said it like she ought to know that.

"To care?"

Ky transferred his gaze to the empty landscape outside the window. "To fall in love with another Shareem." He gave a harsh laugh. "We wouldn't pay much attention to anyone else if we did, would we? We'd be lost in each other. And the designers didn't want that."

"Because you were supposed to please other people."

"Because they'd have lost money." His voice grated. "We please everyone but ourselves."

"That doesn't mean you don't care."

He sat still, a large man in black leather, his dark hair still damp. They'd stayed in a place with a primitive water shower, she realized, while she'd had sterilizers and a soft bed.

"Why should you care what Shareem feel about each other?" he growled. "Or are you going to write a research paper? *What I saw Shareem do with each other in a train?*"

She flushed. "I would never do that. What happened between us last evening is private."

"Is it? Or will your bodyguards arrest us when we get off the train for daring to touch your pristine body?"

"It was my choice. I had to give you permission to touch me."

"Would the patrollers believe that? They'd rather think of us as walking menaces to women."

"Then why did you take the risk?" she flared. "Why entice me to the train?"

He grinned briefly, and she saw a flash of what he was really like—intelligent and good-humored when he wasn't angry. "It was worth it."

"Because you wanted to punish me." She drew a breath. "I know you see me as an upper-class bitch, but I want you to believe I would never betray you. What we did yesterday will hold a special place in my heart. Please, let's leave it like that. It was..." She flushed. "It was wonderful. You knew once I had a taste of Shareem I'd always crave it and know I couldn't have it, but you made me feel wonderful. Wanted." She paused. "Thank you."

"You sure you mean *thank you*, not *fuck off*?"

"Very sure."

Ky looked her up and down, a scrutiny that took in every line of her, every defect, every flaw. In spite of herself she felt his chemistry touch her, relaxing her when she wanted to remain tense.

"You're not like I thought you'd be." He sounded grudging.

"What did you think I'd be like?"

Again the once-over. She might be the highborn woman, member of the ruling family and he a slave in all but name, but he had the upper hand here and he knew it. He filled the first-class compartment not only with his muscular body and his Shareem chemistry, but with his glittering eyes, his voice, his power.

"I thought you'd be spoiled. Petulant. An upper-class bitch, like you said."

The words stung and so did the look. "I suppose I can't blame you. I try not to let how I was raised make me insensitive, but it probably does without me realizing it."

Ky grunted. "Must be hell being rich and pampered."

"I can't help what I was born to be any more than you can."

He slanted her an ironic glance. "Sure. You can say *to hell with this* and move off-planet any time you want. People will be pissed at you, but they won't try to kill you."

Brianne thought of her grandmother's steely eyes and thought of the admonishing messages she'd receive if she embarrassed the family by turning her back on them. "Perhaps not, but there'd still be repercussions."

"If you're trying to tell me we're just alike, you lose. You were raised in a glittering palace. I was I was raised in a hellhole."

"DNAmo?"

"That's the one. We ate the healthiest foods and were treated like priceless art, but it was still a hellhole."

"What was it like? I want to know."

His eyes glittered. She felt old anger radiate from him, old pain that time hadn't erased. "What do you want to hear about? Growth acceleration so you matured in five years instead of twenty? Then slowed way down? When it killed Shareem too weak to handle it, the scientists said, *Oh well, bring in the next batch.*"

She looked at him, appalled. "That's horrible."

"Yeah, especially when it was someone who'd been your friend." His voice softened a notch. "Then tests, people watching you to see how you react, more tests."

"Physical tests?"

She imagined the kind of tests Shareem might be put through—strength, endurance, honing of muscles, bodies working and sweating. Sexual tests too. What enticed them, what didn't, what they could do to women. Being a researcher there must have been—interesting.

"And psychological ones," Ky went on, his look somber. "What you do if you're kept in isolation. If someone you grow to like is taken away from you."

"Some people might call that torture," she said indignantly.

"You might. DNAmo called it science."

She drew a sharp breath. "It was wrong."

"You think?"

"Perhaps that was why DNAmo was shut down. Enough people objected to what they were doing."

He shook his head. "It was shut down because stiff-necked d'Aroth women couldn't face what DNAmo was making. Men who might make women succumb to sexual desires. When they disapproved, the investors started to lose money and so did DNAmo." He made a dismissive gesture. "So we had to go."

"I'm sorry." She felt silly saying it, because she'd been a child when DNAmo had been shut down and the Shareem experiments outlawed. She'd had nothing personally to do with it closing, but he was right, women in her family had made the recommendation. She'd seen the d'Aroth name on the reports concerning DNAmo's closure and decisions on what to do with the Shareem.

"Stop apologizing," Ky said. His eyes softened, and she felt his pheromones touch her as though he were trying to soothe her. "You paid us back last night. We're square. We're done."

"Because I let you coerce me onto the train?"

To her surprise he gave her a small smile. It was incredible how a smile warmed his face.

"No, sweetheart, that was for you."

"I thought—you were punishing me."

"I was." The smile turned sinful. "Punishing you a little. But I'm Shareem. It's programmed into me to make you feel pleasure, no matter how much I want to punish. It almost killed me to tease you and walk away. You found release twice. I had to hold it in a while."

Her gaze dropped to his leather-covered lap. "Why did you walk away? Why didn't you release?"

His smile remained though his eyes were watchful. "Would have spoiled everything, wouldn't it?" he said in a voice that snaked through her senses. "You were bad and we wanted to discipline you a little. But you got us back, sweetheart. We were dying for you."

His blue irises started to widen. Arousal. Which made warmth pool in her belly, her quim soften. What was he saying? They'd been so calm and cool walking away from her last night that she'd never dreamed she'd turned *them* on.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"You like to apologize."

She flushed. "You make me feel so guilty. You're a master at it."

"Only because I'm level three. The punisher. I want you to *want* your punishment."

She rubbed her damp palms over her thighs, resisting the urge to push her fingers between her legs. She wet her lips and asked softly, "How would you punish me right now?"

She sensed Ky's attention home in on her, his anger fading under growing heat. "Bold lady, aren't you?"

"I want to be."

"Are you sure?"

She nodded.

"Why?"

She nibbled her lip at the question, her temperature rising as his gaze riveted to her mouth. "You gave me such pleasure yesterday. I want to learn how to give pleasure in return."

The air in the compartment was very still as he stared at her with his filling blue gaze. "What would you do with your lesson once you learn it?"

"I'm not sure. But I want to learn."

"Aiden's a better teacher than me. He can be gentle."

She shook her head. "No. I want you."

He studied her another moment, his gaze arrested. Then he abruptly loosened the catches of his leather leggings. "All right, if you want it so bad, come here and get on your knees."

He pulled open his fly, then rose up long enough to slide his pants down his legs.

Brianne stared in shock at his lap, at the dark shaft that lay hard and full against his abdomen. For a full minute she couldn't speak, trapped in her first true look at a man's sex.

"You know how to kneel, don't you?" he asked, voice grating.

Brianne glanced at Aiden but the other man continued to sleep, his legs stretched out, his head firmly on Ky's shoulder. Slowly she gathered up her layers of robes and knelt in front of Ky's spread thighs.

His cock lay there, huge and hard, waiting for her. She stared at it in fascination. She'd learned something about male organs from school, but the physiology teacher had skimmed over the lesson, implying that men were ashamed they had such things attached to their bodies. Brianne had never seen real bare male flesh, and she suspected the teacher never had either.

Shareem had been enhanced to be longer than a normal man and a large handful around. A tight fit, but the way her sex ached now she imagined it opening easily for him to slide inside. His tip was dark, the shaft a slightly lighter color, his balls tight and high and surrounded by wiry curls. She could look at him for hours and never get tired.

She swallowed. "I'm not sure what to do."

"I'll teach you, love. That's what Shareem are for."

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw his hand stretch to the controls that turned off the privacy on the windows leading to the corridor.

Brianne gasped and glanced over her shoulder, expecting a dozen people to be peering in to see what they were up to. "What are you doing? Someone might come."

"There's no one else in the car," Ky said, his voice quiet. "And if there are, maybe they'll see you, a highborn woman, bent over my cock. Maybe they'd watch."

Her face scalded. "I can't."

"You wanted punishment, Brianne. If you refuse this, just imagine what I'll think of next."

Brianne had no idea what he could think of, but her heart raced and her quim tightened at his words. "All right. But if anyone does see—you can't let on who I really am. The journalists would make a meal of me."

"Fair enough. Now kiss me."

She started to raise her face to his lips, but he laced his fingers in her hair and gently guided her to his cock. She liked the scent of it, male desire. Daringly she nuzzled the tip then kissed it.

His cock jumped and Ky made a small noise of pleasure. Brianne flicked out her tongue to taste him and found she liked the smooth sleekness of his tip, the taste of the ridge that curved around it.

"Suck me," Ky said, voice ragged. "Put your mouth over it and suck."

Brianne drew a breath then opened her mouth wide and slid it over him.

* * * * *

Ky let out a groan. Brianne's innocent questing was perfect. Her hot little tongue, her eager tasting, the experimental way she sucked him between her lips made his cock hot and happy.

He threaded his fingers through her sleek brown hair and raised his hips, willing her to take as much of him in her mouth as she could.

"That's it, sweetheart. Suck me."

She did, sending sweet sensations through him. His pulse pounded, the sight of her dark head bowed over his lap, her pale fingers clenching his thighs making him want to release right away.

Not yet. Let me savor this.

His world was turning upside down. His Shareem life had been fairly simple—he knew his boundaries. Share a woman with Aiden, walk away. Have a drink at Judith's bar, share another woman.

Sometimes the women gave them gifts for their attentions, generous ones if they were rich. Sometimes they couldn't, and he and Aiden pleased them anyway. Hell,

those encounters stolen in the back of Judith's bar or in a working woman's tiny flat were the best of all.

He and Aiden shared a good camaraderie. He could count on Aiden. They no longer had to speak to know what the other wanted to do, whether it was watching sports on the digitals or what they would do next while pleasuring a woman.

The day before yesterday had changed all that. When Ky discovered Aiden was arrested and likely to be terminated, he suddenly realized he couldn't live without Aiden. Didn't *ever* want to live without Aiden. The pain of that bothered him. He realized he'd taken Aiden for granted all this time, his friend and cohort always by his side.

And this woman—this rich bitch—had been the cause of him nearly losing Aiden forever.

He'd wanted to punish her, to make her feel the hurt and panic he'd felt. But she'd turned beautiful brown eyes up to him and said, "I'm sorry," sincerity and innocence in every word.

She'd taken his punishment without flinching. She had spirit and guts. The pretty face he'd seen on the digitals had strength beneath it.

He'd already forgiven her, but she didn't need to know that. When she'd discovered their arrest, she'd leapt to help them. She could have left them in jail to rot, sent them to termination with a smile on her face.

But her distress had been real, and she'd bent over backwards to help them.

Mmm, bent over backwards. There's a good thought.

He loved the feel of her hair under his fingers, her small tongue struggling to circle all of his big tip. Sweet, sweet woman.

She'd make a lovely submissive. He imagined her in nothing but a collar, a slim silver chain hanging from it, her wrists encased in soft leather cuffs. She'd carry it off well, with her long thick hair cascading down her bare back, tangling around her aroused, tight nipples.

The heat in his cock flared, lifting toward her mouth. He'd gently wrap the chain around his hand and hold her in place while she sucked him, then he'd instruct her to get on her hands and knees while he pleased her.

A Shareem's job was to make her enjoy every second of her time with him. She surrendered to him fully, and he made every minute worthwhile.

Many women didn't know they liked being a sub until they were bound and at Ky's mercy. Then their eyes softened and they begged for him to spank them, begged for him to take control, as Brianne had last night. They learned what it was to surrender, and he made sure they loved it.

Aiden stirred, probably aroused by all the pheromones flying through the air. He turned his warm head on Ky's shoulder and glanced down at Brianne.

"Mmm," he said. "Nice."

She looked up at him and smiled. Her smile could melt ice.

Aiden smiled back, the two sharing a moment. Ky's heart beat faster as a sudden feeling of completion hit him. Not a climax, but the three of them together enjoying a simple moment of joy. It felt *right*.

Aiden slid his hand down Ky's chest and nudged his finger over the base of Ky's staff. Ky held his breath, waiting for the warning tingle, but it didn't come.

He relaxed, turning his head to kiss his friend. Aiden kissed sleepily, his eyes heavy, lips curved in a half-smile. His level one touch soothed and excited at the same time Brianne's lips and tongue sent him spiraling toward climax.

Aiden curved his fingers to encase the base of Ky's cock, his touch dipping to his balls. One finger stroked behind the sac as Brianne's mouth drew him forward, her tongue moving on the sensitive skin under the flange.

Ky rested his head on the seat back, his eyes closing. "Gods, that's sweet."

Aiden licked Ky's cheek. "We aim to please."

"I'm going to come."

"That sounds like fun."

"Shut up and keep doing that."

Aiden chuckled low in his throat. The man knew how to touch. If Ky had known just how well Aiden touched before—no, stop that thought. If Ky had let Aiden touch him before, Ky could very well be dead by now.

The fact that it was Brianne's mouth all over him seemed to mitigate things. Ky kept waiting for the tingling pain to begin in his arm, but nothing happened. Perhaps his body was tricked by Brianne sucking on him while Aiden touched.

Brianne eased Ky out of her mouth and held on to him above where Aiden stroked. She bent forward and licked him, tasting him from base to tip.

Ky dug his fingers into the chair seat and boosted his hips upward. A heat swirled through him as his best friend and a beautiful lady did wonderful things to him.

His hips rocked, his cock stiffened with a painful ache and he came.

Swirls of come slid straight onto Brianne's startled tongue and down his shaft to be caught by Aiden's fingers.

"That's it, my friend," Aiden said into his ear. "Let us pleasure *you* for a change."

"Gods." Ky thrust forward, wondering if he'd ever felt this good. Brianne caught his come on her tongue, her face registering wonder at the taste of it.

Aiden lifted his fingers, wet with Ky's come, and licked them clean. "Mmm. I always knew you'd taste good."

Ky leaned down and hauled Brianne into his lap. She snuggled against his shoulder looking pleased with herself. He kissed her lips and Aiden joined him, lips and tongues playing in the three-way kiss they'd done the night before.

Aiden tasted too good and so did Brianne. He could get used to this.

Damn Aiden. Ky couldn't let this continue, but, oh gods, he wanted to. Brianne was fine—he'd do her backwards and forwards and never worry. But Aiden...

Why can't I tell him to back off and leave me alone? Why can't I be horrified he wants to kiss me?

Why the hell do I have to like it so much?

If Ky didn't stop him, he'd pay for it and he knew it.

Aiden smiled and slanted his mouth over Ky's, his sensual tongue finding every corner of Ky's mouth. Brianne watched, lips parted, and when Aiden drew back, she put her own mouth over Ky's, copying the kiss.

Ky sat there and took it. They went back and forth, Aiden, Brianne, Aiden, Brianne, the pair of them never letting Ky come up for air.

He loved it. They went on and on until the train slowed at the outskirts of the city and he never tried to stop them.

Gods help me. I am so screwed.

Chapter Seven

Decisions

The train jerked its way into the station, waking the dozing trio in the compartment. Brianne sat up straight, realizing she was draped over Ky's bare lap. Aiden had resumed leaning on Ky's other side, head on his shoulder.

Brianne jumped to her feet, but Aiden woke slowly, stretching his powerful limbs like one of the great predatory cats of the southern canyons.

Ky opened his eyes but didn't yawn or make any other confused moves of someone who'd fallen asleep on a public transport. He calmly pulled up and fastened his pants then watched Aiden unfold himself from the seat and take Brianne's bag down from the shelf.

Aiden handed Brianne the soft valise and grinned at her. "What a nice ride."

Brianne's face heated. "Yes. Definitely nice."

The train bumped to a halt. They heard footsteps in the corridor, the train attendant coming to make sure the highborn lady exited without mishap. The attendant was a middle-aged woman who was not happy Brianne had insisted on letting the Shareem stay in the first-class carriage, even though Brianne had paid the difference in their tickets.

"Guess this is where we depart." Ky got himself to his feet. The space in the compartment filled quickly with two Shareem towering over her.

Brianne's heart beat faster. She knew they'd part ways here, probably for good. She wanted to explain that what had happened between them was and always would be special to her, but she could not say a word with the attendant hovering. Besides, Aiden and Ky probably didn't want to hear a woman bleating that her encounter with them had changed her life, likely forever. Women must say that to them all the time.

But she could try. She fished in her robes and drew out a plain gray plastic card. It looked innocuous, but the coded strip held passes to her inner sanctum at the ruling family's compound.

She handed it to Ky. "If you need to see me for any reason give this card to my personal guards. They will let you through to my private apartments." She pushed it into Ky's hand. "Any time, for any reason," she babbled.

Ky took the card without changing expression. The lines around his eyes creased a moment, then he tucked the card into his tunic and walked out of the compartment without looking back.

She was surprised at the hollow feeling in her heart. She realized he meant what he'd said. *We're square. We're done.*

Aiden started out after Ky, then he stopped himself by grabbing the sides of the door. The attendant drew an aggrieved breath, but Aiden grinned.

"You ever need to find *us*, sweetheart, you go to Judith's bar down in Pas City," he said. "If we aren't there, she knows how to get in touch with us."

Another wink, another devastating smile and he was gone.

The adventure was over.

* * * * *

Ky was in one of his *I don't want to talk about anything personal* moods, much to Aiden's disgust.

Aiden had completely given up on him in the last three days, his usually laidback friend growling and muttering whenever Aiden tried to talk to him—about anything. Ky especially didn't want to talk about events in the train and overnight in Elred.

He was pretending nothing had happened—not the arrest, not the train, not the night in the inn, nothing. Not him asking for Aiden's touch, not Aiden stroking him until he came, not him enjoying Aiden's mouth in long and burning kisses.

Asshole. They couldn't pretend it all away. Aiden had hoped he'd at last be able to reveal his feelings for Ky, but Ky completely shut him out.

The two of them decided to go to neutral ground on the afternoon of the third day—Judith's bar.

As usual, Judith tended bar in sloppy breeches and shirt, her hair twisted in a simple knot. Judith worked her butt off to keep this business going, and she made it known that Shareem were always welcome here.

Aiden, like every other Shareem in Pas City, had a soft spot for Judith. She was always up for sexual games, from Aiden's sensual massages to Ky's full-blown bondage. She liked threesomes and foursomes and any other *somes* she could manage. She'd screw until she passed out in exhaustion, then wake up in the morning and do it again. And say *thank you*.

Aiden wanted to see her happy with a permanent lover, one who appreciated her, but Judith was fiercely independent. The last time Aiden suggested she look for a special someone, she'd asked in irritation why she should let a normal human male ruin her life.

He'd backed off, and Judith had smiled and changed the subject. *A bad breakup, maybe?* Aiden speculated later to Ky.

Ky snorted. *Look at her choices. She likes Shareem, and only the rare ones like Rees and Rio have taken lifemates. The human men of Pas City are weaklings. She's better off hanging out with us.*

Aw, come on, Aiden continued, half joking. *Don't you believe in happily ever after?*

No.

Glancing sideways at Ky, who lifted a glass of ale to his lips, Aiden could tell he still had no use for happily ever after. Not even when it stared him in the face.

Butthead.

"Where've you two been lately?" Braden moved to them from the bar. He patted Judith on the backside as he passed her, and Judith sent him a smoldering look.

Ky acknowledged Braden's arrival with a curt nod then fixed his gaze on the silent digital on the other side of the room, ignoring them.

"Home," Aiden said as their friend sat down. "Bored."

"No kidding? I thought you were holed up having some great ménage. I was hurt you didn't invite me."

"Nothing more exciting than digital reruns the last few days," Aiden said, giving Ky another sideways look. "What have you been doing?"

Braden's blue eyes twinkled. "Having a ménage of my own with two lovely ladies, and at one point, sharing with one of the lovely ladies' footmen. Orchestrated sex in a ballroom. It was fun."

Aiden turned his glass on the table. "You'll get yourself arrested if you aren't careful," he said with good humor.

"Hey, I'm discretion itself."

Aiden laughed. "Discretion? You once had sex in a theater balcony. I ought to know, I was sitting next to you. Couldn't hear the whole second act."

"It was dark, and it gave you a hard-on. Besides, it was an acrobatic circus. You didn't need to hear anything."

"I liked the music. If it hadn't taken me so damn long to get the tickets, I'd have been out of there."

Shareem were only allowed at the live theater if they sat in the highest balcony out of sight and only on nights when important people wouldn't attend. *The joy of being Shareem*, Aiden reflected.

Braden started to say something flip, then his expression changed to one of guarded surprise. "Well, holy shit."

Aiden felt a *presence* behind him. He turned around and looked up—and up and up—at a huge black-leather-covered man whose face was swathed in sun-blocking cloths. He slowly removed his sun goggles, the blue of his eyes glinting as he took in the three at the table.

"Calder," Aiden said, nodding a greeting.

"He comes out of his cave," Braden said. "Have a seat, my friend. Or are you going to stand there until Judith faints in ecstasy?"

Judith had gone perfectly still in the act of clearing a table, her gaze riveted to the leather outline of Calder's tall body and the fall of black hair that reached his ass. Calder moved past Braden to take the seat in the shadow of the corner.

Aiden tried not to stare at the reclusive Shareem—he didn't want to poke into Calder's private hell—but it was hard not to look. Calder rarely emerged from his lavish and expensive apartments and never, ever without covering every inch of his body first.

As Calder sat down, he unwound his face-covering cloths, keeping a fold over his left cheek. The right side of his face was fine, but what Aiden could see of the left was a maze of scars and puckered skin.

It didn't look too bad, Aiden reflected, but then he was viewing only what Calder was willing to show. His body had burned basically to death at DNAmo, and that couldn't have been pretty.

In complete silence Judith set a full glass of ale in front of Calder. He gave her a quiet nod of thanks without looking at her. Judith lingered a moment, then when Calder drank the ale without making eye contact, she glided away, looking both dazed and disappointed.

"Judith likes Shareem," Braden said.

"Does she?" Calder's voice was deep and harsh, like it had been broken.

"Bet she'd like a go in that pleasure palace of yours."

"She can apply," Calder said.

"I can't afford it." Judith moved back to the table and eyed Calder wistfully. "Besides, the waiting list is so long."

"You have a waiting list?" Aiden asked, interested.

"He does," Braden answered for him. "And a consent form. A lady has to double-sign it, agreeing to let him do anything he wants for as long as she's with him."

"Shit." Aiden glanced at the large, silent man. He'd seen Ky get pretty heavy into the level three stuff, but Aiden had never sensed the air of menace he was getting from Calder. "What do you do in there?"

"Sex." Calder lifted his ale and sipped it.

"We're Shareem, we like hearing about sex," Aiden prompted.

Calder gave a slight shake of his head and drank more ale.

"He doesn't like to talk about it," Braden explained. "No matter how much you beg. Even his best friend doesn't know."

"Cruel," Aiden grinned.

Calder shot him a look that was almost amused. Almost. "You'll live."

"Yeah," Aiden agreed. "In boredom." He gave Ky another look, but Ky hadn't looked away from the digital, which was playing a news feed.

Calder's eyes shifted from Aiden to Ky and back again. A gleam of knowledge rested in his blue eyes, and his eyebrows rose the slightest bit.

Aiden met his gaze without defensiveness. Calder gave him a *your-secret-is-safe-with-me* look and returned to his ale.

Judith sighed. "Well, anyway, your drinks are on me. And you're welcome here any time, Calder." She leaned down and touched his black-gloved hand. "And I mean *any* time."

Calder flicked his gaze to Judith, a muscle on the unmarred side of his face moving. He slid his fingers along Judith's then released her. She turned away, a little smile on her lips, her eyes heavy like she'd had an orgasm.

"Why do I feel like the rest of us just vanished?" Braden asked.

"Because he's sexier than you, Braden," Judith called over her shoulder.

"Thanks, I'll remember that."

Judith winked and sauntered away, curved hips swaying.

Beside Aiden, Ky went rigid, absorbed in whatever was on the holo screen on the other side of the room. Aiden followed his gaze to the screen and froze.

The beautiful face of Brianne d'Aroth appeared in close-up, standing behind a podium giving a speech he couldn't hear. The picture of her face shrank and shifted to the top of the screen while two women commentators discussed what she'd just said.

Aiden rose and moved closer. "Hey, Judith, turn that up."

Judith obliged with the flick of a button behind the bar. The commentators' voices swam into hearing range.

"...do you think will be the implications of this decision?"

"Well, the d'Aroth family wants to continue its dynasty and expects even the most distant branch to produce children."

"Dranis m'Aren had much to offer genetically. She'll be hard-pressed to find another male with as good a background."

"What do you think prompted Lady d'Aroth to break off the engagement? It seemed to come out of the blue."

"Sources say that she spent a night in the desert a few days ago meditating. Perhaps she was meditating on the question of her marriage."

"Whatever the catalyst, the long-anticipated wedding of Brianne d'Aroth and Dranis m'Aren is off. Brianne's grandmother, the matriarch of the family, is not pleased. There is a question of whether Brianne will be restricted in any way for making this decision."

Aiden felt Ky hulking behind him, his breath harsh in his ear. "What the hell did she do that for?"

She met you, Aiden wanted to say, but kept his mouth shut.

Braden called across the room. "Isn't that the d'Aroth woman who threw your butts in jail?"

"Yes," Ky said grimly.

"She's gorgeous. I don't blame you for drooling over her."

"We did more than drool," Aiden said.

Braden broke into a grin. "Mystery of broken engagement solved. She had some Shareem, it spoiled her for ordinary men."

Ky growled. "I need to talk to her."

"Want me to come with?" Aiden asked.

Ky shook his head. "You're too nice to her. I'm going to make her talk to me." He tapped his pocket that always carried his whip. "And I mean *make her*."

Aiden looked at him in faint alarm, but kept his voice light. "And you won't let me watch? You'll make me jealous."

Ky's lips drew back, anger rolling off him in waves. The forced indifference he'd worn the past three days fell away, and he looked at Aiden in pure rage. "Give it a rest, Aiden."

Aiden's irritation mounted. He'd kept silent for the sake of maintaining their friendship, but Ky's attitude cut and hurt. "Fuck you."

Ky glared at him then turned on his heel and strode for the bright sunshine outside, leaving Aiden behind in the dim bar, breathing hard.

Aiden wasn't certain how long he stood watching the door through which Ky had departed. The intensity of his own anger surprised him, but then again, he had cause. He'd been wanting Ky for some time now, and their intimate play had given him hope...

And now Ky was saying effectively, *It never happened*.

Aiden couldn't even punish Ky by going after another Shareem, because it wasn't another Shareem he wanted, it was Ky.

Why did I have to fall for a complete jackass?

Braden came up behind him and draped an arm over his shoulder. "You look like you could use a dip in cold water, my friend. Hit the baths?"

Aiden tried to pull himself together. "Sure." Nice soothing water, maybe a massage, maybe a willing voyeur who'd agree to a plain old-fashioned fuck.

He stopped the thought, realization pouring over him. The only lady his imagination had him touching and spreading was Brianne.

Hell.

His heart beat faster as he pictured her lying beneath him, her body scented with the oils he'd rubbed on her. Her eyes would be heavy with desire, her pussy moist for him, her lips curved into a smile.

His wayward imagination put Ky into the scene, Ky angling his cock to fit Aiden's mouth while Aiden fucked Brianne.

Damn it. He had to quit wanting what he couldn't have. Stupid to think Ky would go for anything so satisfying as a *relationship* and that Brianne would want two Shareem screwing up her life more than they already had.

He needed to be like Braden—*sex and more sex, as long as the lady's willing. Or Calder—give them what they crave deep inside themselves and then never see them again.*

Rees had given in to his heart and was bound now to a sweet-faced lady called Talan. And Rio, the bastard, had married a princess on Ariel, far away from the rocky heat of Bor Narga. Lucky Shareem.

Aiden would ask Rio if he could come to Ariel. The princess was trying to allow Shareem to immigrate there unilaterally, but the wheels of government were slow even on enlightened Ariel. Aiden could blast off Bor Narga and leave the complications of being Shareem behind. Those complications included Ky and the heartache that had started inside him.

If Braden noticed Aiden's whirling thoughts, he made no sign. "Let's go. Coming, Calder?"

Calder, in the shadows, shook his head and glanced at Judith.

"I see," Braden said. "Hey, we know when we're superfluous. After you, Aiden."

Braden was trying to ease the tension he sensed with his Shareem abilities, Aiden knew, but it wasn't working. Still fuming, Aiden fell into step with him as they turned to the hot streets, leaving the cool bar behind.

* * * * *

Judith cleared tables as customers drifted away to their evening meals. As the sun set, dimming the street outside, the bar grew quieter and her nervousness increased.

Calder remained in the shadows, nursing his ale, shaking his head ever so slightly when she offered him more. He did nothing frightening, yet he radiated a danger she didn't understand.

What would it be like to be with him?

She'd heard ladies in the bar talk of it. They called him The Beast and agreed that an experience with him was like no other, but they were frustratingly vague about the details. If Judith asked point-blank, the lady would grow quiet and maybe give a little shiver.

Judith understood the shivering. While she enjoyed bantering with Braden, she couldn't imagine teasing this dark, silent man whose hard blue eyes took in every move she made.

As the last customer waved and said *good evening*, Judith plucked up her courage. Her customers would return after supper and her bar would be full again until the small hours of the morning.

She approached the table, cloth in hand, and started to wipe it down. "Anything else?" she asked lightly. "Ale? Wine? Fellatio?"

Calder's massive hand fell on her wrist like a manacle. "Close the bar."

"Why?" Her voice shook. "You're leaving?"

"No, I'm staying."

"Oh." She swallowed, straightening slowly until he took his hand from hers. "I told you I can't afford you."

"You can't afford to come to me. So we'll stay here."

Her heart beat in strange, bumping strokes. "Why would you do that?"

"You are kind to Shareem. I can appreciate that."

Their gazes met, his hard and blue. She felt her nipples tingle, liquid pool in her quim. "Why do I get the feeling I should say no?"

"You may say no, and I will go. If you say yes, you allow me to do whatever I wish to you for a period of two hours. After that I will go and not touch you again."

Judith exhaled slowly, her mind turning over what he might mean by *whatever I wish*. "And in those two hours, I can ask you to stop, or I can say a safety word?"

He slowly shook his head, the cloths that half covered his face moving. "No safety words, no stopping."

She clenched the dishcloth, her nails digging into her palms. She'd done many things with Shareem, from sensual stroking to hardcore bondage. She'd acted as a slave and on one occasion let five Shareem have her one after the other.

But in every encounter, even the most exotic, she'd known in her heart that her Shareem would never hurt her. They gave her pleasure and demanded nothing in return. She trusted them.

This Shareem, the one who'd been broken and ruined, was different. How brave was she, really?

But she knew she'd never have another chance to be with him. Some women saved for years to gain admittance to his palace of pleasure. If she walked away from this chance, she'd never forgive herself.

Her heart raced. "All right. I'll do it."

"Go close the doors."

Shakily Judith crossed the room and pulled the storm door over the faded red awnings. She'd installed no windows because insulating glass was too expensive and the Bor Nargan sun too intense to let pour through non-insulated windows. Once she closed the door, they were shut into a cool, dim cave.

When she turned back she saw that Calder had risen from his seat and moved to the bar, though she'd never heard him cross the room.

"Are you going to show me what you do in your pleasure palace?" she asked, trying to keep the tremble from her voice.

"No, you have limited space here. But I will show you the heart of it." He flicked a switch behind the bar and plunged them into darkness.

Judith froze. She couldn't hear him or see him, and the sensation unnerved her.

She jumped when his strong hand came down on her shoulder. She could see only a huge shadow and the faint glitter of his eyes, but she could feel the warm bulk of him, smell the scent of leather and Shareem.

He slid his hand to the nape of her neck and put his mouth against her ear. "What do you truly wish, Judith? Deep down in your heart?"

Her heart right now was flip-flopping, and she had no idea.

"You'll tell me," he said. "Before we are finished, in this space of time, you will tell me what you truly want."

"But I don't know what I want." *Except for you to keep touching me.*

"You will learn. We will learn together."

His hand tightened on her neck then she felt a cool leather strap encircling her throat. His eyes burned in the darkness, and she had the strangest sense he could read her thoughts, even those she hid from herself.

What don't you want me to see, Judith? It was Calder's voice, but not harsh and broken as when it came through his throat.

"I—"

Her words were cut off as Calder swept her legs out from under her. She landed on her back on the hard floor and he crouched over her, one knee ruthlessly pinning her.

Judith tried to squirm away and couldn't. As Calder's large hands ripped her shirt open from neck to navel, she started to scream...

* * * * *

Brianne lay her head in her hands, elbows on the clear glass top of her desk. She wore a body-skimming silk dress, having thrown off her more formal clothes when she came home from the interviews. She couldn't stand to be dressed as a responsible member of the ruling family right now.

The silk felt good against her skin, nothing hampering her. This was Brianne as herself, nothing more.

The deed was done, the engagement over. She'd told Dranis the night before that she could not continue with the bargain of marrying him. He'd taken it badly.

Badly was an understatement. He'd started by jumping up from the table where they'd been eating dinner and throwing his glass of wine across the room. Brianne had stared in shock, never having seen Dranis show any kind of emotion before.

He'd started raving about suing her and her family for breach of promise, then he'd sneered that she'd turned into a Shareem whore.

Brianne had frozen in place, wondering how he'd found out about her train rides with Aiden and Ky. But as he'd rampaged on she realized he was only talking about her seeing Aiden in the coffee bar.

What happened there, Brianne? he'd snarled. *Did you let the animal touch you? Is that why you released him from jail, because you like animals?*

Dranis's face had been purple, his eyes bulging, and she'd thought he'd get violent. Her guards had registered her distress on her body monitors and rushed in to see what was going on.

The bodyguards had to escort Dranis from the room, from her apartments and from the compound. Then had come the official announcement, the statement read in the formal enclosed garden on the other side of the compound. The hundreds of cameras in her face, the reporters eager to be first with the story.

She'd read her statement—which her grandmother's staff had vetted, making at least a hundred changes before they'd let her say anything—and refused to answer any questions.

Dranis m' Aren and I were not a compatible fit for lifemates, and I made the decision to let him pursue his own interests.

The inevitable questions were screamed at her. *Did you have a fight? Did your grandmother tell you to break up? Did it have anything to do with the Shareem arrested for molesting you?*

She'd turned and walked back to the safety of the compound as though she didn't hear the questions.

It had *everything* to do with the Shareem, but not in the way the reporters thought. Aiden and Ky had opened her eyes, not only to her sexual feelings but to how narrow her life was in truth.

Brianne d'Aroth gave to charities and helped the downtrodden, but she did so from a safe distance, from inside her guarded compound. She didn't know the people she helped or even if she truly helped them.

She'd known in the back of her mind that Shareem existed and were treated as less than human, but she'd never bothered to investigate what their lives were really like. They were basically slaves, genetically bred to want nothing more than to give a woman the best sex possible. If their lives were empty besides that, they shouldn't care. Their ability to feel deep emotion had been taken from them, in order to keep them under control.

But they *did* care, and they *did* hurt, and they resented that they were treated like crap. Powerful Brianne d'Aroth hadn't done a thing about it, but that would change, starting now.

She'd never known it was possible to feel affection for Shareem, to wonder what they did when they weren't with her, to want to make their lives better. She'd seen that Ky cared for Aiden and knew that Aiden, for all his carefree attitude, cared for Ky. Brianne wanted to make sure they could enjoy their deepening friendship in peace.

The door to her inner apartment slid open. "I said I don't want any visitors," she snapped without looking up.

"I convinced them to let me in."

Brianne raised her head with a gasp. Ky leaned against the doorframe, his long body taut, his blue eyes giving her a measuring stare.

She stood up. "No one told me you were here."

"I asked them not to."

She couldn't imagine her curt head guard Harbourgh taking orders from a Shareem. Then again, if Harbourgh thought Ky's request was in Brianne's best interest, he'd let him in. Harbourgh had his own ideas.

"What do you want?"

Ky walked across the room, his stride slow, never moving his gaze from her. He halted next to her and twined strong fingers through her hair, forcing her to look up at him.

His face was granite hard, no softening for her. She realized she was looking at the level three, the male Dom, the real Ky. He leaned down and spoke into her ear, voice hard.

"A master always punishes his sub when she's done something bad."

Chapter Eight

New Sensations

Brianne's eyes widened. "Something bad?"

Ky's strong fingers loosened her hair from the tight coiffure she hadn't combed out yet. Locks of brown hair fell to her shoulders and slithered down her back.

"Did you ask me before you broke off your engagement?" Ky said. "Did I give you my permission?"

She looked at him in confusion. "What? That had nothing to do with you."

"Don't lie to your master. Spankings are hardest for lies."

Warmth pooled at the base of Brianne's spine. "I'm not lying. I would have broken it off with Dranis even if I hadn't met you..."

She faltered. Would she really have done so? Or would she have continued lying to herself, saying that marrying him was best for herself and her house?

Ky drew one finger down her cheek. "The reporters made the connection between Shareem and your decision. *I* made the connection. I'm betting Dimwit m'Aren made the connection." He brushed his thumb across her lower lip. "Why did you break it off, Brianne?"

Her throat squeezed, dry. "I had to. It wasn't fair to him."

Ky's fingers closed around her chin. "*Why did you break it off, Brianne?*"

"I told you. I could no longer go through with it. I couldn't let him marry me."

"You're lying again. You didn't break it off for *him*. You did it for your own selfish needs."

Her anger flared. "Very well, I loathe him. I've always loathed him but I didn't realize it. He's petty, narrow-minded and selfish. He calls you an *animal* and is disgusted by you when you are ten times the man he is."

"I'm not a *man*." Ky withdrew his touch but did not step away. "Neither is Aiden. You're throwing away everything you have for Shareem grown in a vat, who don't care about you one way or another."

"Do you think that matters?" She glared up at him. "Do you believe I broke off my engagement so I could tell you 'I've fallen in love with you, let's shack up'?"

"That would have been even stupider."

She tried to ignore the sting his words caused. "Whether you or Aiden speak to me again doesn't matter. I'm surrounded by people who were willing to kill Aiden for even looking at me, and you for trying to help him. I have the power to try to change that

and I will use it. And I can't have a husband who curls his lip at Shareem and undermines my work behind my back."

She ran out of breath. Ky watched her, eyes still, the power of him making her want to back up a step. She held her ground.

"So you're not doing this for me," he said. "But for all Shareem."

"Yes. Talan d'Urvey does what she can, but she hasn't got the power base that I do. I'm in the ruling family. She has the wealth, she understands Shareem, and I have the power. Think of what we can do together."

A muscle in his jaw twitched. "You plan to turn the Ministry of Non-Human Life Forms upside down? To give Shareem the same rights as other Bor Nargans?"

She nodded. "Is that so bad?"

"Very admirable. *If* you can do it." He moved to her again, fingers in her now-loose hair. "But you're still lying."

"About what?"

"Your motives. You are still lying to me, and you're lying to yourself. But if you want to save Shareem, sweetheart, let me show you what Shareem really are."

Her heart thudded. "I know what you are. I was with you and Aiden on the train."

He traced her cheek, his fingers light, but she could tell his gentleness was forced. "I was being nice to you because Aiden was there. He likes it when I'm nice."

"Where is Aiden?" she asked nervously. "I thought you were a team."

"I like to work alone on occasion. Like this one."

"You came here to berate me."

"No." His fingers moved over her eyelids, down her cheek, traced her lips. "I came here to teach you about Shareem. About level threes. Do you know the ancient saying, *In for a penny, in for a pound?*"

"I've heard it. I'm not certain what it really means."

"Your adoring fans likely believe that you had an affair with a Shareem. So why not have one all the way? We gave you a taste, now really sink your teeth in."

She swallowed. "Why do you want me to?"

"To show you what you're trying to save." He tilted her face up to him with strong fingers. "Halfhearted efforts will only make it worse for us. You need to know everything about us. You have to truly want to free us or walk away."

"Why would you try to change my mind? Don't you want to be free?"

His smile was feral. "I do, darling. But I want your efforts to be sincere. Are you willing to be my sub, Brienne? Are you willing to find out if this is really what you want?"

"To let you be — my master?"

"You know a little about it, do you?"

"I've been reading."

"You're precious, Brianne."

She gave him a hard look. "I am a determined woman. You won't break me that easily."

His voice softened a notch. "I don't want to break you, love. I want to educate you. Are you willing to let me teach you?"

He needed her permission to begin. Shareem were powerful, but their lady had to say they wanted it or they couldn't touch her.

Well, Ky was certainly *touching* her. But he wouldn't go forward without her permission, and they both knew it.

She wet her lips and met his gaze, her quim warming and squeezing. "I'm willing," she whispered. "What do you want me to do. Strip?"

Her heart raced as she said the word. The irises in Ky's eyes widened and his fingers warmed. She knew he was aroused—a Shareem's body temperature rose and his pulse doubled when sexually excited.

To her surprise, he chuckled. "No, I don't want you to strip. I want you to dress for me."

* * * * *

Brianne's confusion was adorable. She had no idea what Ky meant, little innocent. So he showed her.

What they'd done on the train had been playtime, a little taste to scare her and punish her for getting Aiden arrested. He believed now that it hadn't been her fault—the wheels of her office turned even without her. He hadn't gone full Dom on her because he'd sensed how inexperienced she was, but tonight would be a different story.

If she wanted to save all the Shareem on Bor Narga because she felt guilty, well then he'd let her know *exactly* who she was saving.

He didn't believe she was sincere for one minute. She'd discover the reality of Shareem and recoil, just like all her kind did. She sat in her beautiful tower and worried about the downtrodden, but she'd never experienced what it was like out there in Pas City, underground.

Literally underground. The place he'd take her tonight existed ten stories below the streets, a secret playground collectively maintained by level three Shareem as a place to let loose.

Ky instructed Brianne to dress in robes that would conceal her identity and to leave her bodyguards behind. In answer to her startled questions, he assured her she'd be perfectly protected from predators by Ky himself.

"Maybe," Brianne said, giving in. "But who protects me from you?"

"Tonight, I am your master. I take care of you, and you trust me to."

"I see."

He put his lips to her ear. "That's what *submissive* means, love. Submitting yourself entirely to me."

He nibbled her lobe and she squirmed. Ky just stopped himself turning the nibbles into sharper bites. His level three instincts made him want to be rough with her, but she was new to this.

For now...

"Will Aiden be coming with us?" she asked.

"No."

"I see," she said again, sounding disappointed.

Of course she'd be disappointed. Aiden had that *come here, baby, let me make you feel good* attitude, and every woman he touched melted in pleasure. Ky melted in pleasure as well, and that was forbidden.

Forbidden.

Ky had a sudden flash of a white room, of himself lying naked on the floor, screams coming from his mouth. Across the room a red-haired Shareem with beautiful eyes watched in anguish. *I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't know they were going to do this to us.*

"Ky?"

Brianne touched his arm, concern on her face. Ky growled, pressing away the unwelcome vision. He'd thought the damn memories would fade, but no. They were as clear today as they had been twenty years ago.

"We're leaving." He clamped his fingers around Brianne's arm and dragged her from the room.

They left the compound by a hidden entrance to elude any reporters that might be sniffing around and faded into crowds heading to the train station. Ky couldn't be mistaken for anything other than Shareem, but Brianne wore the robes and face veils of a middle-class widow. People stared but didn't tumble to the fact that she was Brianne d'Aroth.

They took the train to the back streets of Pas City and a store with a discreet custom-design shop in the basement. The man who ran the shop was a genius, living to create exquisitely sexy clothes for women. His clientele ranged from working-class women who were not ashamed of being Shareem followers to upper-class ladies indulging in private fantasies.

The man's eyes lit up when he beheld Brianne's figure, full in the breasts and hips, curved at the waist. While he checked his workroom for the best material to use, Ky picked out a mask that would both hide Brianne's face and not be out of place where he would take her.

The black velvet mask spread out in a butterfly shape across her eyes and down her cheeks. Ky fastened it securely under her hair with computerized clips that sealed it in place.

When the dressmaker returned, he asked her to strip completely.

Ky smiled at Brianne's sudden shyness, but the dressmaker only whipped out a scanner and ran it over Brianne's naked body, clicking his tongue in approval at the measurements that turned out on his screen.

"Easy-peasy," the man said. "I can outfit her right away and in something lovely. I'm sure you'll both like it."

When the couturier turned away and excitedly entered his back room, Brianne reached for her robes.

"Keep them off." Ky hid a grin when her eyes widened. "Please your master. From now on, you will either wear what I choose for you or be naked for my pleasure."

Brianne hesitated, the robes in her hands. He could see thoughts warring in her eyes, curiosity and excitement about what he'd ask her to do coming up against the fact that Brianne d'Aroth didn't take orders.

He waited for her decision. Would she throw on the robes and run back to her comfy and safe apartments? Or give in to temptation and entrust herself to him?

Slowly she opened her hands and let the robes fall to the floor. Ky warmed as he looked over her lush body, bared for his delight. *This was going to be good.*

The couturier returned with a leather dress that was bright red and thin and soft as silk. It fit Brianne perfectly. The décolletage skimmed just above her nipples, lifting her breasts for nice shadowy cleavage. The leather wrapped itself lovingly around her hips and emphasized the deep curve of her waist. The black high heels the couturier said would go excellently with it emphasized her long and sexy legs.

Ky rested his hand on her hip and drew her to his side. "Now, that's perfection."

Behind her mask her eyes held a mixture of shyness and wonder. He sensed that she'd never tried to be sexy before, never thought of making herself into an object of desire. He hoped she was learning it was fun to be desired.

"Now for the finishing touch." Ky signaled the couturier who smiled and returned with cuffs made of the same soft red leather.

The cuffs sported thin rings through which Ky could lace leather bonds—not now, but later when things grew more interesting. He wrapped the cuffs around the startled Brianne's wrists, sealing them seamlessly.

Last was a collar of black leather that snapped around her slim neck. Ky couldn't afford elaborate jeweled affairs like Calder could, but it was well made and bore a ruby-colored stone that rested at her throat. The collar also had a thin ring in the back, to which Ky clipped a leather leash.

"You look pretty," Ky rumbled.

Brianne studied herself in the five-tiered mirror, staring in wonder. "I'm not sure *pretty* is the right word. I look—strange."

"You look drop-dead sexy. You'll have every Shareem crawling to you with his tongue out, but you're mine tonight." He splayed his hand on her waist. "Remember that. If you go to any of them without my permission, it's punishment time."

"Go to them?" She looked up in surprise. "Why would I?"

"The pheromones fly around something fierce where we're going. You'll find yourself thinking things and doing things before you can stop yourself. But you *will* stop. Or find me, and I'll stop you."

"Find you? I have the feeling I won't want to leave your side."

Ky nodded. "You're catching on."

Before they left, Brianne tried to pay the bill.

"Not tonight, sweetheart," Ky said, hand on her wrist. "Tonight, I take care of you."

"But this must have been expensive."

Ky gave her a cold stare until she stilled, flushing. "You're on your way to punishment, love."

Brianne opened her mouth as though she would argue and then closed it. "All right. I agreed to do it your way tonight."

He saw in her eyes that she would try to settle up with the couturier later. Upper-class ladies always wanted to pay at first, wanting to treat Shareem as their boy toys. They learned quickly just who was in charge, and in the end stopped trying to be in control.

Later, when the lady recovered, she would send her Shareem lavish gifts—or hide from him entirely, depending on what the experience did to her.

"Put it on your account?" the couturier said to Ky with a knowing wink.

"Please."

And that was that.

Ky blindfolded Brianne before they reached their destination. "This is a private place," he explained as he gently tied the black silk over her eyes. "I don't want you sending your bodyguards down later to clear it out. We like it here."

"I wouldn't do that," she said indignantly.

"You might. You think you're open-minded and have a soft spot for Shareem, but we'll see. Women react in all kinds of ways to what we're going to do." He paused. "You might even laugh. Some of the games get funny."

"I feel ready for anything," she said breathlessly.

"Sure, I believe you."

"Just don't let me trip. These heels are unbelievably high."

"That's because they're not really for walking. Hang on to me and you'll be fine."

Brianne did hang on to him in a gratifying way. As they entered the underground play place for level three Shareem she wrapped both arms around his waist and didn't let go.

They plummeted down ten stories in a grav tube to the forgotten warehouse level threes had turned into a space to call their own. Here they brought their subs—one-night stands or more permanent lovers—for games and other interaction.

The place had public rooms and private, food and drink, and bedrooms for resting as well as play. Some rooms were dungeon-like, with racks for tying partners to, a selection of floggers, manacles and chains, swings and many choices of sexual toys. Other rooms were simple bedrooms or sitting rooms—you didn't always need accoutrements to make sex good.

Level twos sometimes brought women here as part of their fun and games, but level twos didn't take it as seriously as did level threes. Level twos might indulge their ladies in a bit of spanking or tie-me-up, but level threes looked upon bondage as an art form. Level twos laughed—level threes were dead serious.

A dozen other Shareem had already arrived by the time Ky and Brianne stepped out of the grav tube, their subs in tow. Most of the ladies wore masks to protect their identities, though some of the lower-class women or those who said *to hell with it* went bare-faced.

Shareem pheromones already hung heavy in the air, and Ky could taste the growing excitement of the ladies. A Shareem in the street above could get a hard-on just walking by.

Ky felt Brianne sway against him as they moved through the rooms. The atmosphere would relax her inhibitions as they moved through the night. She had no need for fear here, because it was harmless.

Mostly.

Ky removed Brianne's blindfold and tucked it into his pocket. With her face-covering mask and her dark hair cascading down her back, she looked very little like the cool, neatly coiffed woman who appeared on digitals. She looked like a woman ready for sexual play, willing to seek it with a Shareem.

Ky was used to the place, but Brianne gasped as they walked around. Many of the women wore a variation of Brianne's dress, cut high in the hip and low in the breast. Most garments were leather of every color, from black to red to bright yellow to electric blue. Some ladies had chosen sheer fabrics instead, and one wore shimmering red silk that outlined every curve.

"She's lucky she's thin," Brianne murmured.

All the women wore collars, from plain black leather strips to silver collars studded with jewels. Some women sported high stiletto heels like Brianne's, some went barefoot. All had tethers attached to their collars, either hanging loose between their breasts or wrapped around the hand of a Shareem.

Ky knew all the Shareem here, some more than others, and a few had become good friends. It was nice to be able to talk freely about sex and bondage techniques without having to worry about patrollers listening.

The one thing they never discussed was DNAmo. Their experiences at the factory had ranged from minor indignities to horrific experiments, and no one wanted to compare notes. *Lab rats*, they'd called themselves, and they'd taken a tacit vow to not speak of it. The past stayed in the past.

Where it belongs, Ky told himself severely.

Braden arrived with not one but two young women in tow, their arms firmly around his waist. One wore leather and the other wore a body-hugging sarong of bright silk.

"Best friends," Braden said as he and Ky met up in the middle of the common room. He didn't bother to introduce them, and Ky didn't introduce Brianne. Ladies here were anonymous unless they chose otherwise.

"Best friends who happen to have the same birthday," Braden continued, grinning. "They're giving each other a gift – me."

Which wouldn't dampen the man's ego any. Ky refrained from making a smart-ass comment and ran his gaze over the two giggling women. They were cute, but he liked Brianne better.

Braden gave Brianne a penetrating glance. Ky figured he knew damn well who she was but was smart enough not to say anything.

"Care to join us?" Braden asked. The two women gave Ky a long once-over, as though concluding that two Shareem would be an even better gift than one.

Ky slid his hand to Brianne's leather-covered backside. "She's in training. Maybe next time."

The two women looked disappointed, but Braden whispered something to them that made them brighten. With another grin, Braden sauntered away, a hand planted firmly on each woman's ass.

"Does that happen often?" Brianne asked. "Being invited to join in?"

"All the time, sweetheart. Sometimes it's one big orgy. Depends on how hot it gets in here. A sandstorm stuck us down here for two days once. That was interesting."

She looked alarmed. "There isn't likely to be a sandstorm tonight, is there?"

"I didn't hear one forecast." Ky leaned close to her. "Doesn't mean we can't have an orgy, and doesn't mean I wouldn't order you to join in."

Her brown eyes widened, lashes brushing the mask. "You would do that?"

"If I was in the mood."

She exhaled. "I don't think I'm ready for an orgy."

"Are you scared?" Ky let his fingers move to the crease in her backside. "Or are you going to trust me?"

"What if I said *no, I don't trust you?*"

"Then I'd have failed as a master. As a level three I take care of you and make sure no one else hurts you. If I think your greatest pleasure will come from you taking another Shareem, I'll order you to do it."

"I see."

"No, you don't. But you will."

"What happens now?" she asked. "Whips and chains?"

Ky dropped his Dom persona and laughed out loud. "No. What kind of shit have you been reading?"

Another woman walked by with a Shareem called Eland, a blond giant whose fist dwarfed the woman's leather tether. They stopped as Ky laughed.

The pretty black-haired woman wore nothing but nipple rings with a silver chain hanging between them. She'd shaved her quim almost clean except for a line of black curls twisting down it. Ky noticed Brianne trying not to stare at her.

Her name was Jeanne and she'd been with Eland a long time. They weren't in love, but they were good friends, and Ky didn't think there was anything they wouldn't do for the other. Jeanne and Eland lived together but each pursued sexual relations with whomever they wanted, and Jeanne didn't confine herself to just men.

Ky and Aiden had shared Jeanne on occasion, with Eland either joining in enthusiastically or watching with equal enthusiasm. She was a rare Bor Nargan woman who, like Judith, refused to hide her interest in sex and Shareem.

But then, unlike Brianne, neither Jeanne nor Judith had a public position to maintain. They were working-class women who labored during the day and enjoyed Shareem at night. Working-class women in general had a more healthy interest in sex, while upper-class women had sexuality bred and brainwashed out of them.

"Ky." Jeanne rose up on her tiptoes and gave Ky a quick kiss on the mouth. "She's pretty."

"Yeah, nice one," Eland said, his irises widening as he looked Brianne up and down. "Where you been hiding her?"

"She's incognito and in training," Ky replied.

"Mmm, I like training." Eland made a show of licking his lips. "Where's Aiden tonight? You always do a twofer."

"Aiden is elsewhere."

Eland looked surprised then he shrugged, the typical *I'm Shareem and I mind my own business* gesture. "What are you going to teach her?"

"I'm still coming up with a plan." Ky's cock was plenty stiff with the ideas running through his head, but he needed something exact.

"Rees is here," Jeanne said.

"Is he?" More ideas percolated through Ky's brain. "Perfect. Talan with him?"

Eland snickered. "Of course. They're joined at the hip."

"I think it's sweet," Jeanne said. "Bound by love. I only stay with this lout because I've never found a better fuck."

Eland grinned at her. "And you never will."

"Now I *know* I'm in the level three hideaway," Ky observed. "Big cocks and big egos."

Eland just laughed and led Jeanne away.

Ky looked around but didn't see Rees, the Shareem that even Shareem weren't certain about. Most thought Rees was level three, but Ky, who knew him through their mutual friend Rio, knew that Rees had been a Shareem experiment, a DNAmo special, made to be above and beyond the average Shareem.

Rees had lived apart from the others at the lab as a priceless commodity—the Shareem that was going to take DNAmo into the next dimension in wealth. The researchers did all kinds of things to him both physically and mentally, according to Rio, and Ky was surprised the man had survived. Rees was also the only Shareem who had ever escaped from DNAmo, twisting the mind of a woman researcher until she helped him. And then she'd cried because he was gone.

Rees, like Calder, could turn a woman who had no intention of being a sub into a willing, drooling, half-crazed slave. But the woman who had finally broken through Rees' shell, a lady called Talan d'Urvey, was anything but a drooling slave. A sweet, rather shy woman, she had wrapped big bad Rees around her finger.

Rees was the perfect man to help train a new sub, and Talan's presence would keep Brianne from getting too frightened. If nothing else, Ky could point to Rees and say, *See, I could be scary like him.*

"Come on." Ky tugged at Brianne's leash. At first she stared in surprise, then she softened the look as though remembering she was supposed to be submissive.

Ky wanted to laugh. *This was going to be fun.*

Chapter Nine

Old Friends

Ky found Rees and Talan inside one of the private rooms. They weren't doing much more than lounging on a sofa, Talan on the big Shareem's lap, a sheer silk dress baring her limbs and showing plenty of cleavage. Her collar was covered with jewels, and she wore jeweled earrings to match.

A black-haired, heavily muscled level three Shareem sat with them, holding the leash of a red-haired woman who was laughing at something Rees had just said.

Ky shut the door behind him. "Rio," he said in surprise. "What the hell are you doing here?"

The black-haired Shareem got up and clapped Ky on the back. "I just couldn't stay away from Bor Narga, garden spot of the universe."

"The last time I saw you, you were hightailing it off-planet. What, you got homesick?"

Rio laughed, the sound filling the room. "I came to see old friends. My lady here can't get enough of Shareem and had the hankering to have some fun."

The unmasked woman next to him, dressed in a shimmering body-hugging fabric, blushed but smiled. Ky knew she was a princess of the planet Ariel, who had finally succeeded in giving Rio his fondest wish, his freedom from Bor Narga. Rio had also found true love with her, according to Talan.

"I'm surprised they didn't arrest you," Ky said.

"Hey, I'm a real live citizen of Ariel and the husband of a princess. I have the ident card to prove it, which I wave under the nose of every patroller who used to piss me off. They can't do a damn thing to me now." He laughed again.

Must be nice, Ky thought.

Princess Nella said, "I'm trying to push through legislation that will give all Shareem a place on Ariel, but it's slow. Ariel's immigration laws are pretty strict and always have been."

Talan slid from Rees' lap. The plump morsel with dark red hair wore a mask, but it was a mere strip of black silk across her eyes, not meant to hide her identity. "You are Brianne d'Aroth, aren't you?"

Brianne's eyes widened. "Please keep that to yourself."

"I would tell no one, and neither would Nella. I am glad to see you've learned that being with Shareem is no bad thing." She cocked her head. "You *have* learned that, haven't you? No more arresting them? They can't help what they are."

Ky moved close to Brianne, wanting to protect her for some reason. "She's catching on. That's why we're here. She wants to help Shareem, so I'm showing her what they're really like."

Rio laughed again, and Rees flashed a smile. "She'll figure out what they're like if she hangs around you," Rees said.

"Where's Aiden?" Rio asked, looking behind Ky as though the level one Shareem was hiding there.

Ky grew irritated. "You know, I am allowed to go outside without him."

"Don't get your cock in a twist," Rio said. "I just wondered."

The piercing look Rio gave Ky made Ky pause. Rio's blue eyes held knowledge and questions he wanted to ask. Questions about Aiden and Ky.

He knew.

But how could he? Ky didn't even know what he was feeling about Aiden. Besides, Ky and Aiden hadn't broken the rules about Shareem interaction until recently, after Rio had been long-gone to Ariel. Aiden could have sent Rio a message about it, but Ky didn't think so, and anyway, why the hell should he?

Rio caught Ky looking hard at him and contrived an innocent air.

Ky growled. "I didn't come here for a family reunion. I came here for sex. Good old-fashioned, ass-spanking sex."

Rio's eyes grew bluer. "I'm all for that."

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

The atmosphere of the room rapidly changed. Instead of the women looking like they were ready to launch into an upper-class lady's charity tea – granted, in odd attire for a tea party – they suddenly quieted in excited anticipation.

Talan and Nella knew what to expect. Brianne didn't at all. Ky chuckled, pushing away his worry about Rio's knowledge.

"Let the games begin."

* * * * *

Brianne thought they'd remain in the sitting room, which was a bit shabby but normal-enough looking with a few sofas and tables. In response to Ky's statement, however, Rees rose and led the way through another door.

The room beyond lay in complete darkness except for one light trained on a padded bench in the middle of the room.

"Who wants to be first in the spotlight?" Rees asked.

"Me," Rio said at once. Brianne sensed the Shareem's temperature rising as he led his off-planet wife forward. Nella went with him willingly enough. "Definitely me."

"You'd think he'd never had sex before," Rees murmured.

Brianne looked up at Rees, his face incredibly handsome but lacking the face-sculpted perfection of Aiden. Rees' hair was long and blond, caught once at the nape of his neck and again halfway down his back. He wore a sleeveless tunic that bared his massive biceps and the black chain on his right arm. His eyes were as blue as any other Shareem's, but he looked down at her with an intensity she hadn't seen in the others. He could make a woman climax with that gaze.

She felt a tug on her collar. "Pay attention," Ky growled.

The slight bit of discipline increased the warmth inside her. She should be outraged that a man had the audacity to speak to her in a commanding tone, but secretly she liked it. At least she liked Ky doing it. If Dranis had given her an order she'd have punched him in the nose.

"Strip for me, baby," Rio commanded.

Nella obediently opened her filmy garment and let it slide to her feet. No shyness about it. She had lush curves and plump breasts and a tiny gold ring in one nipple. Brianne absently touched her own breast, wondering why a woman would want herself pierced *there*.

When Rio flicked his finger over the ring and Nella's breasts tightened, Brianne thought she understood. To have Ky or Aiden casually touch her like that would be excitement itself.

Rio tapped a control that brought the bench to a position halfway between vertical and horizontal, then he stripped off his own clothes. Brianne froze, riveted to the sight. Ky had opened his pants for her on the train, but she hadn't seen him naked, or Aiden either.

Rio had muscles on his muscles. His body was tight perfection, arms and chest strong and raw. The sight took her breath away, and she noted that Nella looked him over in great appreciation.

Brianne waited for Rio to tie Nella to the half reclined bench, but instead Rio leaned back against it and put his arms over his head. "Tie me down, love."

Nella seemed to know what to do. She bound Rio's wrists to the rings in the bench with leather tethers, then she bound his ankles to the base.

There he was, spread out for them, a naked Shareem, his cock huge and standing stiff from his body. Brianne's heartbeat sped.

"All right, sweetheart," he said, his eyes filled with blue. "Do with me what you will. I can take it."

Nella began kissing and touching Rio all over, running her hands across his dark-haired chest, licking his nipples and his belly and his navel. He groaned with happiness.

At last Nella sank to her knees, closed both hands over Rio's huge cock and took it in her mouth.

"Oh gods," Rio moaned.

Brianne could no longer see Rees and Talan in the darkness of the room, nor Ky either, but she felt Ky's leather-clad body pressed tightly to hers, Ky's fingers sliding under her skirt to her thigh.

"Is that what we're going to do?" she whispered.

"Not necessarily."

Brianne bit back disappointment. To have Ky tied up for her would be heavenly. She imagined his body glistening with the oils Aiden made, and then she added Aiden's broad hands oiling Ky for her. She made a little sound in her throat.

"Don't get carried away staring at Rio," Ky said. "If you make me jealous, I'll punish you."

"It's not Rio I'm thinking about."

Ky stilled as though surprised by her words. He stared at her a moment, eyes glittering in the dark, then he lifted his head and went back to watching Nella and Rio.

Rio's cock was so large that Nella couldn't fit it into her mouth, though she had a damned good try. She rubbed her hand around the base in a practiced way, as though she'd learned exactly how to pleasure her Shareem.

Brianne remembered the taste of Ky and felt a twinge of envy and anticipation. He'd been so tangy and dark and *good* that she wanted to taste him again. And again.

Ky ran his fingers across Brianne's thigh and touched her quim, his fingers threading through the curls there. "Mmm. Watching makes you wet. My little voyeur."

She couldn't really explain that she wasn't so much interested in Nella and Rio as what Nella and Rio made her think of doing with Ky. And Aiden.

Ky slid his finger over her clit, massaging the lips of her opening. Before she registered the new touch, he pressed his finger smoothly inside her. At the invasion, Brianne stiffened, a gasp of pleasure escaping her.

"Would you like to be shaved?" Ky asked. "Like Jeanne?"

She remembered the woman with the Shareem called Eland, how she'd walked about naked and had an almost bare quim. "I don't know. Wouldn't it itch?"

"I have a lotion—Aiden came up with it—that keeps the skin from itching. I just happen to have brought some with me."

Just happen to have brought some?

"I don't know."

"You're mine tonight. You obey me. Whatever I want."

"Oh."

"Not *oh*. You say, *Yes, master*."

"Yes, mas—that sounds so strange."

Ky growled. "You *so* want to be spanked."

Rio shifted his hips toward Nella's mouth, his black hair skimming his chest as he turned his head. "Spanking—sounds—fun."

Rees' voice came out of the darkness. "Learn obedience, Brianne. It will go easier for you."

Unlike Rio, his voice held no humor. He wasn't joking.

"Ky's the spanking master," Rio said, then he groaned. "Sweet gods, I'm coming. I love you, Nella."

Nella held on to him, opening her mouth wider as Rio lifted his hips. Nella took in his come with a look of rapt concentration, reminding Brianne of how she'd taken Ky in the train. Brianne still couldn't see Rees, but she heard Talan make a half squeaking, half groaning noise overlapped with Rees' soft laughter.

Ky snaked his hand through Brianne's hair and tilted her head back to kiss her. His tongue was hard and strong in her mouth. "I want to fuck you."

"Oh... I mean, *yes, master.*"

"I can't, because I won't be gentle. I don't know how to be."

"Because you're level three."

"I should have brought Aiden. I want to fuck *this.*" He let a second finger join his first inside her quim. "Then I want to fuck your ass. I'd call that a good night."

Brianne's hips rocked, her quim wanting to squeeze his fingers, her heart hammering. *Her ass?* Did people do that?

In the center of the room, Nella released Rio from his bonds, a huge smile on her face. She squealed with laughter as Rio wrestled her to the floor and pushed her knees open. Before Brianne's startled eyes, Rio entered Nella, his brown hips rising and falling.

Rees laughed in the darkness again, and Talan said, "More, please, *yes.*"

Brianne whimpered as Ky's fingers pressed farther inside her. She had never felt such a thing. She'd played with her own clit before, bringing herself to climax, but she'd never put anything inside, and on the train, they'd only teased the outside of her quim.

"I want to come," she whispered fiercely. "May I come?"

"Asking permission? You're learning, sweetheart."

"Please, may I?"

"Yes, baby. Come for me."

A wave of darkness rolled over her, her hips jutting as she tried to drag his fingers in and in. "*Ky,*" she moaned. "*Aiden.*"

Ky kept up the rhythm of his fingers, his thumb rocking back and forth on the button of her clit. "That's good, Brianne."

Brianne bit her lip to stifle her cries. She wanted more than his fingers inside her, she wanted all of him. Every Shareem inch. And she wanted Aiden. Was that possible? Two men inside her at the same time?

The thought pushed her over the edge. She gave up hiding her cries and screamed. Ky caught the scream on his lips, kissing her hard as she rocked against his hand.

She heard Talan and Rees in the darkness, both of them making muffled groans. Rio drove into Nella in silence, and she moaned and squirmed, loving what he did to her.

Brianne gave one last cry, then Ky gathered her against him, his leather cool against her bare arms. She felt his heart slamming against his ribs, his body temperature high.

"You called out for Aiden," he said. "You want him?"

"Yes." Brianne drew a long breath. "*And you.*"

His heartbeat went even faster, quicker than a normal human's should. "Do you, now?"

"Yes." *So do you*, she wanted to add.

Ky eased her away. Before she could reach for him again, stumbling on her too-high heels, he abruptly turned away and faded into the blackness.

"Ky?"

Brianne reached for him again and contacted empty air. The sound of the door opening and closing answered her.

Her wave of panic subsided almost immediately. The languor of her own climax coupled with the endorphins that floated through the room calmed her down, made her almost languid. He'd left her for the moment, but she'd be all right, he wouldn't let anyone hurt her. For some reason she wanted to believe and trust Ky, to submit to him in truth.

She remembered what he'd said about Shareem pheromones, how this place was permeated with them. He'd said that because of the pheromones, she'd do things she'd never dream of otherwise.

What she dreamed of was having Aiden and Ky naked, facing each other, tip to tip, while she knelt and licked them from one set of balls to the other. Then on her back, her legs wide while they both licked her quim.

She could come just thinking about it.

Rio and Nella ceased moving and began kissing each other, Nella cupping Rio's backside. Talan drifted into breathy sighs, Rees silent except for the occasional low sound. Neither couple seemed to mind that Brianne watched and listened.

Brianne didn't mind either. What would have shocked her only a few days ago now seemed fine. Sex without inhibition and fear. The couples obviously loved each other. She could see the adoring way Nella looked up at Rio and had sensed the same bond between Rees and Talan.

Seeing them together made her feel a little lonely, but also at peace. She had no idea what Ky would want her to do, but she felt ready for anything. Spread for him, take him in her mouth, bend over so he could have her ass?

The last thought made the faraway practical side of her shiver in fear, but the part of her that had already submitted to Ky thought, *it sounds nice*.

The door opened and she felt Ky's presence warm at her side. She sighed in relief and reached for him, closing her arms around his leather-clad body.

"Miss me?" he asked.

"I was afraid for a moment you'd gone."

He slid his hand down her back. "You're approaching more punishment. I would never desert you, especially not here. Do you trust me?"

Of course she did. Didn't she? "I don't know. This is all so new."

Rio rose to his feet and reached for Nella. "I hear someone heading for trouble. Want the spotlight, Ky?"

Ky grunted. "It's about time you finished."

Rio gathered Nella close. "Hey, I could go all night."

"Not in front of me. Go bore someone else."

Rio curled his lip, but his eyes twinkled with good humor. "Bite me, asshole."

"That's Nella's territory," Rees' voice drifted to them.

Rio laughed as he and Nella disappeared from the light. "Aw, he's just horny. A sexy woman with him and he hasn't had release."

Ky gave Brianne a slap on her backside. "Go out into the light and take off the dress."

Brianne looked up at him in apprehension. His voice firmed. "Now."

More punishment coming her way, she guessed, though why did she shiver with excitement to think so?

Brianne should be terrified to step into the circle of light which blinded her to everything but herself, and more terrified to remove her clothes, knowing the others watched. But for some reason it seemed perfectly natural to find the catches to release the dress and peel it from her body.

"Ooo hoo, very nice." Rio's voice came from somewhere in the dark followed by an "Ow, she *bit* me."

Ky remained in the darkness too, but Brianne sensed his eyes watching her, gleaming with feral possessiveness.

"Show off your body for us," he said. "Your breasts, your sweet pussy, your ass."

Brianne wasn't quite certain how he wanted her to do that. She cupped her hands under her breasts, lifting them a little. For some reason she automatically ran her thumbs over her nipples, making them tight. Perhaps the Shareem pheromones were telling her what to do.

"Good," Ky said, his voice a growl. "Now your pussy."

Brianne glanced at the padded bench, still nearly vertical from where Rio had stood against it. She rested her back on it and opened her legs, drawing two fingers down either side of her quim.

She sensed rather than heard the appreciative sighs. She wasn't quite sure why the others liked looking at her, but perhaps she was winding up the two Shareem who in turn wound up their wives.

She felt the full weight of Ky's stare coming from outside the circle of light. "I want to see your ass."

Brianne wondered what he meant because she was stark naked and everyone could see it. But she had an idea of what to do as she pushed away from the bench.

Ky had brought her here to learn the reality of Shareem, believing she'd grow fearful and race back home. She needed to show him she was serious, which meant she could not be shy.

She adjusted the controls on the bench to lower it horizontally and then she kept her finger on the control so the head end moved down farther than the foot. Perfect.

She moved to the end of the bench, bent over and hugged her arms around the middle. There. They should certainly be able to see all of her ass.

Nothing but silence met her ears. She knew they were still in the room by the escalating tension in the air and the lassitude that eased over her, making her anal star relax and open.

Ready for fucking. The thought danced through her head. *Ready for a Shareem.*

When the door opened, she almost jumped, but the heaviness in her limbs kept her in place. She knew instinctively that it was Aiden, knew the scent and the change in the air that meant him. She felt her quim open even more, liquid pooling inside.

"Yum," Aiden's voice rolled over her. "Pretty."

She looked back as Aiden stepped into the light, his blue eyes almost luminous. He wore a sleeveless tunic similar to Rees', his hair in a long blond braid to his hips. He approached the bench, the smile on his face chasing her remaining fears away.

"Hello, love." He placed his hand on her back just above her backside. His touch warmed her all the way through, the scent of jasmine and spice floating over her. Aiden always smelled so good.

Ky came and stood close to Aiden, the pair of them looking down at her. She felt suddenly right and complete that the two should be there, not just Ky, not just Aiden.

I need them both.

"Rio is here," Ky said in a low voice.

"I know," Aiden answered. "He and Nella came into Judith's bar right after you high-tailed it out of there."

Ky's face set in a scowl. "Did he?"

Aiden nodded. "I know you didn't call me to talk about Rio. I wouldn't have come down here for *that*."

Brianne heard Nella laugh, and Rio's voice rolled to them. "Thanks a lot, Aiden. You really know how to hurt a Shareem's feelings."

"Why *did* you call me?" Aiden asked, ignoring Rio.

Ky ran his hand down Brianne's back, making her open and lift even more. Maybe he'd put his fingers inside her again. Maybe he and Aiden both would. She groaned in anticipation.

"She mentioned she'd never been with a man before, and her first time shouldn't be with a level three. I might hurt her."

Aiden looked surprised. "You want her first time to be with me?"

"Yes."

"Brianne?" Aiden asked.

Ky interrupted. "She is mine tonight. She'll do what I tell her."

"Brianne?" Aiden repeated.

Trying not to look at Ky's scowl, Brianne nodded. "I think—I think I'd like that."

Ky went down on one knee beside her and put his face close to hers. "You're very bold for a sub. But I'll let you pay for it later."

Brianne moved in excitement, no longer worried. "Thank you. For bringing Aiden, I mean. I won't be afraid with him."

"You won't be afraid with me," Ky said, voice soft. "But I might hurt you without meaning to. I'm bred to like it rough. You need a little more experience before you can take me."

That sounded nice. She could practice for a long time on Aiden and then move on to Ky. The perfect solution.

Somewhere in the back of her mind, her true self felt a stab of alarm—Aiden was a huge man, she'd never done this before, she'd never expected to do this, and Ky wanted her to practice until she was ready to take him? When had her life gotten so strange?

Aiden laid a hand on Ky's shoulder. "Thank you, my friend. I won't forget this."

Ky gave him a nod then returned to stroking Brianne's hair. "Are you ready?"

Brianne swallowed. "I think so. What do you want me to do?"

Aiden ran both hands down Brianne's back, drawing his palms in a curve over her backside. "Turn over," he said, his voice gentle. "I'll do the rest."

Chapter Ten

Training

Brianne rose from the bench and repositioned herself on her back. She'd warmed the leather with her body, and it was comfortable against her skin. Her hips jutted upward with the angle of the bench, her legs parting naturally.

"She's lovely," Aiden said approvingly.

"She wants to be shaved," Ky said. "Like Jeanne."

Aiden's brows quirked. "Really?"

"Did I say that?" Brianne wasn't certain any more what their conversation about shaving had been.

Ky ran his fingers down either side of her quim. "Right here, I think. Leave her a little, enough to be entrancing."

"Sounds good to me."

Aiden's voice had deepened and softened, containing a warm, seductive note. His fingers joined Ky's in exploring her, moving back and forth until she squirmed with delight.

"I brought lotion." Ky's voice grew rough, gentleness departing.

"So did I," Aiden answered. "And oils. Made especially for her."

Rees came out of the darkness with Aiden's carved rosewood box in his hands. "You might want this."

"Thank you," Aiden said without either looking at Rees or ceasing his exploration of Brianne. "Where's Talan?"

"Asleep. She needs to rest."

Rees looked Brianne over, his expression neutral, then shifted his gaze to Aiden and Ky. His intelligent eyes seemed to see and understand everything without having to ask questions. He nodded once at Brianne then set down the box and disappeared back into darkness.

Aiden opened the lid and drew out a cut glass bottle that caught the light and shimmered in rainbow colors.

"How pretty," Brianne breathed.

Aiden chuckled. "We've got her relaxed."

"She'll need to be."

Aiden opened the bottle, sending out a waft of mellow spice similar to the smell of the oil he'd used before. He poured some of the lotion into his hand and then smeared it on the outside of her quim, rubbing firmly but gently.

Ky had pulled a black leather bag out of his pocket, which he now opened. He drew out a slim silver device that Brianne assumed was a shaver. She wriggled a little, the practical part of her brain worried. She usually removed hair from her body with a depilatory cream that she had applied at a salon, the results guaranteed for a year. Shavers were considered risqué, for people who wanted the sensation of dragging them across their skin. And she'd never ever dreamed of letting someone remove the hair from between her legs.

Ky flicked a switch and the device made a small, pleasant hum. "Move your thighs farther apart," he instructed. "And lie very still."

"Perhaps we should tie her hands so she doesn't jerk," Aiden suggested.

"Good idea." Ky turned off the device and proceeded to fit strips of leather into the rings on the cuffs that adorned her wrists.

"Hold on to the handles," Aiden said. He gently guided her arms over her head and her fingers around the handholds above the bench. Ky threaded the leather through rings, tying them securely.

Brianne gulped as she felt the leather close on her wrists. Though she shook on the inside, a part of her hoped Aiden and Ky liked what they saw, that they thought her body was pretty.

She knew that Rees and Rio and their ladies likely watched from the shadows, but her excitement didn't stem from being watched by strangers. The way Aiden and Ky looked at her, blue eyes burning, made her extremely happy.

"Good," Aiden breathed. He pressed her thighs even farther apart and pushed his palm against her pelvis, making her hips rock back.

Ky rested one hand against her left thigh and brought the shaver around. He stroked it once against her quim, a cool band of movement between thigh and pussy.

Brianne expected to feel something—a sting, a pull—but there was nothing but a pleasant, tingling sensation, then it was gone.

Ky lifted the shaver and pressed his hand against her right thigh, gently moving it aside. He repeated the stroke against the fold between leg and quim. Aiden watched with avid eyes, his gaze riveted to what Ky did. When Ky moved away, finished, Aiden brought out a fold of silk which he wiped gently across Brianne's skin.

"All done," he said. "You're beautiful."

Brianne pulled a little against her bonds. "Thank you," she said shyly.

"Have you ever used a vibrator?"

Brianne shook her head, her hair sliding against the bench.

"I'll use one on you before I enter you," Aiden said. "It will open you and make you more ready for me. Shareem are big."

She smiled. "I know."

Aiden chuckled and winked at Ky. "I think she enjoyed riding back with us on the train."

"Get on with it," Ky growled.

"Level threes are always impatient," Aiden said. "Level ones take their time, savor every minute of it."

"I want to savor every minute of *sex*," Ky said. "Not you talking."

Ignoring him, Aiden reached back into his box and removed, not the long wand that Brianne expected, but a small, ruby-colored plastic sphere that fit into his palm. He straddled the bench in front of her and looked her over, his appreciative look making her blush.

"I thought vibrators were penis-shaped," she stammered.

He gave her a slow smile. "I thought you hadn't ever used one."

"I haven't. I've read about them."

His smile widened. "Next time you read about sex toys, invite me over."

"It wasn't for fun, it was research."

"Fine by me." He winked. "Invite me over when you do your — research. I have my vibrators designed in special shapes. Most level ones do."

"Like you design your oils?"

"Exactly."

Aiden draped her feet over his spread thighs and ran his thumb over her now-shaved pussy. "This vibrator fits right against my hand." He showed her the sphere pressed in his palm, anchored by a strap to his middle finger. "It lets me give you added sensation when I stroke you."

"Do you need to?" she asked breathlessly.

He chuckled. "Let's just say it will be nice for you."

Ky moved to straddle the bench. He rested Brianne's head in his lap, fingers trailing through her long hair.

"Any time you want to start," he said to Aiden.

Aiden gently rubbed Brianne's quim. "Level ones can bring a woman to climax just by talking," he said in a teasing voice. "But not with a level three hovering nearby growling at them to get on with it. Have I mentioned they're impatient?"

Brianne looked up at Ky, who shot Aiden an annoyed look. Brianne started to smile, then let out a sigh instead. Aiden's quiet fingers coupled with the cool surface of the sphere made her quim part and swell.

She well believed that a level one could make a woman come just by talking to her. The timbre of his voice and the vibrations it set off inside her heated her entire body. Ky stroking her hair didn't hurt either. She rested her head in his lap and looked up at him, trying to connect with his enigmatic eyes.

He kept his emotions shuttered around her, but she sensed he was a man of deep feeling. He nearly betrayed himself whenever he looked at Aiden, showing his caring,

his growing lust and his anger at himself. Or maybe only Brianne saw it because she was looking.

Once or twice when he'd looked at her she'd seen a flash, just a flash, of longing. She pretended to herself that his longing was more than a Shareem needing to sate himself on a woman. She pretended he truly wanted *her*. It was a fantasy, but she'd live it as long as she could.

Bound, she couldn't touch him or reach for him, but she turned her head and lightly kissed his fingers.

A spark jumped in his eyes. "Hurry up," he said to Aiden.

"Patience," Aiden said without looking up.

Aiden's blue gaze focused on Brianne's quim. His incredibly handsome face stilled in concentration as he stroked the sphere across her opening. She squirmed, loving the hard thing against her. She was getting it all wet.

"Good," Aiden murmured. "She's doing well."

Brianne opened her mouth to reply when a little buzz ran through the sphere and across her pussy. "Ohhh."

"That's why I have these custom-made. Enjoy it, Brianne. Open yourself to it."

The small pulsation enhanced the feel of the cool plastic against her quim, made Aiden's finger that teased her clit vibrate with it. Her hips rose, seeking the sensation as Aiden traced patterns around her nub.

"Please," she begged. "I want it inside me."

"It's too big," Aiden whispered.

"I don't care. Open me with it. I want it *in*."

"How about me instead?" Aiden asked.

She hesitated. Would he feel as good as this hard thing that she wanted to thrust against?

Aiden seemed to know her thoughts. "It will be better," he said. "I promise."

Better? This was already *very* good.

She nodded.

Aiden removed the sphere and dropped it back into his box. Before Brianne could form a whimper of loss, the sphere was replaced by his blunt—equally as hard and almost as large—tip.

He'd lifted his tunic and stripped off his loincloth. Straddling the bench let him put his cock right against her without him having to move.

"Yes," she said. "That's wonderful. Does it vibrate?"

He chuckled. "Only if I laugh."

Ky leaned down, his heat covering her. "It can do many things, sweetheart. Let my friend please you with it. Let him fuck you."

"Yes."

Aiden skimmed his tunic off his body, his blond braid landing against his back. Sitting spread in front of Brianne in all his nakedness he was absolutely, incredibly delectable.

She ran a hungry gaze over him, and noticed Ky doing the same.

If Aiden noticed their scrutiny, he didn't acknowledge it. "Ready?" he asked softly.

Something in Brianne wanted to tense, wanted to reject that this large man was going to touch her more intimately than anyone had in her life. But her body was relaxed and open from his massage with the vibrator, and she moved her legs farther apart, nodding silently.

Aiden slid his hands under her hips to position her. "Breathe out," he instructed.

Ky sat still behind her, waiting. He stroked her hair, his gaze on her face. She exhaled slowly as Aiden commanded, and Aiden slipped himself inside.

He stretched and widened her far more than the vibrator had, and he was just as hard. Shareem were twelve inches—she'd looked it up—one standard foot, and she felt every inch carefully penetrate her.

She moaned and lifted her hips to him. He caught them in his hands, steadying her while his long hard stem pushed in and in. She wanted to pull him down to her, rake her fingers across his back. She pulled on her tethers, frustrated.

Aiden dropped his head back, his bare throat damp. "You're tight, baby. I love it. Ky, damn, you have to feel how tight she is."

"Later. When she's ready."

Brianne studied Aiden's body as he began to gently thrust into her. His tail of blond hair dragged across his shoulders, the curls on his chest a darker blond. His biceps played as he steadied her on him, his naked hips rocking. He bit his lip, brow furrowing in concentration.

She saw where they joined, his staff outlined by curls that blended with her darker ones. The sight increased her excitement. She looked back at Ky, his dark hair hanging loose, his leather tunic open to show a V of brown chest.

"I want to see you," she whispered. "Let me see you."

He knew what she meant. For a moment she thought he'd refuse, or maybe mention that subs shouldn't give orders, but then he rose from the bench and began to remove his clothes.

Her gaze riveted to him as his body came into view. His chest was powerful and heavily muscled, resembling Rio's more than Aiden's. A gold ring hung from his flat, brown nipple, making her want to flick her tongue over it.

His chest and abdomen tapered to narrow hips and muscled thighs, between which his cock extended, his balls lifted tight.

Brianne sighed happily. "That looks so nice."

"You bet it does," Aiden agreed.

Aiden lifted Brianne's hips and withdrew himself, sliding smoothly out. Brianne whimpered, then moaned out loud when he laid his body full length on top of her and entered her again.

He went deep inside, stretching her walls, making her want to *squeeze*. His Shareem body warmed her, his touch sending smiling lassitude through her.

"That's it," he told her in a low voice. "You're getting it."

"Hold him tight with your pussy," Ky instructed. "Make him feel it."

It surprised Brianne that she could pleasure Aiden just by lifting her hips and pressing the muscles inside her quim. Aiden's eyes glazed over, a half groan sliding from his throat. "I'm in love."

"Do you like it, Brianne?" Ky asked.

He stood next to the bench, his cock at their eye level. It jutted toward them, as though interested in what they did.

"Yes, I like it," she breathed.

"I like it too," Aiden said. "You're beautiful, Brianne."

No one had ever called her beautiful—good-looking or attractive perhaps, but said only in a businesslike way, satisfaction that she'd look good on digitals. Dranis had certainly never mentioned her looks.

No man in her life had told her, with that catch in his voice, that he thought her beautiful.

She touched his face and kissed him. Aiden returned the kiss with practiced lips and tongue, teaching her to use hers. But he was no less enthusiastic for knowing how to do it. He kissed her for the joy of kissing her, while his huge Shareem cock stroked her from the inside out.

"Suck me." Ky's voice next to them was a harsh rumble.

Brianne and Aiden both broke the kiss and turned to study Ky's cock that hovered within reach. "Suck me while Aiden fucks you."

Brianne moved in excitement, her smile wide. She reached out with her tongue and licked Ky's tip, enjoying the familiar taste of salt and *him*.

She wet the tip thoroughly, tracing the flange and playing a little just under the head. Aiden watched, his cheek pressed to hers as she opened her mouth and took Ky inside.

Ky was big, filling her mouth. Aiden kissed her cheek where Ky pressed it, and when she drew back to take a breath, Aiden swiped his tongue up the side of Ky's shaft.

Ky stilled a moment, then he reached down and smoothed the hair from Aiden's brow. "Suck," he commanded. "Both of you."

Brianne opened lips for another mouthful of him. Aiden licked where her mouth closed around Ky, tongue teasing and snaking between her lips.

Aiden continued riding her, his slow penetration making her want to scream. She lost her hold on Ky, and she and Aiden began licking him. They went about it thoroughly, tasting and wetting him from balls to tip and back again. Aiden's tongue tangled with hers and he laughed.

"This," Ky said hoarsely. "This I can do."

Brianne dimly wondered what he meant. She loved the taste of his hardness against her lips and the taste of Aiden as their tongues met.

It should always be this way.

She didn't understand the thought and didn't pursue it. She didn't need confusion right now, she needed to lick Ky and fuck Aiden. Hopefully soon they'd reverse and she'd be fucking Ky and licking Aiden.

She laughed inside, knowing she'd never have used the word *fuck* before she met Aiden and Ky. She wanted with all her strength to be with these two powerful men, one who soothed her and the other who commanded her and excited her beyond belief.

Ky slid his hand between their bodies, his fingers finding Brianne's swollen clit. Ky knelt beside them, putting his cock out of reach, but his mouth was available for kissing. Both she and Aiden enjoyed themselves, thrusting tongues between his lips, tasting him while he did the same to them.

It was so beautiful, and the hot friction on her clit and the huge hardness inside her tangled into one dark, shuddering wave of feeling.

"She's coming," Aiden said against Ky's mouth, then he closed his eyes and groaned. "I am too. Gods, she's squeezing me so tight."

Brianne screamed, coming hard and hot. She jerked against her bonds, wanting so much to hold Aiden as her hips bumped his. Ky played and kissed, catching her cries in his mouth as he had when he'd stroked her in the darkness.

Aiden moved faster and faster and then his voice broke as he came.

He kissed her and Ky, their lips and tongues all mixed up. Brianne kept on kissing even as her climax wound down, loving that the three of them were together. Women who dared to have sex usually had it with only one man—what joys they were missing not having it with two.

Ky pulled away and stood up, still naked and hard, but moving back from the pair. His chest rose with his quick breath, his eyes blue and hot.

"Don't go," Brianne begged.

Aiden smiled. "I know. I love him too." He closed his eyes and rested his forehead against Brianne's neck, his breathing heavy but his body calming. "That was perfection, absolute perfection." He looked up at her and smiled. "Thank you, my dear."

* * * * *

Ky was not going to let Brianne get away without her punishment. After Aiden withdrew and calmed down for a few minutes—Aiden stretched out on the floor and went on for a time about how perfect and beautiful it all was—Ky had him help reposition Brianne on the bench.

“No,” she protested, but she was so relaxed and pliant from sex that her complaint was halfhearted and she barely struggled against them. “I was good.”

“No, you weren’t,” Ky said. His level three instincts thrummed, his hand happy to feel the familiar handle of his whip. “You disobeyed me, you didn’t trust me, you worried I’d left you behind and you looked at Rio with lust in your eyes.”

“I was thinking of you.”

Her answer secretly pleased Ky, but that was no reason to let her off the hook. “Sorry, sweetheart, you’ll have to do better next time.”

“Next time?”

Yes, why was Ky going on about *next time*? He would finish here and see that she got home all right and that would be it. There would be no next time.

“You never know when you’ll want to play again.”

He’d brought his crop with him, a stiff piece of leather that people eons ago had used when they rode creatures called *horses*. Horses were extinct, but the crop had been discovered by level three Shareem as a nice spanking implement.

Ky liked this particular one because it provided a swift sting without truly hurting or leaving a mark. He also had fun tracing patterns with its tip around Brianne’s buttocks while she wriggled and pleaded with Aiden as he finished tying her up.

Aiden laughed at her pleas and stepped back to let Ky do his thing. When Ky was done, Aiden would soothe her with oils and she’d feel plenty good. So good in fact that she’d likely beg to be punished and maybe deliberately disobey so he’d do it again.

You’re still thinking this will go on after today.

She might want to do good works and change life for Shareem, but that didn’t mean she wanted two Shareem lovers living with her in the ruling family’s compound.

The crop whistled through the air and smacked right across her ass. Brianne squealed and jumped but she smiled a little as though thinking *that’s not so bad*.

Punish her, his instincts screamed. Make her obey you.

He spanked her four more times, then lowered the crop. Aiden looked at him in mild surprise.

That’s all she can take. She’s new at this.

The level three inside Ky snorted. *You’re never this soft on a sub. If they agree to submit to you, they take what you give them.*

This one’s different.

The level three inside made a noise of derision. *Oh please.*

Aiden slid his hand across Brienne's backside as Brienne turned her head and looked up at Ky. Her eyes were soft, her face relaxed, and she smiled.

"Your ass is so pretty and red," Aiden said, going into his soothing routine. He kissed her backside, lips touching where the crop had fallen. "I'll make you all better now."

Chapter Eleven

Revelations

Ky dressed in the outer room, Aiden having carried the oiled, calmed, almost cooing Brianne off to a private room where she could sleep. She'd murmured she didn't need to rest, but she was new at this and Aiden cajoled her as they went off together.

Ky let Aiden take over because he knew that if he saw Brianne snuggled up on the bed, her hair mussed, her eyes heavy, he'd thrust open her legs and drive into her before he could stop himself. He wanted her. And he wanted Aiden right there beside him when he took her. Best leave them alone.

Rio came in, dressed and yawning. "That was fun."

Ky laced up his leggings, still shirtless. "Did you stay the whole time?"

"Most of it, until you started the spanking. Then I felt the need to take Nella aside and do a little punishing of my own. Rees and Talan have disappeared, so they're probably down for the count."

"As long as you were entertained."

Rio laughed. "Cut the crap. You two enjoyed the hell out of it." He stopped laughing and gave Ky an odd look. "I'm glad to see you and Aiden—you know—have worked things out."

Ky stopped in the act of picking up his leather tunic. "Worked things out?"

"You know, between the two of you." Rio looked uncomfortable. "I mean, you were kissing each other. I thought you and Aiden, um, got together."

"He told you, did he?" A thread of anger worked through him. He hadn't released, and the frustration of not finishing with Brianne coupled with Aiden blabbing to Rio pissed him off dangerously. "About me letting him bring me off?"

Rio looked surprised. "No."

Well, shit. "He didn't give you the whole story at Judith's?"

"At Judith's? You mean today? No, he told me a long time ago, before I left for Ariel."

That had been months and months ago. But Ky hadn't let Aiden touch him or kiss him until a couple of days earlier, when they'd met Brianne. But Rio obviously knew...

"Wait a minute, what did he tell you?"

Rio shifted from foot to foot. "That he had the hots for you. I thought he was crazy, but he was dead serious. And then when I saw you in there, I just figured..." He shrugged.

"The *hots* for me?" Ky stared at him.

"Yeah. I don't know why, you're pretty ugly, but hey, it's a matter of taste." His teasing died. "He didn't tell you?"

"No."

Rio made a face. "Oh crap, I blew it."

"Let me get this straight. He told you – a long time ago – that he was thinking about sex with me?"

"Yep. I thought it was bizarre, but he kind of convinced me it wasn't."

"And how many people did you tell?"

Rio looked offended. "None. Not even Rees. That's the kind of shit that can get a Shareem terminated."

"I know. It can't happen, it was programmed out of us." Ky pulled on his tunic, his heart thumping. "Let me set you straight. Aiden doesn't love me, and we're not together."

"Yeah, well, I know what I saw in there. He had his mouth on you."

"That's because of Brianne. She – I don't know, she makes everything go away, you know what I mean? I never know what I'm really doing, I'm lost in the pleasure."

Rio looked at him narrowly. "Whatever you say."

"Swear to the gods. But keep it to yourself, all right?"

"As long as you don't want to kiss *me*."

Ky shook his head, not remotely interested. "Hell, no."

Rio let out a breath of relief. "Fine then." He clapped Ky on the shoulder. "Good luck, my friend."

He walked out of the room whistling, likely anticipating getting back with his redheaded princess. Ky remained alone for a few moments, digesting what Rio had let slip.

Aiden wanted him. Aiden the tall Shareem with the beautiful eyes and pleasing touch wanted him.

No.

The word cut through him like a whip.

It is forbidden.

He's my friend.

More memories poured through his head, searing pain, another Shareem with lips like fire, a lonely white room, crushing grief when they told Ky what had happened. *It should have worked, they'd said. It should have worked without harm.*

Fuck off! Ky had screamed. He'd launched himself at the terrified scientist, who ran away, calling for restraints.

A slamming door, more loneliness. Grief.

Ky gasped, coming to himself. He was no longer at DNAmo, he was in a level three pleasure palace surrounded by Shareem enjoying themselves without limitations. In another room, Brianne would be sleeping with Aiden watching over her, both of them alive and well.

He gathered up his things and left the room, heading for the grav tube. At the top, he barely acknowledged another Shareem and a blindfolded lady coming in for some fun, walking past them into the night.

The air had cooled a little, but not much, Bor Narga always like an oven. The street held more activity than it did during the day, now that the sun wasn't blasting full strength. Ky walked slowly through crowds of people who were enjoying the night, thoughts swirling in his brain.

I can't do this, it will kill me.

Brianne was beautiful, he could focus on her. She might think tonight was a one-off, but he planned to insinuate himself into her life. He'd seduced her once, he would do it again.

If he couldn't have Aiden, he would relieve himself with Brianne. He loved touching her hair, bunching it in his fists, letting the rich brown curls fall across his skin. He could get lost in that and forget all about the complicated mess inside him.

He stopped in the middle of the street, realization hitting him like a load of steel beams.

"Oh no," he said out loud. "No, I can't be *that* stupid."

People milled around him, looking sideways at a leather-clad Shareem talking to himself. He stood out already, being taller and larger than everyone else, not to mention the bondage master clothing and long tangled hair. Now he was staring into space while his life crumbled around him.

"You all right?" a hesitant male voice said.

Ky looked around at a vendor whose stall he'd stopped in front of. The man was selling cheap trinkets, necklaces and earrings a working woman would give to her man or vice versa. The vendor straightened, putting on his salesman's face. "Best in the system. Two credits for this brooch? Your lady will love it."

Ky closed his fist around the man's shirtfront and lifted him up. "Tell me, do I look stupid to you?"

The man spluttered. "Of course not. For you, one credit."

"What? No, not the jewelry. It's crap. You ever fallen in love?"

"Um, well, yes."

"Did you feel stupid? I mean utterly, boneheaded, brain-dead stupid?"

The man paused a moment, then nodded fervently. "Oh, yes. You should have seen what I—"

Ky released him, thumping him back to his feet and patting the shirtfront back into place. "I was afraid of that."

The vendor cleared his throat. "Are you saying you are now in the state we call lovelorn? For that, I have much better things. I only bring them out for discerning customers, like yourself. A little more pricey, but worth it for your lady." He began rummaging behind the stall.

"I don't want any of your junk," Ky said. His eye fell on a pin in the shape of a salamander, flashing and glittering with colored glass. "How much is that?"

"Ah—you have taste..."

"I'll give you a credit for it."

The man looked affronted. "It's worth three."

"Take it or leave it." He dropped a credit strip drained of all but one credit and took up the brooch.

It reminded him of Aiden, fierce colors and that good-humored twinkle in his eye. It also made him think of Brianne, her curving shape and her beauty.

I've lost my mind and it's going to kill me.

"Ident card."

The hard-voiced command snapped Ky out of his reverie. He closed his hand around the salamander pin and looked down at a woman in scruffy gray holding a handheld.

She wasn't a bad-looking woman, with sleek dark hair wound in a bun, an oval face and almond-shaped brown eyes. But she'd hidden her body under the loose coveralls and hardened her face by pulling her mouth severely down.

"I'm Ky, and I'm going home."

She frowned, clearly not knowing what to do when a Shareem didn't instantly produce his card. They were required to provide their identification on demand—Ky didn't know why, it was bloody obvious they were Shareem.

"Ident card," she repeated.

To humor her, he produced a strip of plastic and shoved it in the handheld. Her fingers trembled as she punched in codes and studied the readout.

"You new at this?" he asked.

"It's temporary." She tried to keep her voice hard, but she didn't quite have the edge. "Until my promotion at the Ministry of Non-Human Life Forms."

"Uh-huh. Why did you ident me?"

"What?" She blinked and looked up at him. Clearly they had told her Shareem would obey without question.

"Why did you ask for my ident?" He took the strip back from her, hiding amusement when she very carefully didn't touch him.

Her gaze darted to the vendor, who'd turned to entice another customer. "I thought there was some trouble."

"No trouble." Ky smiled, turning on full Shareem power, which caused her to step back. "I was buying a gift." He opened his hand to reveal the glittering brooch.

The patroller was woman enough to let her gaze linger on the pretty thing before she remembered to be severe. "Well, don't let it happen again."

Ky laughed, letting the sound grate into the night. "I won't. He's a robber. What's your name?"

"Name?"

He deliberately moved her collar as though looking for a name tag. Patrollers didn't wear them, but women who worked warehouse jobs did. He cast Shareem pheromones over her, giving her the full dose, and her eyes softened.

No, she didn't look bad at all. If he hadn't just realized he was in love with Aiden and Brianne at the same time, he might have tried a little fun with her. But he wanted to be with both Aiden and Brianne until he died—which might be sooner than he liked.

"Lacy," she said breathlessly. "I don't know why I told you that."

"I do." He released her. "Be nice to Shareem, Lacy, before your promotion. We're sweethearts."

She relaxed enough to smile, so easily succumbing to his power. "I'll keep it in mind."

"Good." Ky gave another laugh, patted her backside and strolled away.

* * * * *

"You love him," Brianne whispered.

"Mmm?" Aiden rose up on his elbow and looked down at Brianne in the darkness.

When he'd carried her here her limbs had felt mushy and limp. Now after a short sleep she'd awakened incredibly rested and refreshed.

"You love him," she repeated.

Aiden flashed his handsome smile, then went somber. "Yeah, I do."

"Tell him."

"What?"

Brianne ran her hand along his strong arm, catching on the chain around his biceps. "I have tonight to be with you. I've enjoyed every second of it. Tomorrow I'll go back to being Brianne d'Aroth—I have so many meetings scheduled." She laughed a little as she ran her fingers around the black chain, fingers finding each cool link. Breaking it off with Dranis had caused hiccups in every level of her household and she'd spend the whole day smoothing things out.

"I'd like to think when I'm back in my 'glittering palace' as Ky calls it, that you two at least have each other. Grab onto your happiness with him and don't let it go."

Aiden had gone still during her speech. His eyes shone in the darkness, his Shareem touch on her face soothing. "You won't get away from us that easily," he said in seductive tones.

Brianne touched his lips, stilling his words. "No games right now. I'll go, you and Ky will move on. I'll always remember you and hold you in my heart. But tell him. Promise me?"

Aiden let out his breath. He captured her hand and brought it to his lips. "Anything to please a lady." He kissed her fingers. "I promise."

He smiled his devastating smile and told her to roll over. The games hadn't finished, he showed her, not by a long shot.

* * * * *

Ky waited a long time for Aiden to return home that night. He watched three dramas digitally piped into their holo pic tube and couldn't remember a thing about any of them.

At last, as dawn broke Aiden strolled in, humming a tune in his throat. Ky keyed off the digital and sat in silence. He wanted to ask Aiden a hundred questions, and now he couldn't think of a word to say.

The drawbacks of being male, came the thought. Women would have hashed it all out by now. Males sit around wondering how to start.

"Nice night," Aiden said. He flopped down on the sofa, moving a growing pile of Ky's laundry, and draped one leg over the frayed arm. His thighs spread invitingly. "Why'd you leave? Brianne and I played a little more, and I know she wanted you there." He threaded his hands behind his head. "What a sweetie."

"I had to go."

Before he did something stupid. He might have gone to Brianne in his frustration and taken her at level three. That would have been a complete disaster and would have landed himself back in the jail at Senoda waiting for termination, and possibly Aiden too.

No, he'd gone out and bought her an asinine present from a vendor, a gaudy brooch she'd probably wrinkle her rich-girl nose at. Shareem like Eland had it easy—he and Jeanne always knew when their master-slave games ended and didn't feel bound by emotion.

Must be nice.

Ky was still hot and hard from need and from the revelation of his true feelings, and three hours of boring digitals hadn't changed that.

"Brianne get home all right?" he asked gruffly.

"Yes. She was hurt you weren't there to say goodnight. So she told me to say goodnight for her."

Aiden hauled himself off his sofa and dropped next to Ky on the other one. His Shareem warmth poured over Ky, making Ky's already miserable cock dance and ache.

"I can still smell her scent on me," Aiden said, his voice a satisfied growl. He licked Ky's ear and when Ky turned his head Aiden slanted a soft kiss across his lips. "Good night."

Ky drew away, breathing hard, aroused as hell. "You told Rio."

Aiden looked blank. "Told Rio what?"

Ky stood up and folded his arms, painfully aware that his cock was pressing hard against his pants. "You told Rio you wanted me. Gods, I feel stupid even saying that. You told him a long time ago, before he left for Ariel."

Aiden froze. "He told you? Shit, see if I send him a birthday card."

"It's true then? He wasn't making it up to be a pain in the ass?"

"No, he *is* a pain in the ass, but he wasn't making it up." Aiden's eyes held wariness.

"You can't," Ky began.

"How can I not?" Aiden got off the sofa and looked Ky straight in the eye. "You're my best friend, we went through hell together, I would have *died* if not for you. I don't pant after every Shareem who walks by, but when I see you in nothing but thigh boots I get a huge hard-on. All right? Now you know. Live with it."

"You should have told me. I would have left."

"I know. That's why I *didn't* tell you."

They eyed each other, Aiden's blue eyes shutting Ky out, the handsome perfection of his face impregnable.

"You've been kissing me," Ky said. "And touching me. That hasn't been slop-over pheromones from Brianne?"

Aiden's expression softened, his Shareem chemistry trying to distract him from difficult emotion. "What a sweet woman she's turned out to be. I'm glad now she had me arrested..."

Ky grasped Aiden's face in one hand. "Focus. It wasn't just because of Brianne that you started feeling me up?"

"No, I did it because you asked me to. I remember you sitting on the bed in the inn at Elred begging for my hand."

"I remember that too."

"So what was your reason?"

Ky folded his arms over his chest again, as though wanting to hug the discomfort away. "I wanted you to touch me. I wanted *you*."

"Good. Then you know how it feels."

They stared at each other, Ky's blood heating to a breaking point, his Shareem physiology straining for release. Aiden's wary look deepened.

"What do you want to do, Ky? End our friendship? Pretend we don't have feelings for each other, stay on opposite ends of the apartment? We only have one bathroom, that could get tricky."

"You're an asshole."

"So are you. You haven't released, I can tell. If you don't pull down your pants and yank yourself, you're going to explode."

"You do it," Ky said suddenly.

Aiden stopped. "What?"

Ky tore at the laces of his leggings. "Go down on me. Suck me off. Whatever you want to call it."

"You're back to begging me again. Color me confused."

Ky pulled off his tunic, baring his burning torso to the cool air of the apartment. "I want your mouth on me. If you want me so bad, do it."

He knew he was being reckless, but his unreleased body and the emotions milling through him weren't letting him think straight any more. Shareem weren't supposed to have strong emotions like hate, fear, love—the scientists at DNAmo had tried their best to breed them out. Shareem still had them, but their bodies had been programmed to suppress them with unfocused thoughts or distractions—but mostly with sex.

If a Shareem grew very, very angry the energy would release by making him want sex, even more sex than perpetually horny Shareem usually wanted. This facing facts with Aiden was driving Ky's already needing body insane.

It would be all right, he reasoned. Aiden would do nothing more than a woman would. Perhaps that was why the pain had remained suppressed. Aiden had done nothing more than Brienne had done—kissed him and licked his cock and used hands on him.

If he stuck to what Brienne would do, everything would be all right.

Ky tossed aside his leggings and stood naked in the middle of the room. His skin was hot, sweat beading on his brow, the ends of his hair brushing his backside.

Aiden stripped off too. He didn't need to, but Ky got lost in appreciating his genetically sculpted body and the cock that went on for miles. How could the idiots at DNAmo take away a Shareem's appreciation for the beauty of another Shareem?

Aiden cradled Ky's face in his hands and gave him a deep, level one kiss, all slow, sensual moves and a tongue that knew how to please. Ky bit Aiden's lower lip, not playfully but hard to show him what level three could do.

Aiden gave a throaty laugh. He slid his hands down Ky's torso as he sank to his knees and guided Ky into his mouth.

Oh yes, oh gods.

Ky twisted Aiden's long hair in his fingers, pulling his mouth harder onto him. Aiden had a magic tongue, circling Ky's sensitive tip. Aiden knew exactly where Ky

liked it, because that was probably where Aiden liked it – under the tip, down the sides, at the base near his balls.

He nibbled his way up and down Ky's shaft then took it in his mouth again, continuing the magic. He used his tongue and his lips and his teeth, so practiced and fine that Ky wondered if Aiden had done this with another Shareem. Jealousy flared, confirming that what he felt wasn't simple *I need to get off* lust.

"Bastard," Ky whispered. "You've been practicing on someone."

Aiden withdrew to laugh. "No, but I've been thinking about this a *long* time."

He thrust his hand between Ky's legs and played with his balls, circling each with thumb and finger and squeezing gently. Ky moaned. This was more than perfect. Aiden slid his mouth over Ky again, and Ky moved his hips, thrusting into Aiden's mouth.

When Aiden let Ky go and stood up, Ky almost died. He knew his body temperature was way over danger levels and he could barely see. "What the fuck...?"

Aiden returned instantly with a bottle of oil in his hands, and Ky smiled. Aiden was a master with oil.

He barely registered the tangy smell of the oil that Aiden stroked over Ky's balls. His slick palm moved behind Ky's sac, lifting and caressing it. Then Ky rode back into Aiden's mouth as Aiden continued to play.

Ky held him by the nape of the neck, willing him to suck harder, harder. He heard the words come out of his mouth and Aiden's muffled laughter.

He felt Aiden's slick fingers move between his thighs and up to his buttocks, then a gentle prodding of his anal star. Ky moved his feet apart willingly and let out a sigh when Aiden's long finger slid into Ky's ass.

"Yes," he said, his voice already broken. "Just like that, lover boy."

Aiden squeezed Ky's backside in response, his beautiful finger moving in and out. Ky had used butt plugs and his own fingers plenty, not to mention women's fingers and tongues – and ladies enjoying fucking their Shareem with toys made for the purpose.

But he'd never had his best friend touch him and fill him, especially with that level one *I know exactly how to please you* skill.

"More," he begged. "More please."

Here was Ky, the smart-ass level three Shareem, the big bad Dom, begging his roommate to *please push in more fingers and don't stop what you're doing to my cock*.

Aiden parted Ky's cheeks and acquiesced to the silent plea by sliding a second finger in. Ky felt stretched and good, automatically relaxing and pulling in Aiden's fingers.

What would I do without this man in my life? I might have died tonight, being too stupid to release myself before I passed out.

Maybe I'll let Aiden release me every time.

When Aiden slid a third finger in, Ky shouted out loud. He didn't care—they'd spent money soundproofing their walls. It was a Shareem house after all.

He felt his climax coming for him, felt his extremities tingling as the blood rushed to his hot and heavy erection. Aiden's sweet, soothing touch went on and on in his ass, and he suddenly understood what Brianne had felt when Aiden had pushed inside her.

Delirious joy.

He came. He must have slammed Aiden against him, but he didn't really remember. When the darkness cleared he was flat on his back on the carpet, Aiden's fingers still carefully inside him. His cock was wet with come, and by the smug smile on Aiden's face, he'd sucked some down before Ky had fallen.

"That's it, big guy," Aiden said. "Release."

He rubbed his fingers a few more times in Ky's ass before he slowly withdrew.

No. Not enough. Not by a long shot.

Ky grabbed Aiden and kissed him. Aiden laughed against Ky's mouth, cocky bastard.

"I want you inside me," Ky informed him. "Your cock in me, fucking me."

Aiden stopped, laughter dying. "Are you sure?"

"Damn sure. Do it."

Aiden reached for the bottle of oil, his hand shaking. "You'll have to bend over something."

"I know how it's done."

Ky got himself off the floor, grabbed the pillows off the sofas and arranged them to cradle his body over the end of one of them. He shook in excitement as he positioned himself, wanting Aiden more than he'd wanted anything in his life.

The scent of spice wafted to him as Aiden oiled up. "Want to do this in your bedroom?"

"No, I want it right here. Get on with it."

Aiden chuckled. "Or what, you'll punish me?"

"I just might."

The truth was Ky feared he'd balk if they took the time to go into the bedroom. So far he hadn't felt the warning twinge, and he wanted to get this done before anything could change his mind.

He spread his legs, knowing exactly how far was needed to open himself up. Ladies loved to use a wand on him, and he'd helped women use them on Aiden. But Aiden's presence behind him was far different than a cold, inanimate wand. Aiden's Shareem heat covered him, and his hand on Ky's backside made his just-released cock grow hard again.

"Lots of lube," Aiden said in a low voice.

His hand, cool with scented lube, rubbed over Ky's skin and into his hole until Ky knew his ass was shiny with it. Glancing back, he watched Aiden rub the lube over his own jutting cock. His big, beautiful dark cock that would soon fill Ky.

"Ready?" Aiden asked.

"I've *been* ready."

Aiden laughed softly. He positioned his tip at Ky's needy opening and very gently pressed it inside.

Aiden's huge Shareem cock inside him at last. Ky almost cried except he wanted to laugh out loud for the joy of it.

"Gods, I've waited so long to have this," he breathed.

"Yeah, I've been waiting too," Aiden replied.

Inch by slow inch, Aiden pushed himself in. Ky groaned in sheer pleasure, the sorrows of all the years melting at the feel of his lover inside him. "Like that. Don't stop doing that."

"No problem. Anyone ever tell you you're a tight ass?"

Ky closed his eyes. "Hey, I live to squeeze."

"No complaints from me. Have I ever told you I love you?"

Ky growled. "Gods damn your perfect Shareem face and your talented lance of a cock."

Aiden laughed, his hips now pressed against Ky's ass, the wiry curls tickling Ky's skin. "Does that mean you love me too?"

"It means I'm going to regret this."

Aiden's voice went soft. "No regrets, Ky. It's always been you and me." He rested his warm hand on Ky's back, filling him all the way.

"You and me," Ky repeated. Through the long months of raw survival, of later discovering they could make a living with their powers, of sharing a dump, then a lesser dump, and now this place. Aiden laughing off troubles that left Ky moody, his Shareem skills massaging Ky back into smiles.

Everything culminated in this moment with Aiden buried inside him, his stiffness deep and hard in him. Ky knew nothing in the world would ever feel this good – ever.

Aiden leaned down and licked Ky's back. "Guess I wouldn't be here if I didn't love you. Want me to pump, or just fill you?"

The words shot his memories back to a place long ago, before Aiden had come into his life. A man with dark red hair, his Shareem eyes languid, had asked Ky the same question. His warm weight had covered Ky's back, just as Aiden's did now.

He should tell Aiden. But Ky hadn't been able to talk about him or even think clearly about what had happened without triggering the pain centers. Even now, he wasn't sure...

And just like that, the tingle began sharp in his arm. More than just a warning, a true shooting of pain that told him he'd overplayed his hand, and he was going to pay.

"No," he whispered. "*No*, let me have this."

But you couldn't reason with nanotechnology because it was even less human than Shareem. Nano-computers didn't drink with their friends or watch digitals or fall in love with the wrong people.

Aiden misunderstood. "I'm letting you have it, sweetheart. Don't fight me." He held Ky's hips and eased himself even deeper inside.

The tingle switched abruptly into all-out rip-open-the-guts pain. "Get out," he shouted.

"What?" Aiden's touch stilled. "What's wrong?"

"Get out of me!"

"Does it hurt? I'll make it stop." He began caressing Ky's back with a stroke that any other time would melt him.

"No, damn you, get out of me, *now*."

Startled, Aiden backed away, the slick lubricants letting him slide out easily and noiselessly. "Ky..."

Ky stood up, pain stabbing him so hard he wanted to vomit. "Stay away, don't touch me."

Aiden's confusion turned to hurt and then anger. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

The pain receded the slightest bit but didn't go away. "Just stay away from me."

Ky stumbled to his bedroom and inside. Before he slammed the door behind him, he saw Aiden in the middle of the living room, his cock straight out and slick with oils, a look of outrage on his face. "Ky. You fucking tease..."

The door closed and Ky collapsed against it, willing the cool of the metal to penetrate his broiling skin. He hit the lock and sank to the floor, tears and blood spilling from his eyes.

Chapter Twelve

Consequences

Brianne roused herself from her doze as her console chimed. She'd been blissfully groggy all morning ever since Aiden had left her near her compound and patted her on the rear before fading into the shadows.

She was sorry Ky hadn't returned and a little worried about it as well. Aiden assured her he sometimes did that—up and walked away without a word.

Shareem weren't exactly about commitment, Aiden had explained. Out of all the Shareem, Rees and Rio and a level one called Brandt were the only ones who'd found a lady for life, although Aiden also told her about Maia, the only female Shareem, who now lived out in the desert canyons with Rylan, a level two.

But Brianne's encounter with Shareem was over. She hoped Aiden would tell Ky the truth and the two of them would be happy. She herself needed to give up daydreaming, put Aiden and Ky behind her and get back to work.

Today she'd begin her mission to make Shareem more than second-class citizens. At the very least, she could give them the freedom to leave the planet, a ridiculous restriction made by people who feared Shareem would run off and breed more Shareem.

Brianne was determined to help. She owed it to Aiden and Ky for waking her up and showing her the shallowness of her life. She owed it to them for last night, which had revealed a world of joy she would have turned her back on in ignorance. There was nothing shameful and disgusting about what she'd done—the night had been beautiful from beginning to end.

She would pay them back in the only way she knew how. After the endless meetings to soothe her staff about the change in wedding plans, she would contact Talan d'Urvey and confab with her about how to help the Shareem.

She raised her head now and touched the console to answer the interrupting call. "Yes?"

The screen remained a blank, soft gray. "You don't know me," a cultured male voice said. "And you will not be able to trace this call, so do not bother to try."

"Who is this?"

In light of what she'd done last night she worried that this was an anonymous reporter come to make her life difficult. *Brianne d'Aroth becomes a submissive to a level three Shareem. Details at eleven.*

"My name is Baine," the voice said. "I am a computer. The professor I work for has an urgent message for your ears only."

She had never heard of a computer called Baine. The voice sounded far more sophisticated than normal voice-commanded computers—if indeed it was a computer and not a human trying to be funny.

She touched the off key, but to her surprise the screen remained lit. “Who is this?” she repeated, an edge to her voice.

“Baine. B-A-I-N-E. You can hear me, can’t you? I am sure the connection is good.”

“The connection is fine. But I’m still not certain who you are.”

“That doesn’t matter. My message is important. You have been with two Shareem called Aiden and Ky?”

Brianne answered cautiously. “Is that your business?”

“I am not here to chastise you, blackmail you, report you or pass judgment on you. My mistress’s concern is only for Aiden and Ky. Are they per chance with you?”

“No.” That at least was true.

“No one responds at their dwelling,” Baine said. “It is imperative I speak to them.”

She grew alarmed. “Why? What’s wrong?”

“How to put this? My employer, who shall remain unnamed, became worried when Rio told her that Aiden and Ky were—ahem—exploring a *new* sort of relationship beyond what Shareem usually do.”

“A new sort of relationship?” Her heart thumped. She still wasn’t certain whether to trust this computer, although if Rio had been talking to its owner, it might be all right. But then again, this might be a patroller trying to get enough evidence to arrest Aiden and Ky again. Silence was the best recourse.

Baine went on. “I know you know what I mean. But she says they *mustn’t*. If they persist, they could be in great danger, especially Ky.”

Brianne rose. “Why?”

“I do not know the precise nature of the danger, but my employer is worried. It is best you find Ky and tell him to contact Baine. He’ll know who you mean. I’ll be waiting.”

The screen went dark, the voice gone.

Brianne’s heart raced. Danger? How? She wished the computer had been a little more precise.

She tried to trace the call, but even the state-of-the-art equipment in her compound couldn’t do it. Whoever Baine was and whoever he worked for, he had effectively blocked all paths to his location.

She pressed her finger to her intercom and brought up her head guard. “Harbourgh,” she said crisply. “Have my transport prepared right away. I’m going down to Pas City.”

* * * * *

Aiden had just begun his third ale when Brianne d'Aroth rushed in the door of Judith's bar.

She was dressed in upper-class finery, her robes bearing the colors of the ruling clan. No masks, no hiding her identity, just Brianne hurrying into Judith's in a whirl of silk.

Calder sat at the table with Aiden, keeping to the shadows as usual. When Brianne saw Aiden and ran to him, Calder casually pulled up the cloths that hid his face.

Brianne didn't notice him, which was strange in itself. Every woman noticed Calder.

"Aiden, where is Ky?" she asked breathlessly.

Aiden pushed away his ale. His cock still throbbed from the sweet tightness of Ky's ass, and his heart still ached at Ky's furious rejection. He'd come here to pour ale down his throat and try to erase the pain.

"Last I heard, locked in his room," Aiden said. "He can stay there as far as I'm concerned."

"Someone named Baine is trying to call him. He said he couldn't get Ky at home."

"Baine?" Aiden asked, staring.

Baine was a computer made by a former DNAmo scientist called Dr. Laas. Dr. Laas' brilliance had first created the Shareem, but unlike the other experimenters who worked at the factory, Dr. Laas had always been on the Shareem's side. Her work had been outlawed and so had she, and she now hid out in a lavish underground complex run by an ultra-sophisticated computer called Baine.

"He implied that Ky needed to talk to him," Brianne rushed on. "He said Ky would be in danger if he didn't."

"What kind of danger?" Calder rumbled from the corner.

Brianne started, clearly not having seen him there. "He didn't say. He sounded worried, and he's made me worried. I'll feel better when we talk to Ky."

So would Aiden. If Baine had called that meant Dr. Laas was concerned about something and Dr. Laas didn't grow concerned lightly.

Aiden scraped back his chair. "Let's go then."

Calder rose with him. "I'll come with you. Start at your place?"

Aiden nodded. He didn't really want Calder in his house right now, which he'd left looking like they'd tried to have three days' worth of sex in five minutes. But Calder was good to have along in a pinch. The huge Shareem with his face swathed to his eyeballs was a menacing sight.

He and Calder started heading down the street for Aiden's apartment, but Brianne called to them.

"I have transport." She motioned to a hover car with sun-blocking windows, the kind of vehicle only the very rich had. The car was on, a driver waiting inside.

"We're Shareem," Calder said.

"I know that, but you can't walk faster than a hover car. Get in."

Aiden lifted his brows. "You'd be seen getting into your transport with two Shareem?"

"This is important. Hurry."

Calder and Aiden exchanged a glance, shrugged and went with her to the vehicle.

There was just enough room for the two large Shareem to squeeze into the passenger seat with Brianne in the middle. Cooled air wafted over them, a perfect temperature. Compartments in the barrier separating her from the driver contained drink, food, a screen for digitals and reading material.

Must be nice to be rich.

The driver, a woman in a business suit, looked askance at the two Shareem but said nothing. Aiden gave Brianne the address and Brianne keyed it into a console that would display directions to the driver.

The transport pulled swiftly and smoothly into the busy Pas City traffic without a bump. Aiden marveled at the quiet way they reached his apartment in a fraction of the time they'd have creaked along on public transport. Calder sat there like he didn't notice, but nothing much fazed him.

The car pulled up in front of the sandstorm-stained building that housed Aiden and Ky's residence. Brianne keyed her driver another message, then the canopy opened with efficient smoothness and the three of them piled out.

The apartment was silent, the front room empty. Calder glanced at the pile of cushions at the end of the sofa, the open tube of lube, the bottle of oil and Ky's clothes on the floor, but made no comment.

Aiden knocked on the door of the bedroom. "Ky."

No answer.

"Where else would he have gone?" Brianne asked, worry in her voice.

"The baths," Calder suggested. "Or out to meet a lady."

Aiden avoided his gaze. The feeling of being inside Ky had been wonderful. He'd finally been able to show the man he loved what he felt. He'd convinced himself that Ky felt the same, just before Ky turned around in horror and shouted at Aiden to get away from him. The hurt of that cut deep.

Ky might easily have flung himself out of the apartment to go relieve himself on a woman. But that didn't explain the fact that Ky's bedroom door was still locked.

Aiden knocked again. "Ky, come on. Brianne's here."

Aiden's anger began to surge, and then he heard a groan from the other side of the door. Not a groan of pleasure, a groan of pain. "Ky?"

The door remained closed, and silence reigned.

"Ky." Aiden beat on the door but got no response.

"Do you want me to call a locksmith?" Brianne pulled out a communicator.

Calder shook his head. "I can open a door." He jerked a faceplate out of the wall near the door and gave the wires inside a few quick twists. The door slid open.

They found Ky on the floor. His eyes were closed, his naked body slick and red with blood that seeped from every pore.

* * * * *

Brianne gasped, her hands going to her face. Calder said, "What the hell..."

Aiden felt like his own blood had drained from him. He dropped to his knees beside Ky's body. "Gods, Ky."

Ky didn't appear to hear them. A soft groan escaped his lips along with a trickle of blood. Aiden put his hands on Ky's chest, feeling his heart beating way too fast, his skin roasting hot and soaked with blood.

Aiden's hands became slick and wet with it. He stroked Ky's shoulders, trying to use his Shareem touch to soothe his friend and ease his pain.

"He needs to go to the hospital," Brianne said. "My driver can take him."

Ky peeled his eyes open. They were filled with blood and it was obvious he couldn't see them. "No. No hospital."

"You have to." Brianne went down on her knees, reaching for him, his blood smearing her robes. "Oh, Ky, what happened?"

Ky rolled his gaze to Aiden. Aiden felt like someone had stabbed him then kicked him in the stomach and then stomped all over him to make sure he felt it. He continued to caress, pouring out endorphins in attempt to slow Ky's heartbeat.

"No," Ky rasped. "You make it worse."

He stilled. "*I'm* doing this?"

"We did it." Ky's voice weakened, and his eyes closed. "*We* did."

Aiden smoothed his hand through Ky's hair, which was soaked with blood. The ends of his own blond hair stained red where they brushed Ky's chest.

Brianne gave them an anguished look. "How can you say no hospital? He's dying. We have to help him."

"I know what he means," Calder rumbled. The big man lowered himself to one knee, black leather stretching over his massive thighs. "He needs a doctor, but not that kind."

"What?" Brianne said blankly, but Aiden understood.

Calder touched Ky's face, blood smearing his leather-clad fingertips. "So, my poor friend, what kind of experiments did they perform on *you*?"

* * * * *

Brianne didn't understand what Aiden and Calder were talking about. Aiden was for calling this doctor they both knew, but Calder stared at Brianne in suspicion.

"She's a d'Aroth," Calder snarled. "The d'Aroths were all for terminating the Shareem after DNAmo shut down. We can't trust her with this."

"I am not those d'Aroths," Brianne argued. "I was a child when all that happened, and I'm Ky's friend."

"You got him arrested."

"How many times do I have to explain I knew nothing about it? If this doctor can help Ky, I say we call her."

"I say you go back to your safe fortress and leave us to deal with this."

She planted her hands on her hips. "I'm not leaving while Ky is in danger. If you won't let me take him where he can get help—we have a private hospital with the best doctors on Bor Narga—then I'm staying."

Calder's half hidden face was fearsome. "He doesn't need a human doctor. He needs a Shareem specialist, and you outlawed them and drove them away."

Aiden broke in. "Calder, shut the hell up and call Baine. I'll vouch for her."

Calder looked at Brianne as though he'd like to lift her in one giant fist and fling her out into the street. He was a frightening man, covered in black leather, blue eyes blazing over his cloths that hid his mouth and nose.

At the same time he exuded a predatory sexuality that must have women throwing themselves at his feet. She had no idea why he didn't removed his face covering even inside, but it added to his air of mystery.

Right now, he was angry at Brianne for even existing. He slammed out of the room, and Brianne didn't dare follow him.

Aiden had moved Ky's head into his lap. Blood still seeped from Ky as though every vessel inside him had burst.

Tears slid silently down Brianne's face. "I don't want to lose him."

Aiden raised his head, his eyes dry and fierce. "I *can't* lose him. He's everything to me."

Brianne wiped away her tears, knowing she stained her cheeks with traces of Ky's blood. "What are we going to do?"

"I don't know." Aiden's voice was hollow. "If Dr. Laas can't... I don't know."

Brianne reached for his hand. Aiden held it hard, his Shareem strength almost crushing her.

Calder strode back into the room. "She's coming."

Aiden lifted his head. "She's coming *here*? She never leaves her compound."

"We can't exactly drag Ky there without attracting attention. Besides, she said not to move him."

"Who said?" Brianne asked him.

Calder glared down at her. "You have to go."

"Let her stay," Aiden growled.

"We can't risk her knowing. She leaves, she doesn't know, she can't do anything."

"I trust her."

"Good for you."

Brianne rose to her feet. "I don't think you understand. I will do everything in my power to help Ky. If I'm not supposed to know who this doctor is, then I won't ask. I swear that to you. I only want Ky to be all right."

"She stays." The words grated from Ky. "I want her."

"Don't try to talk," Aiden said. He wiped the blood from Ky's lips with the corner of his tunic then flinched when Ky began to cough.

Calder transferred his glare to Brianne. "Then you go out there and tell your driver to go home. Send your guards away and take off every body monitor you're wearing, or I'll do it for you."

She imagined his huge gloved hands probing her body, ripping the monitors from her pulse points. She had the feeling the sensation would make Ky's spankings seem like being stroked with a feather.

"Fine," Brianne said, backing away a step. "I'll do this your way."

She removed her bloodstained outer robe and put her hands under her dress to peel off the monitor probes under his scrutinizing gaze. She crumpled the wires and marched out of the apartment to thrust them into the hands of her startled driver.

The driver did not want to leave Brianne in what she termed a disreputable part of town, but Brianne overrode her. She punched up Harbough on the car's console and told him what she wanted. Harbough was a hardcore bodyguard, but he had worked for Brianne long enough to trust her.

"Yes, my lady," he said.

The driver was less enthusiastic, but obeyed orders. The hover car slid gently away as Brianne watched, its wake stirring her hair.

Only a few moments after her driver disappeared, another transport slid to a halt in front of the building. A person emerged so swathed in cloths that it was hard to tell if it was male or female. The second person out of the hover car was Rees.

Brianne hurried across the street to dive into the building just behind them. Rees looked down at her with the same suspicion as Calder, but with one difference. Rees' expression told her that if Brianne tried to betray them, he'd take care of it. No need for threats, he'd just do it.

They entered the apartment and Rees locked the door behind them. The doctor removed her face cloths and outer robes, revealing a trim woman of about forty or so in a body-hugging pantsuit. She glanced at Brianne without interest, her gaze swiveling to Calder, who waited for them.

"Hello, Calder," she said in some surprise.

Calder gave her a curt nod.

"He's in here," Aiden called.

The woman stepped calmly over the mess in the living room and entered the bedroom. "Oh dear."

"Can you help him?" Brianne asked.

"That all depends." She knelt by Ky and touched his face. "It's Dr. Laas, Ky. They put nano-implants in you, didn't they?"

Ky dragged his eyes open but didn't focus on anything. "Yes."

"With a specific trigger. Yes, I remember those experiments. I thought they'd shut them down."

"Specific trigger?" Aiden asked. "What are you talking about?"

"He never told you? Experiments were run to discover whether unacceptable behavior could be eradicated by embedding nano-computers inside Shareem. Brain chemicals produced during the unacceptable behavior would trigger the implants to cause—oh, pain, nausea, shock—whatever the scientists wanted. They were questionable experiments, and I opposed them. Not that anyone listened to me."

"So he did something 'unacceptable'?" Calder asked.

Dr. Laas nodded. "I would guess when Aiden and he began to make love the nano-computers decided it was a step too far."

Aiden's face drained of color. "I did this to him?"

"I'm afraid so." Dr. Laas put a kind hand on his shoulder. "You weren't to know."

Calder's eyes flickered, but he said nothing. Rees remained stoic.

"It doesn't matter how it happened," Brianne broke in. "What matters is whether you can help him."

Dr. Laas slanted her a grateful glance. "I will have to go in surgically. The question is whether I can remove the implants at all—they might have tied them to vital functions."

A muscle in Aiden's throat moved. "In other words, removing them could kill him."

"Yes." Dr. Laas' eyes were somber.

"They're killing him now," Brianne pointed out.

"So I'll have to take the risk." Dr. Laas got briskly to her feet. She pulled Aiden against her in a fond hug, kissing the top of his head. "I'll do my best, Aiden, don't you worry."

Brianne's concern ran to more practical matters. "Where will you do the surgery? You'll need to take him somewhere, and I gather you're not exactly free to come and go as you please."

Dr. Laas focused on her. "My dear, I am outlawed. If anyone finds out I'm still alive and on Bor Narga, my termination will be immediate. The statute of limitations on me hasn't run out yet."

As Brianne absorbed this, Calder said, "She's a d'Aroth."

"Really?" Dr. Laas peered at Brianne like she was a unique specimen. "A d'Aroth who likes Shareem. How interesting."

Brianne blushed, and Dr. Laas grinned suddenly. "Lucky you. I don't have to take him anywhere, I can do the surgery right here. That's what Baine and transport devices are for. That is, *if* I can find an uncluttered surface on which to lay him. The researchers never thought to breed tidiness into Shareem. Such an oversight."

So saying, she hauled open the bag she'd brought with her and removed a small rectangular surface about two feet square. She set this the middle of the room and pulled out a handheld. "Orient on me, please, Baine. I'll need..."

She trailed off into technical jargon and soon had a pile of accoutrements glittering on the transport pad. She sorted through these while Calder and Rees cleared off Ky's bed and Aiden lifted him gently onto it.

Ky moaned as Aiden laid him down and the sheets quickly soaked with blood. Ky reached up and touched Aiden's lips. "Not your fault."

"You should have told me," Aiden said softly.

"Thought it didn't matter anymore. I guess my statute of limitations...didn't run out." He tried to grin then drifted into unconsciousness.

"Good," Dr. Laas said briskly. "Easier if he's already out. The rest of you clear off. I don't need Shareem falling over when I start digging into him. The room is too small."

* * * * *

For three hours, Brianne and Aiden waited in the living room while Dr. Laas worked behind Ky's closed bedroom door. They heard no noise from the bedroom, no indication whether her surgery was working or if Ky lay dying even now.

Calder waited with them, a silent hulk of man sitting in a chair, long legs stretched out in front of him. He never removed his face covering. Rees paced for a time, then moved to the tiny window in the back, leaning against the frame.

At first Brianne absently began to tidy the living room, putting away the lube and rearranging the pillows, but after the first half-hour, she gave up and came to sit beside Aiden on the couch. Aiden sat as one stunned, his Shareem blue eyes fixed, his mouth twisted in worry.

By the end of the second hour, Aiden had gathered Brianne into his lap and held her close. He buried his face in her neck, his hot tears dripping onto her skin. She rested against him, trying to comfort him, as grief-stricken as he was.

When the door finally slid back Brianne sprang nervously to her feet and Rees turned. Aiden stood up behind her, his hands moving to her waist. Calder rose more slowly, but his gaze fastened to Dr. Laas as avidly.

Dr. Laas sighed and scrubbed her hand through her hair. The skin around her eyes was tight and her mouth drooped in exhaustion.

"Well," she said. "It was tough, but I got 'em."

Brianne let out the breath she was holding and heard Aiden's loud exhale of relief. She turned and hugged him, Aiden's strong arms going around her tight, tight.

Dr. Laas sank into the chair Calder had vacated and sighed again. "I forget I'm such a genius until a *real* challenge comes along. The little buggers were built with defenses and the ability to lay dormant for decades. But I found them all. Takes more than microscopic computers to get the better of *me*."

She spoke brightly, but her eyelids drooped and Brianne sensed her tension. She'd been scared she wouldn't succeed.

"Thank you," Brianne said.

"You're welcome, my dear."

Aiden rose in silence and went into the bedroom, the door shutting behind him.

"Ky's all right now?" Rees asked.

"He will be. Back to normal. Well, as normal as a Shareem can be."

Calder shot another suspicious glance at Brianne and wouldn't look at Dr. Laas at all. "If he's all right, I'll go. I have an appointment."

Brianne rose. "Thank you for your help, Calder." She stuck out her hand.

Calder gave it a bemused glance then clasped it in silence, his grip strong. He walked out of the apartment without a backward glance, hot air from the hall whooshing in before the door closed again.

Rees's lips quirked in a half-smile. "He's softening toward you."

"That was softening?" Brianne asked.

"Yes. But I meant toward Dr. Laas."

Brianne gave Dr. Laas a puzzled look. "My question stands. That was softening?"

Dr. Laas smiled tiredly. "Calder is the way he is because of me. Oh, not because I pushed him into the plasma fire that burned him or anything. Because I saved his life. I couldn't save him all the way, and that makes him angry."

"Why? You could have let him die."

"At first he fought to live. He was so strong, I couldn't believe he survived at all. But once he saw what I did to him, he wished I'd let him die. Twenty years and he still hasn't forgiven me."

Brianne glanced at the door through which Calder had just departed. "Is it that bad?"

"He was burned to the bone," Dr Laas said. "I had to practically rebuild him—insert robotic parts in places and grow new skin for him and things like that."

"The essentials seem to work," Rees put in.

"Oh yes. So now he calls himself The Beast and women pay a fortune to be with him." Dr. Laas sighed and ran her hands through her hair. "He's lonely, like the rest of them. I'm glad Aiden and Ky have found each other."

Brianne was too, but she would miss them. She'd return to her board meetings and her causes and this week would become a distant and pleasant memory.

The bedroom door slid open. Aiden stood in it, his eyes soft. "Brianne," he said. "He's asking for you."

She was across the room and through the door so fast that she heard Dr. Laas chuckle behind her.

Ky lay on his back, his breathing rapid but better than it had been. His hair had been pulled into a loose tail that lay across his torso, and his eyes were calm and clear. Dr. Laas had cleaned the blood from him, but his body bore small pink scars where she'd cut into him.

When he saw Brianne, he smiled tiredly and held out his hand. "There's my girl."

Brianne clasped his fingers. "I thought we'd lost you."

"I'm right here, darling. And I'll be up spanking you soon, don't worry."

"After he rests," Aiden said sternly.

"I heal fast, and I'm not going anywhere. I have all I need right here." He squeezed Brianne's hand.

"Will you tell us what happened?" Brianne asked. "Why they put those things in you, those nano-computers?"

"Yeah, I'd like to know that too," Aiden said.

Ky hesitated. "Dr. Laas didn't tell you?"

"No." Brianne kissed his fingers, so happy that they were still warm and strong. "I don't think she knows the whole story."

Ky closed his eyes a moment and drew a breath. The sheet covering his naked body rose and fell, and when he opened his eyes again, they held sadness.

"All right, I'll tell you. I've never wanted to talk about it—the pain would start when I even *thought* about talking about it—but you should know."

Chapter Thirteen

Ky's Story

"Do you remember a Shareem called Meyet?"

Ky had propped himself up on pillows, his Shareem strength already beginning to heal him. Brianne snuggled against him on one side while Aiden sat across the foot of his bed, back to the wall.

He'd invited the others in to hear the tale. Dr. Laas had made herself comfortable on the only chair and Rees leaned against the doorframe. The room smelled a bit of disinfectant and Brianne itched to grab one of Aiden's bottles of oil and open it to scent the air.

Rees nodded briefly, and so did Dr. Laas. Aiden said, "He was a friend of yours at DNAmo. He got auctioned off and went off-planet."

"He didn't go off-planet," Ky said. "He died. Because of me."

Aiden shot him a look.

Rees said, "DNAmo's experiments weren't your fault, Ky. Trust me, I know all about their experiments."

Ky shook his head. "No, I knew how dangerous it was. I tried to warn him, but I was in love with him—no, I'll face it, I was in *lust* with him. I know the difference now. He was a level one."

Aiden smiled gently at him. "You have a thing for level ones?"

"I didn't have a thing for any Shareem." His voice grated. "Until one day a couple scientists got the great idea to see if two male Shareem would interact sexually. Meyet and I didn't really know each other and we didn't know what the experiment was going to be. The researchers put us in a room together, supplying food and water and a comfortable bed, and left us alone for two weeks. I mean totally alone. We didn't see anyone but each other."

"They imprisoned you?" Brianne asked. "Why?"

"To see what we'd do."

Aiden broke in. "Shareem have to release sexually every day or we die. Our bodies heat up—and heat up—until we release, either with full-blown sex or sexual play. DNAmo hired women to help out with that in the name of science. But if we formed attachments to any of the ladies, they disappeared and we never saw them again. DNAmo wanted us to keep everything distant and casual."

"That's cruel," Brianne flared.

"Well, yeah," Aiden said. "But we're only Shareem, right?"

Brianne quieted, more determined than ever to put everything right for them.

"So you can see why being stuck in a room alone for two weeks was dangerous," Ky went on. "We could release using our hands, but that got old fast. So one day when we were looking at each other we started wondering what it would be like. We talked about what we could do then we started doing it.

"At first it was little things like touching each other and helping bring each other off, then we tried going down on each other. We liked that and we went on from there to full-force sex. We figured if we had to be stuck in that boring room forever, we might as well enjoy ourselves.

"The researchers watched. We knew that, but it's easy to forget when you never see or hear the watchers. Pretty soon we were having some pretty magnificent sex. He was a master with his tongue, and I could see why women adored being with him.

"We started to enjoy it. We'd wake up planning what we'd try that day. Or he'd take over for the whole day and massage me and touch me with his level one hands. It felt so damn good. Or I'd take over and make him my sub. Trust me, I made him do everything you can imagine."

Brianne pictured the two of them locked in the small room, meeting in the middle, their eyes blue with arousal. The two men kissing, lips and tongues tangling, hands moving on each other's bodies. Ky spreading his legs and ordering Meyet to kneel behind him, part his cheeks and lick...

He was a master with his tongue.

And then Ky lying on the bed while Meyet ran his palms all over Ky's skin, massaging and stroking as Aiden had done to her. Her next vision put Ky with a strap in his hand, kneeling over Meyet on all fours on the bed, Ky's cock gleaming with lube as he pressed it into Meyet's ass.

The researchers had watched all this, through hidden cameras most likely, their Shareem performing for them.

"What did Meyet look like?" she asked suddenly.

She tried to sound innocent, but Aiden grinned. "I think your story is heating her up."

Ky stirred and Aiden shifted position. Even Rees looked uncomfortable. Brianne realized that the conversation had triggered her pheromones, which triggered Ky's, touched Aiden, then Rees.

"He had dark red hair. Fairly dark skin. A little shorter than me and not so big. Much better-looking than me. He was—nice."

"I'm sorry," Brianne said quickly. "I shouldn't ask."

Ky shook his head. "I think he'd like knowing we still got turned on thinking about him. He was damned good at sex. We weren't sure whether—if we ever got out of there—we'd keep our discovery of each other a secret or tell other Shareem and get

them interested too. An all-Shareem orgy was tempting. We decided to keep it to ourselves for a while and tell others gradually, maybe seducing them one at a time."

"You sure did keep it to yourself," Aiden said.

"This was before we became friends. Although I had my eye on you as one to seduce."

"Really?" Aiden laughed. "Couldn't resist me even then, could you?"

Rees eyed Ky curiously. "What did you think about me?"

Ky shook his head. "Sorry. I didn't know you existed then. They kept you behind closed doors."

"True. I'm kind of surprised they didn't try the experiment on me. They tried so many others."

"It wouldn't have worked," Ky predicted. "I heard about some of the things you did. You'd probably have ended up with five women locked in with you willing to do anything you and the other Shareem required."

Rees smiled. "You're probably right."

"One day you'll have to tell me how you did all those things."

The smile turned mysterious. "One day."

"What happened next?" Brianne prompted, snaking her hand down to clasp his. "They let you out, presumably."

Ky's expression went bleak. "You bet they did. Just about the time Meyet and I were really enjoying ourselves, they rolled back the doors and kicked us out without a word of explanation. Experiment done."

"We went back to our usual routine, but we couldn't keep away from each other. We found we liked to keep our encounters secret. It was fun to haul his butt into a closet or an empty lab room and have wild sex before we strolled away oh-so casually."

"We'd meet in the middle of the night or the middle of the afternoon—in the middle of just about anything. We were crazy about each other. Because we were both strong Shareem we could be rougher than we could with women, and we liked that too. You name it, we did it to each other. It almost made living at DNAmo worth it."

Aiden's brows lifted. "Almost?"

Brianne wondered whether Aiden felt jealousy hearing Ky describe his past encounters, but the look he gave Ky bore only tender relief. Shareem were like that, she was learning, able to not let the past mar their present or future.

Rees shifted against the door. "I'm betting there was no way the researchers let you be happy. They didn't have it in them."

Ky grew somber. "Meyet and I found out too late that we were part of a two-step experiment. Part one, *Given the chance, will Shareem want to have sex with each other?* Answer, Yes. Part two, *How are we going to stop them?*"

"Oh no," Brianne breathed. "Because Shareem were created to pleasure only women."

"Oh yes," Dr. Laas put in, her tone acid. "DNAmo was making a fortune breeding the perfect pleasure slaves for wealthy women. With all that sexiness bred into them, it was logical that they might start experimenting on each other, and maybe prefer it over what they were supposed to do. And DNAmo might lose money."

"The gods forbid," Rees said.

"So we had to be stopped," Ky finished.

Brianne shuddered. "With the nano-computers?"

"They tried psychological conditioning first. They put us back into the same room and left us alone again. We were thrilled and started fucking right away. Then they punished us. First with shocks or loud noise, then with food deprivation.

"We agreed to stop while we were in the room so they wouldn't hurt us. That was hard because we were back to our hands alone for release, but they let us out soon, thinking they'd taught us a lesson. But they'd only taught us not to do it in the experiment room or where they could catch us."

Aiden snorted. "Idiots. DNAmo scientists had egos so big they couldn't see anything in front of them. Oh sorry, Dr. Laas."

"I agree with you," Dr. Laas said crisply. "They were idiots."

Ky continued. "Meyet and I kept on meeting whenever we could. I don't know if we were in love, but we couldn't keep our hands off each other. I only did it with him, but he started seducing other Shareem. I don't know how many of them he snagged, but he was having fun. I didn't mind – like I said, I don't think I was really in love with him.

"Then one day the researchers came into my room and knocked me out with anesthetic. I didn't think anything about it, because they did it all the time for experimental techniques on our bodies.

"When I woke up I didn't feel any different, and they didn't tell me what they did. I didn't realize what had happened until I met Meyet a few days later, and we started playing. I felt a tingle in my arm but I was too distracted to pay attention. All the sudden it was full-blown pain, so bad I was screaming.

"I recovered, but it took a while. The researchers told me, smiling like they were so damn clever, that they'd given me implants to counteract my 'behavior'. They told me that any time I started with Meyet, the nano-computers would trigger and start to tear me apart from the inside. Scared the shit out of me.

"Meyet hadn't felt anything, and the researchers told me they hadn't doctored him. They'd figured only one of us was enough to teach us to lay off.

"Meyet had already started having sex with other Shareem. I warned him to stop before they got him too, but he didn't. One day a Shareem he'd been with came and got me, scared to death. We found Meyet in an unused room rolling around on the floor,

blood everywhere, kind of like you found me. We got him to the medic, and they tried to turn off the implants and stop the bleeding, but they couldn't. Whatever system they used on us hadn't been tested and they didn't know how to control it.

"So Meyet died. The researchers kept it quiet, telling everyone he'd been auctioned off and sent off-planet. They threatened me and the Shareem who'd found him—who conveniently disappeared off-planet soon after—not to say anything. They said they couldn't take the implants out of me without killing me, but as long as I didn't try to have sex with a Shareem I'd be all right. They made me sign something swearing I wouldn't tell anyone else on threat of termination."

"They never asked me," Dr. Laas broke in. "I could have gotten the implants out. I didn't know about the experiment until a long time later, after DNAmo shut down. And I didn't realize it was Ky they'd experimented on until recently."

"When Rio told you..."

"Rio, who can't keep his mouth shut," Aiden growled.

"I'm glad he didn't keep the secret," Brianne said, running her fingers across Ky's chest. "It saved you."

"Yeah, well, I'll talk to him later," Ky said. "The implants worked in one sense—I never wanted to do what I did with Meyet again. I moved in with Aiden and we got along fine. It was good to have a friend. I never felt the pain again and after a while I assumed the implants had ceased to function."

"Until we started," Aiden said.

"Exactly," Ky finished.

The room went silent. Aiden folded his arms, meeting Ky's gaze. "You should have told me."

"I know. Like I said, I couldn't talk about Meyet and what happened for a long time. But I should have tried. For a while I hoped it didn't matter, but I didn't realize the damned implants would last twenty years."

"You won't have to worry about them now," Dr. Laas said. "I found all the nano-computers and destroyed them. I know why DNAmo never told me about them—they knew I'd pitch a fit. Genetic research and discovery is one thing, torture and manipulation is another. Assholes."

Ky grinned at her. "I always liked your attitude."

"Shareem were my idea, the culmination of a dream. I care about the wellbeing of all of you, even if I'm stuck hiding out in a compound."

Aiden blew her a kiss. "And we love you."

"Most of you do." She stood up and brushed off her pantsuit. "Time to take me back to my dungeon, Rees. Lady d'Aroth, walk out with me."

Brianne pressed a kiss to Ky's cheek and scrambled off the bed. She followed Dr. Laas and Rees to the living room, closing the door on Aiden and Ky, who still stared at each other.

Rees, enigmatic as ever, stood behind Dr. Laas, arms folded across his massive chest, eyes quiet.

"Take care of them," Dr. Laas said to Brianne.

"Ky and Aiden? I will. I plan to stay here until Ky gets better."

"That's good, but I meant all my Shareem. I can only help them indirectly, when they come to me. Talan does what she can, and Nella is trying on Ariel, but you, my dear, are a d'Aroth."

"I have some ideas," Brianne promised her.

Dr. Laas closed her hand on Brianne's. "It will be hard. Shareem are feared for what they are. You will have to battle that."

"I know."

"I will help as I can. My compound is a refuge and only Shareem know where it is. I won't tell you how to find it, but if you need to, one of them will bring you to me."

"Thank you," Brianne said sincerely. "Thank you for saving Ky."

Dr. Laas eyed her speculatively. "You really care for him?"

"Yes. And Aiden."

Dr. Laas smiled. "Well, I can think of worse relationships to be in than with two Shareem. Good luck, my dear."

She swathed herself in robes again, donned sun-blocking goggles and followed Rees out into the waning afternoon.

* * * * *

Inside the bedroom Aiden and Ky sat silently. Aiden laid his hand on Ky's leg, his hand warm through the bedcovers.

Aiden smiled, eyes watchful. "And here I worried that if you knew I was getting hard for you, you'd leave town."

Ky threaded his fingers through Aiden's. "I thought maybe if we just played a little nothing would happen. I didn't know it would get serious."

"That sucks about Meyet dying. I'm sorry."

Ky remembered Meyet's warm red hair, his blue eyes, his laughter. The way he'd groan when Ky entered him, *that's it, right there, gods, don't stop.*

"I don't think I loved him, although I thought so then. I was excited by him, and man, could he spur my imagination. But it's different this time."

"This time?"

Ky slanted Aiden a look. "With you, asshole. We've been friends for twenty years, and you know me better than anyone. The things I think of doing with you are..."

Aiden's eyes grew more blue. "Are what? Tell me, baby."

"Explosive. I want to feel you moving under me, hear you begging for me."

"Begging like a sub?" Aiden grinned. "I have power of my own, big bad Dom. I can lay you flat with just a touch."

"I'm looking forward to it."

Aiden slid his hand to Ky's groin, looking pleased to find him hard. "So am I. As long as you're really all right."

"If Dr. Laas says she got all the implants, she got them all."

"Thank the gods for Dr. Laas."

"She's responsible for us existing at all," Ky pointed out.

"But I like existing. Life at DNAmo was bad and people still treat us like shit, but I have you and Judith's bar and the bathhouse and life as a sex toy. It's not all bad."

"And Brianne."

Aiden looked thoughtful. "Brianne. What are we going to do about her?"

Ky shrugged. "Spank her, lick her, fuck her. You do level one on her, I'll do level three. What's the problem?"

"I've gotten attached to her. So much that I don't want to *un*-attach from her."

"Yeah, but she's highborn, she's in the ruling family, and after what she saw today, she might be finished with us." He grunted. "I told her I'd show her what Shareem were really like, and I guess I did. I probably ruined her crusade to save us."

"I don't know. She was worried about you."

"She's not like us," Ky said. "She's soft and spoiled. Not resilient."

Aiden shot him an incredulous look. "You're kidding, right? After the train, and you taking her to the dungeon, and me giving her her first fuck while she sucked on you? Her first time, and it was a *ménage*. She survived all that *and* she came running down here to find me when she feared you were in danger. I'd say she's resilient."

"Maybe I'm just trying to let myself down easy. I'll miss her."

Damn, but he would. He remembered her wriggling and swaying in the train as he and Aiden stroked her, remembered her look of pure pleasure when she bent over him in the train compartment going home. The rapture in her eyes when Aiden slid inside her and the eagerness with which she turned to enclose Ky's cock with her mouth.

He liked seeing her ass cherry-red after he spanked her, and he wanted to plant himself inside it. He'd have to use Aiden to relax her before he could, because she was an ass virgin.

He grinned. *Ass virgin*. Did he just coin a term? He'd never been with a woman who hadn't been with Shareem before. They usually started at level one and worked their way up.

Aiden's smile widened. "You're thinking about it, aren't you?"

"Thinking about what? Fucking her? What else would I think about?"

"I meant asking her to stay."

Ky came back to reality. "She won't. She might think it would be fun for a while, but she won't."

Aiden hauled himself off the bed. "I'll ask her."

"What, you mean right *now*?"

"We won't know what she wants until we do."

"Let it go, Aiden."

Aiden turned around. His big, handsome body was heating up—Ky could feel the pheromones already pouring off him. "Screw you. I let it go for twenty years, and I almost lost you before I could say, *I love you, Ky*. I'm not letting this go."

Ky stilled. "Twenty years? You were thinking about doing me for twenty years?"

"Hell yes. Why do you think I wanted us to live together?"

Ky tried a smile, but his mouth wasn't cooperating. "I thought it was my stunning personality."

"No, it was your stunning cock. I knew you'd freak if you knew what I was thinking, and I figured having threesomes with you was the next best thing." He wet his lips. "And it has been."

Ky thought about the number of times the two of them had been inside a woman—or two—Aiden's hand planted on Ky's ass, or Aiden's arms around him with the lady in the middle. Sometimes Ky had wanted to turn around and bury himself inside Aiden, but he'd automatically stopped the thought before it formed. He'd learned his lesson at DNAmo.

Maybe Dr. Laas—and Brienne—had given him a chance to learn differently.

"You can ask her," Ky said, pulling up one knee under the blanket and resting his arm across it. "But she'll say no."

Aiden glared at him, then opened the door and called her in.

Chapter Fourteen

Beginnings

She said *maybe*.

Brianne entered the bedroom to find Aiden standing ramrod straight, his arms folded, his blue gaze fixed on her. Behind him Ky waited on the bed, his brawny arm on one bent knee, looking good enough to eat.

"When you say *stay with you*," she asked nervously in response to their question. "What exactly do you mean?"

"Be our sweetheart," Ky said, his expression unreadable. "My sub and Aiden's lover. A threesome. A *ménage à trois*. You've heard of those?"

"I understand." Brianne felt herself blush. "I meant in practical terms. What do you mean? Me live here?"

Ky made an indifferent gesture. "Sure. Or whatever."

Aiden broke in. "Women like to have things all spelled out. *I* mean live with us. As lovers. Exclusive lovers. You move in here or we get a bigger place so we're not tripping over each other. Although that could be fun too."

Brianne gulped. "Move in with you?"

"We know you'll say no," Ky said, his voice a growl. "You're Brianne d'Aroth, member of the ruling family, a high-profile socialite. Why would you ruin your reputation by moving into a dump with two Shareem? Aiden insisted we ask. But fine, stay in your high-rise and take champagne baths or whatever you do up there."

"Champagne baths?" she repeated.

"Ky's an idiot," Aiden said. "What he means is we love you and want you with us. But we'll understand if you go."

A lump formed in Brianne's throat. She looked at Ky. "Is that true?"

He scowled. "*Aiden* will understand. I'll be pissed and hurt. But I can't force you to stay, much as I'd like to."

"I meant the love part."

Ky's blue gaze bore into her as it had the first time she'd seen him. "That part's true."

She felt a rush of happiness and pain, excitement and fear. "It's a lot to ask. A big step for me."

Ky looked away, pasting a neutral expression on his face. "We figured you'd say no."

"Wait a minute. I haven't said anything yet. I need to think. There are so many things I'd have to do..."

Then happiness surged, wiping out fear. All her life she'd been in the spotlight, had done her job to the best of her ability, had worked hard for various causes and gone to bed every night vaguely dissatisfied with her world.

Suddenly she had something to work for—two *someones* to work for—a purpose that would fill her heart. She'd have to make hard sacrifices, but it was easy to sacrifice for ones you loved.

She held up her hands. "I have to talk to people and arrange a lot of things. It might take me a while. Don't go anywhere."

Ky raised his brows. "I'm staying right here, darling. I still feel like crap anyway."

"Good. I mean, not that you feel like crap. Oh, you know what I mean. I'll be back."

With that she whirled around, grabbed her robes from the outer room, rushed back in, flung her arms around Aiden and kissed him. Then she kissed Ky, laughing at his fearsome scowl.

"I love you too," she said, then ran out the door again.

* * * * *

After three days in bed, Ky felt almost normal again. He sensed Aiden watching him cautiously, but Ky insisted on getting up and going to Judith's on the third night.

Braden was at Judith's as usual, and from his good-natured greeting, he'd heard nothing about Ky's ordeal. He'd assumed that they'd holed up with a woman for a while in another pleasure game.

Judith looked happy to see them both, but she kept peering distractedly into the corners. Finally she asked Braden, "Where's Calder?"

Braden shrugged. "Don't know, haven't seen him in a while."

"Oh," Judith said, disappointed.

"He's a one-shot," Braden answered. "Now with me, it's any time." He gave her a *you want to?* look. Judith nodded, but her expression made it plain she regarded Braden as second best.

Ky laughed, surprised at how strong his voice sounded. Judith slanted him a warm glance. "If Braden and I have some fun," she said, looking hopeful, "why don't you join us? Aiden too."

Ky winked at her but shook his head. "Have something else to do tonight."

Again Judith looked disappointed. Braden growled, "Hey, what am I, chopped liver?"

"No." Judith leaned down and kissed his cheek. "You're lovely leftovers."

Ky and Aiden roared with laughter, and Braden glared at them. "I'm never going to live this down. Why I put up with it, I don't know."

Ky knew why he put up with it. Being with Judith wasn't something to be tossed aside lightly, and Braden would forgive her. *After* he punished her a little.

Ky scraped back his chair and *thunked* down his ale. "I'll leave you to it. Aiden?"

"Right behind you."

As they walked through the dark streets, Ky leaned close to Aiden. "You mean it? Right behind me?"

"Sure. If you want."

They hadn't kissed or touched or even talked about it while Ky was healing, Aiden saying he wanted to make sure Ky was all right first. They hadn't heard from Brianne either. Not a word, not a glimpse.

She went home and changed her mind, Ky had grumbled. I saw the luxury she lives in, why would she want to trade that for us? Besides, the journalists wouldn't leave her alone if she did.

Aiden had only shaken his head. *Gods, you're a pessimist. Let's trust her.*

Whatever.

Now as they entered their tiny apartment, Ky's excitement rose. Ky knew he and Aiden would have sex, no coy *will we or won't we?* He just knew the time was right.

Ky hit the control to close the door and lock it. "Here we go. Pull down your pants, lover boy."

Aiden was wearing a sleeveless tunic, not pants, but he went along with it. He pulled off the tunic and loincloth and stood naked in the middle of the room. His body was perfect, all raw muscle and toned skin, with a face that could stop traffic and often did.

"*Damn,*" Ky said in appreciation. He wrapped Aiden's hair in his fist and pulled him forward for a kiss. "What do you want to do?"

"You're *asking* me? I thought you were the Dom."

Ky grinned. His cock was hard and dancing, and if Aiden wanted to play, well all right...

"Grab the lube and get on the sofa."

Aiden swiped his tongue across Ky's lips. "You're such a sweet talker. Whispering sweet nothings in my ear."

"You want to do this?"

"Yes, master." Aiden laughed, his breath spicy, then went to fetch scented lube out of the cupboard. "What do you want, chocolate or butterscotch?"

Ky peeled off his clothes, his body temperature rising. "Just pick one and hurry up."

"Sound's like someone's horny."

"*Your* cock's sticking out so far you could pick a lock from across the room."

"Thanks for the compliment." Aiden turned around, a bottle in his hands, and looked Ky up and down, irises widening. "You're not bad yourself."

"Get over here."

Ginning, Aiden came to him. Aiden squirted lube all over his hands – butterscotch, great – and rubbed it onto Ky's cock.

Ky stood still, getting lost in the feeling. His best friend rubbing him and wanting to have sex with him. The gods bless Brianne and Dr. Laas for giving him back this joy.

"Nice and slick," Aiden said. His eyes were filled with blue, his pheromones tingling on Ky's skin. "Perfect."

Ky was starting to lose coherence. "Turn around."

Aiden knew what he wanted. He handed Ky the lube then positioned himself on the sofa, bending to rest his head on his arms. Ky trickled a line of lube across Aiden's backside then entertained himself rubbing it in.

He didn't have the same soothing touch Aiden did, but he knew how to ready someone for a Shareem. He gently ringed Aiden's hole until his anal star relaxed enough for him to slide in a well-lubed finger. Aiden groaned.

"Do you think you can take me?" Ky asked.

"I am *so* willing to try."

"Shareem cocks are big. Are you sure?"

"I've dreamed about nothing else."

Ky slid a second finger inside and used the third to massage the opening. "We'll take it slow."

"Whatever you want," Aiden mumbled, his voice thick.

A dangerous thing to promise. Ky wanted to drive into him until they were both screaming, but he knew better than to rush it. He remembered how gentle Aiden had been with him and how damn good it had felt. The least he could do was return the favor.

Ky withdrew his fingers. Aiden's noise of disappointment turned into a sigh of joy as Ky slid *three* fingers inside him.

"I think I'm going to come already."

"Hold on to it," Ky said.

Aiden groaned again. "If your cock is anywhere near as good as this, I'm in trouble."

"Let's find out."

Slowly Ky withdrew his fingers. "Relax. Think good thoughts."

"I can't think of anything better than this."

Ky slowly parted Aiden's cheeks and positioned himself. He prodded gently, just enough to get Aiden's opening to relax again, then he slid his tip inside.

"Beautiful," Aiden breathed. "Simply beautiful."

Ky rested his hands on Aiden's hips and slowly but surely slid himself forward. Aiden's moan ended in a growl of pleasure.

"Better than your dreams?" Ky asked.

"Shut up and fuck me."

"Hey, I'm the Dom around here."

Aiden's reply was incoherent, but Ky got the drift. He pumped very slowly, getting Aiden used to it. All the way in, all the way out. Another dribble of lube to make slipping inside a little easier.

"Sweet," Ky said. "I love how tight you are."

"So do I," Aiden gurgled. "How did I ever live before this?"

Ky silently wondered that too. The pressure of Aiden squeezing him was better than any sex he'd ever had in his life. The only thing that came close to this much feeling was Brianne's questing mouth.

The thought of her popping in to make it a threesome escalated his excitement. He began to ride in earnest, and Aiden shouted encouragement. Ky reached for his flogger and swatted Aiden lightly on the hips with it.

"Yes, yes, *yes*," Aiden moaned.

Ky stung his own hands and abdomen with the flogger but he didn't care. The tiny bite of pain was nothing to the agony the nano-computers had caused. He felt none of the pain now, not the warning tingle, not the implants eating him from the inside out. He was free to love Aiden any way he chose.

And he would choose so many ways...

"I love you," he said hoarsely.

"Fuck me," Aiden replied. "Don't stop. Don't...aw, damn, I'm *coming*."

"No, wait." Ky reached around and pinched the base of Aiden's cock, but it was too late. Ropes of come snaked out and coated Ky's fingers. At the same time, Ky felt an answering surge, and everything went black as he pumped hard, releasing his seed deep inside his lover.

"Love you," Aiden said brokenly.

Sweat poured from Ky's body, and he leaned into Aiden's equally sweaty back. "I love you too, my friend. Oh fucking damn, that was good."

* * * * *

That same night, Brianne stood in her grandmother's study and faced down the elegant gray-haired woman who was the ruler of all Bor Narga. Brianne felt like a schoolgirl coming to confess a misdeed she'd done instead of a twenty-eight-year-old who could make her own decisions.

"You're going to what?" Clothilde d'Aroth sounded calm, but she was practiced at keeping her voice controlled when she really wanted to shout.

"I am moving to quarters in Pas City," Brianne said, resolving not to twist her fingers like a child. "I plan to take rooms with two Shareem."

"Yes, I heard about you running around the slums with Shareem. I asked Harbough what he meant by letting you do it." Her eyes became steely. "He defied me, said it was your business."

Brianne felt a guilty twinge for Harbough, who could have reported her a long time ago. She resolved he'd not lose anything by this.

"He's right. It *is* my business."

Lady d'Aroth's mouth firmed. "Not when you appear on every digital feed on the planet. Not when reporters are having a field day speculating what you're doing with the Shareem. Not when the m'Aren family are threatening to sue for breach of contract for the ended engagement. What *are* you doing, Brianne? Experimenting with sex? With Shareem? If you're going to do that, hire a Shareem for a week — *discreetly* — and then go on about your business."

Brianne bit the inside of her cheek. She'd made a promise to herself that she'd be professional and businesslike and explain without breaking down. The problem was, it was so difficult to remain in control around Grandmother. Clothilde d'Aroth knew it, and wielded her power with precision.

"I came to tell you, because I thought I should extend that courtesy," Brianne began. "I have started work on changing the laws that restrict Shareem. Talan d'Urvey is helping to fund the movement. Shareem have been enslaved too long."

"Very noble of you. But they're not slaves."

"They may as well be. They're restricted by laws that take away rights that even the lowest-born Bor Nargan enjoys. That's wrong. DNAmo is no longer a threat, and these men aren't either. They have no intention of taking over Bor Narga. They just want to be left alone."

"You're gullible, too."

"Grandmother." Brianne barely held on to her patience. "I'm *going* to do this. I've already begun. It has nothing to do with you or the d'Aroths."

Lady d'Aroth shook her head. "Gods, you're stubborn. Like your mother. I can see you're determined to change the laws — which I don't think will work, by the way — but can't you be a do-gooder from your own office? Why make a fool of yourself moving to Pas City?"

"To prove that there's nothing wrong with living down there. That there's nothing wrong with Shareem. If the spotlight will be on me, it will be on me living with them and sharing their lives, not hiding in my office signing papers."

"Oh, Brianne, you are so young..."

"I'm not that young," Brianne interrupted. "You were crusading for miners out in the canyons you were younger than I am now—enthusiastically. You took part in protests."

"I remember," she said crisply.

"And you were successful, as I mean to be. The d'Aroths caused the Shareem to live in misery, I think a d'Aroth should change that."

Her grandmother leaned forward, as strong at eighty as she'd been at thirty. "You are a stubborn, foolish young woman, Brianne, and you do this without my blessing. When you fall on your face—and you will—I won't catch you."

"I don't expect you to."

Brianne feared she'd tremble and stammer when she faced her grandmother today, but to her surprise a strength rose in her to make her stand as strong and firm as Clothilde d'Aroth ever did. She was not asking her grandmother's permission to begin the enterprise, she was warning her so Lady d'Aroth wouldn't be taken by surprise when the reporters came calling.

Not that anything ever really surprised her grandmother.

"Now that I've told you," Brianne said calmly. "I am going. I came also to say goodbye."

"Good." Clothilde gestured briskly at her desk. "I'm busy."

Brianne gave her a nod. "As you wish. But please remind Dranis m'Aren that he can't sue us for breach of contract because he never signed the engagement agreement. He had his lawyers fussing over the clauses so long that they never finished hammering out a draft."

Her grandmother raised her head, her brows climbing. "Really? You made sure of that before you broke it off?"

"Of course I did. And my lawyers know it too."

"I see." Clothilde d'Aroth held her gaze, reassessing her. "Perhaps you are not such a feeble-wit after all."

Brianne ducked her head. "Thank you, Grandmother," she said, and departed.

* * * * *

Aiden and Ky lay tangled in sleep on the bed in Aiden's room. They'd chosen to adjourn there because Aiden's room was neatest—*we can actually find the bed*, Aiden had said.

When Ky stirred to wakefulness he found himself with his head on Aiden's chest, Aiden's blond hair tickling his cheek. Aiden snored. A soothing level one snore, but a snore nonetheless.

Ky yawned, wondering why he'd awakened, when he heard someone buzzing the front door. Not just buzzing it, leaning on the bell.

He nudged Aiden. "Someone's at the door."

Aiden broke his snore, mumbled and went back to sleep. Ky hauled himself from the bed, wrapped a sheet around his middle and made his way to the front room.

He opened the door to find Brianne standing there with about twenty suitcases and a tall man with salt-and-pepper hair behind her.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello." His gaze shifted to the man and he felt a bite of jealousy. "Who's that?"

"Harbourgh, my bodyguard. I rented the empty apartment two doors down for him so he can keep reporters and crazies away from us."

"Reporters and crazies?" Ky must still be asleep. Was Brianne really here, smelling so good, a mass of luggage around her?

"I'm afraid so. I'm a public person and what I've decided to do will attract attention. They'll get tired of me before long, but until then we'll need Harbourgh."

Ky's sheet slipped but he caught it before it bared more than one hip. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"You asked me to stay. So here I am."

Ky looked into beautiful brown eyes a man could drown in. He saw her determination, a strength that any level three Shareem could admire. Behind that, he sensed worry that they'd forgotten about their offer, that they hadn't really wanted her, that they'd reject her.

As if he could ever send this woman from his side.

Ky hauled her against him for a kiss. He'd have dropped the sheet and screwed her right there if not for the Harbourgh person still in the doorway glaring at them.

Brianne clung to Ky, closing her eyes in relief. "Thank you."

"I wasn't going to push you away." He kissed her again. "Welcome home."

She stepped away and wiped her eyes. "Where's Aiden?"

"Snoring. You'd think that with all the genetic engineering they'd come up with a snore-free Shareem."

Brianne burst out laughing. Harbourgh, who probably never laughed, began dragging Brianne's bags inside. Ky helped him, wondering where they were going to put all her stuff. They wasn't exactly a lot of room here – when Ky traveled all he took was a toothbrush.

Harbourgh left for his quarters, after emphasizing to Brianne that she should call him any time – *and I mean any time* – she needed him. With a final warning glare at Ky, he departed.

"He's just doing his job," Brianne said. "He's been guarding me forever and he doesn't trust anyone. But he'll ensure we have privacy."

"Good." Ky leaned down and danced his tongue over her lips, loving the taste of her. "We'll need it."

The door to Aiden's room opened, and Aiden appeared, stark naked, in its frame. His blond hair was tousled, his eyes twinkled and his cock looked happy to see Brianne. He was the most gorgeous thing Ky had ever beheld.

"Hey, Brianne," he said in his low Shareem voice. "We're having sex. Want some?"

Ky dropped the sheet. He was erect and needy, his body heating, and Brianne's scent and her nearness was driving him crazy.

Brianne laughed then screeched as Ky snatched her up over his shoulder. He ran past Aiden into the bedroom, grabbing Aiden's cock on the way and hauling him in after them.

* * * * *

Ky couldn't have been happier. He lay on Aiden's bed, his thighs spread while Aiden lay between them and took Ky in his mouth. Brianne knelt above Ky and he busily delved his tongue deep into her.

Aiden had a masterful technique, using his lips and tongue and teeth to make Ky harder and harder, his balls rising tight. Aiden paused in his ministrations to slide a ring around Ky's cock, not that he needed it to stand straight up. But he let Aiden play.

Brianne's pussy was sweet. A narrow line of dark curls twisted against her opening, the result of the shaving at the level three haven. Ky dipped his tongue inside her opening, licking her honey, then tickled her clit, moving faster and faster until her hips rocked and sighs dragged from her mouth.

He knew how she felt. He rocked his own hips, up and up into Aiden's talented mouth. His balls squeezed, knowing his come would release soon.

Ky and Brianne would climax, and then it would be Aiden's turn for pleasure. Ky smiled as he kissed Brianne's clit. He had plans for his friend, already imagining Aiden's shouts of pleasure.

Ky was moaning now, his cock thrust hard into Aiden's mouth. At the same time, Brianne screamed and writhed, almost crushing Ky, *but hey, what a way to go.*

In a few minutes they all lay breathless and panting on the bed, Brianne smiling, Ky impatient to move to the next thing.

"Fuck her," he said to Aiden.

Aiden got to his knees. "Gladly."

It was Aiden's turn to be happy. He suckled Brianne's full, lovely nipples before he laid her back with a gentle hand and parted her legs. He slid his cock, slick with lube, into her pussy, closing his eyes when he felt her squeeze around him.

Tasting Ky had been heady. He knew Ky was trying to reward him for sucking him so good, but having Ky had been bliss. Not that he minded taking a reward.

"Get ready," Ky said.

Aiden shivered in anticipation. He opened his eyes to find Brianne staring at him, worried, and he laughed and kissed her. "It's fine."

He felt Ky's hand on his anal star, smearing it with lube, and then Ky's huge cock pressing him.

He groaned in double pleasure as Ky stretched him and slid deliciously inside. Could life get any better? He began to stroke Brianne, lifting his body in and out, at the same time Ky began to stroke *him*.

The coming was the best in his life. *And it won't be the last time*, he thought happily as they collapsed on each other again. *We get to do this again, and again, and again...*

Brianne too was perfectly happy. Aiden stretched out on his back and Ky helped lower Brianne onto Aiden's waiting cock. Aiden moved beneath her, his large hands cupping her breasts.

Ky instructed her to lay down against Aiden then she felt his fingers on her anal star, cool with lube. She moved her hips at the sensation, causing Aiden to moan.

She was relaxed, limbs heavy from Aiden's Shareem touch and voice, not to mention his huge staff inside her. Ky's touch also soothed her, but made her muscles tighten in excitement.

"Shh," Ky said. "You need to be calm, love."

She tried to be calm, but what he did felt so *good*. Was that his finger sliding in?

It was. He worked her like that for a time, then used two fingers, then three. They wouldn't let her come. Every time she got near, Aiden would slow down and run his hands over her body to calm her. She moaned in frustration, but at the same time knew they built her up for something even better.

Ky removed his fingers, then something blunt and very large pushed on her anal star. She froze a moment, but Aiden shushed her and Ky said, "It's all right. It's only me."

And then he was inside her, sliding in, penetrating her so deep. She was filled full, Aiden in her quim, Ky in her ass.

"*Gods.*" She screamed, incoherent, as they both began to ride her, their cocks so close together inside her.

"I love you," she said, her voice strangled.

"Love you too," Aiden said. "*Fuck.*"

"Every day," Ky said. "Every day, both of you. That's how much I love you."

"Ain't he sweet?" Aiden asked, and then he came.

And then Brianne, and then Ky.

After that they lay together tangled and breathing hard and smiling, three as one, complete.

* * * * *

They went to Judith's bar later that night, Brianne wanting to begin her Pas City life right away. She told the other two that they'd begin apartment hunting in the morning, because much as she loved them, she wanted her own room. One that wasn't messy.

Aiden and Ky eyed each other in trepidation, but agreed that a bigger place would be good.

They didn't reach the bar until well after midnight, and most of the patrons had gone. They entered to find only three occupants—Calder in the shadows, Braden in the light, Judith on Braden's lap.

When the three walked in arm in arm with Brianne in the middle, Braden laughed. "Excellent. Now we can have a party."

Aiden looked at Ky, a roguish twinkle in his eyes. "Should we?"

Ky shrugged. He slid away from Brianne and went to Aiden's side. "They'll have to find out sooner or later."

"Find out what?" Judith asked. She looked happy enough perched on Braden's lap, her foot busily twining his long legs.

For answer, Aiden slid his hand behind Ky's neck, and the two Shareem shared a long and loving kiss.

"*Shit*," Braden said. Calder took a calm sip of ale.

Judith smiled, positively delighted. Braden sat still, his blue eyes wide, his lips parted in shock. Brianne burst out laughing. "The look on your face..."

Braden forced his mouth closed and wiped a hand across it. "But I thought—you and them were a *threesome*."

Ky eased away from the kiss, turned and licked the side of Brianne's mouth. "We are. The best kind of threesome."

Aiden chuckled. "We can have sex no matter who's home."

Judith slid from Braden's lap, her slim hands going to her cheeks. "I think it's *wonderful*. Braden, have you ever considered... Maybe you and Calder...and me..."

"No," Calder grated. "*Not* Braden."

Braden rolled his eyes. "Sheesh, I am so abused here."

"It is wonderful," Brianne said softly.

Ky slid his hand across her backside. "Maybe Braden is jealous."

Aiden grinned, catching on. "Maybe he wants to take part."

Braden's eyes widened. "*What?*"

Ky and Aiden closed in on him, arms wide. Judith laughed and danced out of the way, ending up close to Brianne. "I adore those two," she whispered. "I'm so glad you've made them happy."

"Me too," Brianne said, her heart full.

Then they laughed together as Braden tried to scramble back, still in his chair, screaming as Aiden and Ky bore him to the floor. They overturned the table in a wash of flailing Shareem limbs as Calder calmly reached out and rescued his glass of ale.

About the Author

Allyson James is yet one more name for a woman who has racked up four pseudonyms in the first two years of her career. She often cannot remember what her real name is and has to be tapped on the shoulder when spoken to.

Allyson began writing at age eight (a five-page story that actually contained goal, motivation, and conflict). She learned the trick of standing her math book up on her desk so she could write stories behind it. She wrote love stories before she knew what romances were, dreaming of the day when her books would appear at libraries and bookstores. At age thirty, she decided to stop dreaming and do it for real. She published the first short story she ever submitted in a national print magazine, which gave her the false illusion that getting published was easy.

After a long struggle and inevitable rejections, she at last sold a romance novel, then to her surprise several mystery novels, more romances, and erotic romances to Ellora's Cave, and became a bestselling author. She writes under several pseudonyms, has been nominated for and won Romantic Times Reviewer's Choice awards, and has had starred reviews in Booklist and Top Pick reviews in Romantic Times.

Allyson met her soulmate in fencing class (the kind with swords, not posts-and-rails). She looked down the length of his long, throbbing rapier and fell madly in love.

Allyson welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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