



Loose Id

Lacey Savage
DAWN
of the
ALPHA

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Loose Id.®

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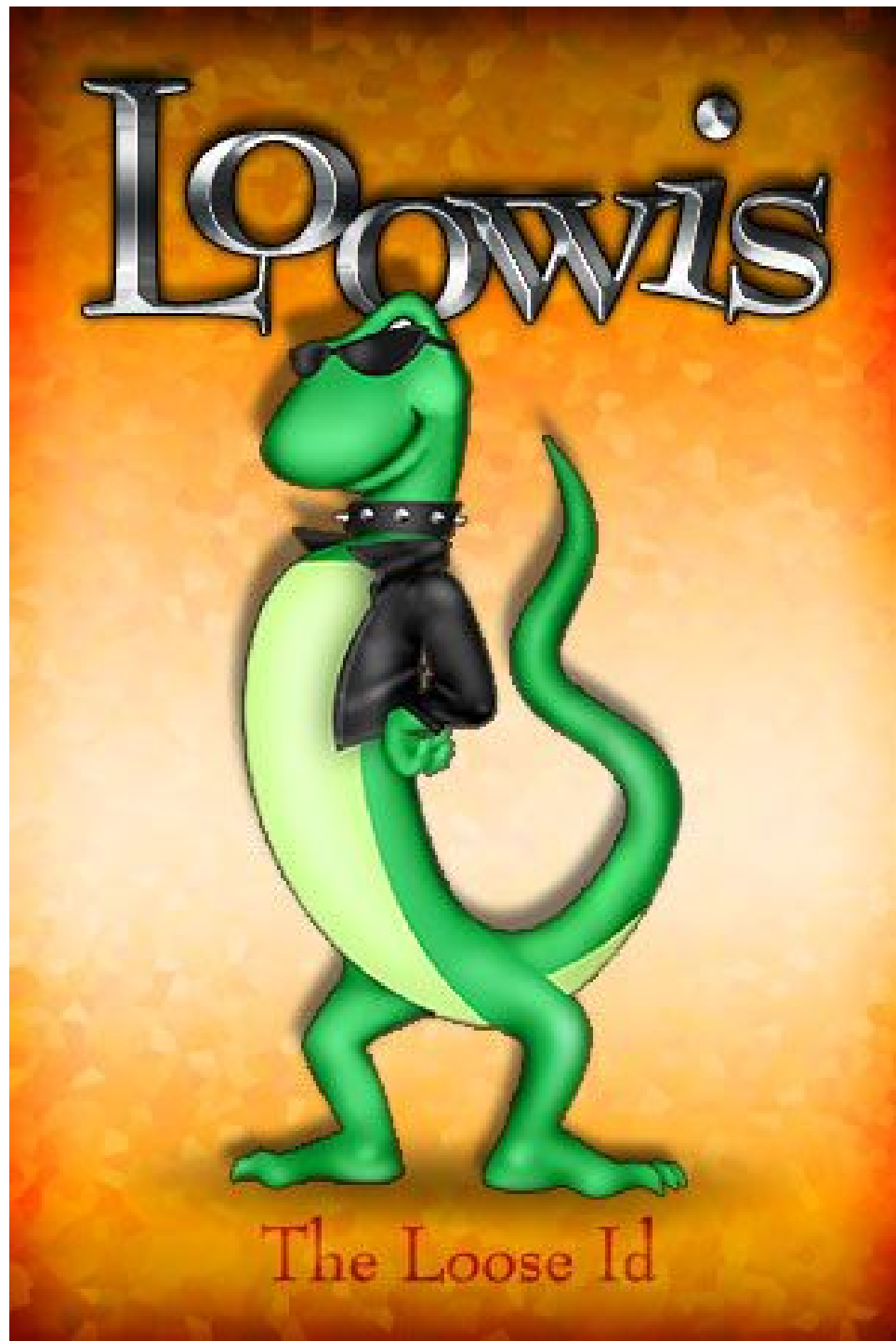
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Chapter One

“Home, sweet home,” Quinton Stillwell muttered, unable to keep the sarcasm dripping from his voice in check. “Are we cleared for landing?”

Tynisha Shuhi’s fingertips danced over the ship’s controls, her long red nails punctuating the steady beeps and chirps of the console with regular clicks of acrylic tapping plastic. “Yes, Sir. Earth’s Central Command is expecting us.”

“No doubt they’ll be sending a welcome party to greet us.”

Tynisha’s shoulders lifted a fraction of an inch, just enough for Quinn to discern her grimace. He didn’t have to see her face to know the furrow of her brow or the downturn of her lips. He’d seen that same reaction on her features a dozen times before as the ship neared Earth.

A moment later, the lightweight material of her body-hugging black uniform smoothed out as she relaxed her clenched muscles. She gave her head a small shake, and her mass of black hair shimmied down her back. “No doubt.”

Involuntarily, Quinn’s body’s reactions had mirrored hers, and he forced his tense muscles to slacken. He gave his pilot’s shoulder a reassuring squeeze. “We don’t live there any more, Ty. The past can’t hurt us.”

She turned her head and angled her gaze upward in his direction. "So you say."

Although he'd grown accustomed to staring into her glassy, unseeing eyes, a shiver stole down his spine.

Tynisha hadn't been created blind. Hell, unlike the rest of Earth's citizens who'd been engineered in sterile laboratories for generations, she hadn't been *created* at all. She'd been born to Alpha parents who adored her; a healthy, happy baby. Elsewhere, she might have stayed that way. On Earth, the pure method of her birth had labeled her an aberration, and when rumors of her nativity spread, it had only been a matter of time until someone came to eliminate all trace of her and the uncontaminated shape-shifting genes she carried.

She'd survived. Her sight hadn't.

As far as Quinn knew, Ty was the only blind pilot in the galaxy. Maybe even in the entire universe. And she was the best. Her exceptional piloting skills were only matched by her affinity for Enigma, Quinn's transport ship. What she lost by not being able to see the vidscreen and console, she more than made up for through instinct and a keen honing of her remaining senses.

Besides, Quinn reminded himself, just because she didn't see the world his way, didn't mean she couldn't *see*. Her surgical implants, coupled with her natural Alpha night vision allowed her unique sight processing capabilities. For that reason, Enigma's small bridge was kept permanently dark. Bright, colorful lights flickered at regular intervals across the console, and the star chart spread out on the vidscreen cast an eerie white glow around Tynisha's lean form, but otherwise the room remained shrouded in shadows.

"I hate setting Enigma down in Earth's spaceport," Ty said, her voice barely above a whisper. She ran her fingertips over the ship's console, caressing the smooth surface like a lover might, with infinite patience and awe. "She doesn't like it either, being so close to all those slaver vessels. We might as well set her down in a junkyard."

"We won't stay long," Quinn promised. "Just until dawn."

“Are we free to enjoy the festivities tonight, then, or are you keepin’ all the fun to yourself as usual?”

Quinn turned toward the sound of the familiar masculine voice to see Dante Lotton leaning in the doorway, his massive form illuminated from behind by the glaring neon light that washed over the hallway outside the bridge.

Enigma’s crew had quickly nicknamed Dante “The Muscle” after he’d arrived on board, and the name fit both his appearance and his job description. Almost 6’5 and built like a brick wall, Dante’s impressive physique inspired lustful thoughts in women and immediate terror in those with something to fear from Enigma’s only security officer. As a side benefit, Dante’s raw strength often came in handy when the cargo required heavy lifting.

“Would I do that to you?” Quinn spread his hands in a gesture of innocent surrender. “The Saint Valentine’s Festival’s reputation for debauchery and rampant hedonism is well earned.” He flicked his fingers in Dante’s direction. “Go. Enjoy. Just be back before sunrise. Enigma’s taking off at dawn with or without you.”

Dante brought his hand up to his temple and snapped off an archaic mock-salute. “Aye, Cap’n. I’ll be back before you can miss me.”

Quinn rolled his eyes and placed his right palm over his heart. “I miss you already. Now go tell the others, before I change my mind.”

Dante lingered for a moment, as though preparing to say something else. With a final nod, he turned and left.

Quinn sighed and focused his attention on the vidscreen. The star map had disappeared, and Quinn watched as Earth’s topography came into view. He stood behind Ty’s chair in silence while she dropped them down between two massive buildings to hover effortlessly above a blue-tinted airlock. The ship lingered in the air for a few minutes, until Central Command granted them permission to enter.

Quinn waited, ignoring the dull throb in his gut that always came with being so close to home.

No, not home. I was born here, but I don't belong here.

None of them did. Not Ty, who had nothing but ugly fragmented memories of what men did to Alpha carriers on Earth. Not Shantae Espinall, the ship's doctor, or Isaac Congrove, Enigma's engineer. And certainly not Vance Gellert, who, although he hadn't lost any of his senses or vital organs as Ty had, was probably the most scarred of all of them by humanity's cruelty toward Alphas.

Even Dante would have stayed far from Earth if he could have, though he'd been born on the Mars colony, where the Terran Government's strict rules and regulations didn't have as firm a hold on people as they did on their native planet.

Yet Quinn brought them all here, again and again. He told them as little as possible about his reasons for returning to Vieux Orleans every three months, though he knew they'd all figured out much more about his obligations and his past than he'd let on. Well, so be it. He was grateful they didn't ask too many questions. The less he involved them, the better.

"Central Command kindly informs us that two officers are waiting outside the ship. They want to talk to you, then they'll board."

"Of course. Let's not keep the gentlemen waiting." He gave Ty's shoulder one last pat, then took a deep breath and headed toward the door.

"Captain?"

Quinn turned back. Tynisha had spun in her chair to face him. The glow from the monitor didn't quite reach her face, but he could see the subtle contours of her small nose, her slender throat. And there was no ignoring those eyes. They gleamed with a fierce incandescence. Shimmery violet light seemed to come from inside her, dimming momentarily and then flaring again a split-second later.

The effect unnerved him. "Yes?"

She frowned and tipped her head to one side. “Be careful.”

Quinn nodded. “Always am.”

He raced through Enigma’s hallways, careful to avoid the ship’s central areas as he made his way to the exit. He didn’t want to face any more concerned pairs of eyes before he left the safety of the ship.

On Enigma, he was surrounded by Alphas. He’d picked them all himself, and trusted them with his life. Here, enclosed on all sides by the ship’s gray walls and people who understood him, he felt truly at home, able to shift at will and indulge his true nature. Out there, on Earth’s streets, he’d be among enemies who wouldn’t hesitate to turn him over to Terran officials at the slightest provocation.

With one last look over his shoulder at the inside of his ship, he pushed his six-digit code into the electronic keypad situated to the right of the main doors. They swung open with an audible hiss, triggering the ramp extension.

Done stalling, he strode down the length of the ramp and paused in front of the officers. They both wore standard-issue Kevlar uniforms, which included white hermetically sealed helmets that hid their features.

“Present your identity chip for immediate inspection,” one of the men said, his voice sounding like a distant echo drudged up from the bowels of the earth.

Quinn thrust out his arm and turned his hand palm-up. A raised indentation stood out beneath the skin at the center of his wrist. The officer ran his palm over it and the mark flared to life. It glowed a fiery red for a second, then turned green.

It also itched like a son of a bitch, Quinn thought as he gritted his teeth to keep from scratching. The man who’d implanted the fake chip had promised he’d get used to it, but it had been almost a decade, and he still couldn’t stand the damn thing. Every time it activated, his flesh either itched or felt like a thousand fire ants danced beneath the surface of his skin. Truth be told, he preferred the itching.

“Quinton Stillwell, created in Vieux Orleans in 2382.” The man hesitated as he received the rest of the information in his earpiece.

“Problem?” Quinn asked, not bothering to unclench his jaw.

“No problem. It’s just that we so rarely see a former domestic returning home. We bid you welcome.”

“Thanks.” He wondered if the sarcasm in his tone penetrated those laser-proof helmets.

“Your ship will be boarded and inspected. Your crew will be asked to leave. If everything is found to be in order, you will be granted permission to take possession of your vessel in two days time.”

“No can do. We need to leave first thing in the morning. We have an urgent delivery that can’t wait.”

The officer on the left elbowed the other. “He’s on Earth for the Festival, like everyone else. The sooner they’re all out of here, the better.”

Quinn glanced around him at the crowded spaceport. Vessels of all shapes and sizes stood ready for inspection, doors gaping widely to allow Central Command’s officers free reign. While docked on Earth, everyone obeyed Earth rules.

“Fine. I’ll tag your ship’s identification chip with permission to depart tomorrow. That means you’re not to linger a moment longer than absolutely necessary. Understood?”

Quinn fought the urge to mimic Dante’s salute. Although the simple gesture hadn’t been used by Earth’s military forces in over two hundred years, it still served as a symbol of acknowledging authority. More often, though, it was used to mock that same authority.

Leashing his irritation, Quinn turned his back on the officers without another word, veered through the multitude of ships and left the spaceport on foot. As the streets opened up before him, he was once again struck by the familiar emotions that the sights of the city stirred within him.

Although Vieux Orleans only remotely resembled its previous namesake, it continued to hold on to the ancient charm and rustic architecture that still made it a popular tourist attraction. While a few skyscrapers reached their tendrils into the sky and boasted over three hundred floors, most buildings remained lower to the ground.

Unlike the spaceport, which was a hollow, blue-tinted structure built for function rather than form, the rest of the city bathed in color. Modern technology had been used to rebuild and enhance polished villas to contemporary perfection. Flowers bloomed year-round, spraying the air with synthetic scents day and night. Beneath his boot heels, the self-cleaning slick surface of the sidewalk reflected the hurried feet and distorted bodies of Vieux Orleans' residents.

At the corner of Canal and Decatur in the French Quarter, he paused to hail a hovercab. He'd briefly considered walking to Faye's home, but the trip would likely take a couple of hours on foot. Although there was plenty to see as the preparations for the Saint Valentine's Festival got underway, the less time he spent among locals, the better.

"Where to?" The driver peered at him through the rearview mirror, his gold-tinted eyes hinting at his genetically engineered hyper-sight.

"3437 Saint Francis."

The man nodded. "Sit back and enjoy the ride. We'll be there in no time."

Leaning his head against the backrest of the seat, Quinn scrubbed a hand over his jaw. He'd shaved earlier that day, but already his beard had begun to grow and it scraped against his palm. Yet another side effect of his genes.

He sighed, turning his attention outward, refusing to think about his lot in life. He'd done enough desperate searching over the years, and he'd wasted too much time trying to come to terms with the way the world treated him. It had taken decades, but he'd finally realized that the only person he had to satisfy was himself. No one else.

The hovercab came to an abrupt stop as the driver obeyed a traffic signal flashing on the inside of his windshield. He swore and gripped the steering column with both hands, tugging on it sharply.

Quinn glanced out the tinted window. A few feet away, people prepared for the night's activities. Brightly colored tents and makeshift stages were being assembled, and vendors set up luminescent booths from which to hawk every kind of sex toy imaginable.

The driver finally pulled away, but Quinn continued to watch in fascination as the urban metropolis turned itself from a tourist's quaint paradise into a city of sin. In a few short hours, Vieux Orleans, like every other metropolitan area on Earth, would celebrate Saint Valentine's Night.

Noticing the slant of Quinn's gaze, the driver chuckled. "I hope you'll get a chance to see the sights before you leave. There's nothing quite like the city coming alive under the skillful ministrations of a hundred thousand horny men and women." He whistled, a sharp, appreciative sound. "You'll have so many mouths clamoring for a taste of your cock, you won't know where to shove it first. I can't explain it better than that. You have to experience the Festival for yourself."

Quinn licked his lips. His cock stirred, surprising him with a jolt of intense arousal. "I'll keep that in mind."

Though he'd lived in the city for the first twenty years of his life, he'd never participated in a Saint Valentine's Night Festival. Faye hadn't allowed her servants to attend the celebration, but he'd spent countless hours watching the festivities from his room and stroking his shaft until his seed splattered against the wall.

Resisting the urge to rub the heel of his hand over his erection, Quinn thought back to the history books Faye had forced him to read. They'd claimed that a millennium ago, Saint Valentine's holy day had been no more than a casually observed celebration at best; a commercialized, materialistic, saccharine holiday at worst.

That had changed in the centuries that followed. The whole world had changed. As all of Earth came under the jurisdiction of a central government that sought to rule every aspect of its citizens' lives, including all minute details of any service and commodity, Saint Valentine had rapidly become the patron Saint of sexuality.

He was the one to whom pleasure slaves prayed when their flesh burned with the permanent scars their masters inflicted. And it was his name that was most often screamed in brothels across the world when a sex droid brought a paying customer to the height of ecstasy. Saint Valentine's image graced the inside of every pleasure room, be it in the form of a sculpted artifact nestled in an altar or in the rippled surface of a sex toy meant to burrow into a woman's wet cunt when she couldn't afford to purchase her pleasure elsewhere and was forced to leave matters to the skillful visage of her patron Saint.

Earth's governmental regulations had made it clear that sex without an exchange of money and a written contract was illegal, whether it involved oral pleasure or something as simple as the baring of sensual body parts to another person's eyes for the purpose of arousal. Penalties for disobeying the law were always harsh, but they ranged in severity depending on the seriousness of the crime.

A number of Faye's friends had been prosecuted under the sexual regulations, and they'd all been found guilty. Most had lost their homes, along with every possession they owned. They were stripped of their titles and job opportunities. Their identification chips permanently marked them as sexual deviants, most often for doing nothing more than indulging in mutual petting with a co-worker or masturbating in front of a neighbor.

For three hundred and sixty-four days of the year, every aspect of sexual behavior had to be controlled and micromanaged. But not tonight.

Tonight, Saint Valentine would be revered and worshipped by every indentured servant, every sex worker, every Vieux Orleans citizen who wished to freely indulge in the pleasures of the flesh. No monetary tokens would change hands. The Festival was all about giving in to pure, unregulated bliss with abandon.

Quinn closed his eyes to block out the image of a giant phallic symbol dripping creamy liquid onto bystanders from a tenth-story balcony. He was no longer the pup whose life Faye Laurens had saved when she'd refused to turn him over to the authorities for attempting to steal from her. And he was no longer the youth who'd learned about erotic pleasure at the skillful hands of educators twice his age.

No, he was an adult now, having seen more than thirty of Earth's cold winters. And a free citizen, besides. He could attend the Festival if he wished.

The thought made his lips curve upward in a smile. The blaze of his lust flared up another notch. His cock hardened even more, stretching the tight material of his trader's uniform.

Faye would have a few things to say about his decision. Knowing her, though, she'd also have a willing pussy waiting for him at home. A wet, hot, and well trained pussy he could shove his dick into without hassle. And best of all, without the government regulating the service.

His smile widened into a full-fledged grin. There was one good thing about coming to Earth. Even after all these years, Faye still took good care of his needs.

Chapter Two

Rhyanne Hamilton balanced a delicate silver tray on the outstretched fingertips of her right hand and concentrated on placing one high-heeled shoe in front of the other without tripping. Her calf muscles trembled from the strain of teetering on narrow nine-inch heels. The crystal goblets perched precariously on the tray quivered, their melodious song echoing through the marble hallway.

She counted each step in an effort to space her footfalls the exact length apart. Her walk had to be exact, each pace measured and precise, each movement flawlessly elegant. That was the way the Mistress wanted it. The way she was expected to carry out all her duties: immaculately and without question.

One-two-three.

She took a deep breath and turned, measuring the distance to the door on the other side of the hall with her gaze. It had to take exactly thirty seconds to traverse the length of the corridor. No more, no less.

One-two-three.

She added a sway to her hips, remembering the kiss of leather across the small of her back the Mistress had applied when she'd forgotten to sashay just so the last time she'd served a meal to Faye's companions.

One-two-three.

She furrowed her brow in concentration. It felt almost like dancing, only not quite as effortless. She couldn't lose herself in the movements. She had to keep her concentration at all times, or else the half a dozen goblets would tumble to the ground. The Mistress made her practice in the hall, knowing Rhyanne would have to be careful. The marble floor was unforgiving toward crystal, especially when dropped from a height of almost six and a half feet.

One-two-three.

The precarious balancing act made a breath hitch in her throat. Tension knotted her muscles. A bead of sweat dripped from her temple, though the temperature in the room had been set to an ideal 73 degrees Fahrenheit. She knew, because she'd set it herself. As she walked past a small, discreet vent, a light breeze caressed her bare mound, ruffling her finely-trimmed pubic hair and making her shiver.

The goblets trembled with her. She paused a second longer than necessary, swallowing hard.

"Tonight is very special to me, Rhyanne. I expect everything to be perfect."

Rhyanne's heart raced at the sound of her Mistress's silky, self-assured voice. The crystal vibration intensified, sending a harmonious chirp into the air. Rhyanne held her breath, willing her cramped fingers not to give way under the weight of the tray.

"I expect you to acknowledge me when I speak to you." Faye punctuated her words with a flick of the wrist.

Rhyanne caught the motion from the corner of her eye a split-second before the thin leather switch made contact with her bare ass.

She gasped. Her back arched involuntarily as a thin, targeted line of fiery pain spread through her nerve-endings. Her sex clenched, wetness slicking her labia despite the abrupt sting.

She'd been trained well. Created to take her place among indentured pleasure servants, she'd been carefully instructed in the art of erotic pleasure practically since she could walk. At first, it was all done through books and vidscreens that graphically portrayed all the acts she'd be expected to perform in exquisite, intimate detail.

Then, as she'd matured, she'd been allowed to practice under close supervision using a variety of toys and the occasional pleasure 'bot. Every blissful response of her body had been carefully monitored, meticulously honed until she could effortlessly control her reactions to erotic stimuli, but only to amplify her arousal. Her patrons would surely want her ripe for the taking, and her training had consisted of ensuring that even pain brought a wave of undeniable pleasure.

"Yes, Mistress," she hissed on a sharp intake of breath. In her hand the tray quivered, but held. "I won't fail you, Mistress."

"Good. I trust you'll remember that from now on."

The second blow came from the front, smacking the crease where her leg met the apex of her thigh. The edge of the switch made contact with her plump labia, shooting spiraling waves of pain and heat into her clit.

The shock of the sensation made her stumble forward. Her legs wobbled as she fought to regain her balance, but the outlandish shoes she'd been commanded to wear impeded her best efforts to anchor her feet to the floor.

The tray slipped out of her grasp, tumbling to the ground with an ear-splitting crash. The goblets shattered on impact, spraying shards of glass in every direction. She felt one of the fragments scratch her ankle through her gauzy thigh-high stockings as it bounced off the

floor, but didn't dare bend down to assess the injury. Instead, having regained her balance, she stood rooted to the spot, keeping her head down and her gaze lowered.

Faye gave an exaggerated sigh as she stepped around Rhyanne, her much more sensible flat-soled shoes crunching on the ground with every step.

"What am I going to do with you? In the past two months, you've cost me more than any other pleasure servant I've ever owned. And what have I gotten for my efforts? Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

Rhyanne drew her lower lip between her teeth and bit down hard to keep from replying. If Faye hadn't received her tokens' worth, it wasn't because Rhyanne hadn't tried.

Faye was Rhyanne's first patron, having purchased her contract immediately after her training had been deemed complete. The transaction had taken place two months ago. In that time, Faye hadn't once demanded sexual gratification.

When the embarrassment of not being wanted had grown to be too much, Rhyanne had attempted to seduce her mistress. Her efforts had been for naught. She'd been swiftly and thoroughly rejected.

Sometimes she feared she'd live the rest of her life without experiencing the true pleasures of the flesh. Most of all, though, she hated knowing that her first real taste of bliss would come at the hand, mouth, or cock of someone not of her own choosing.

"You're trouble with a capital T," Faye said. "I could tell that about you from the first moment I first saw you standing in the Academy chapel, brazenly meeting the gaze of every prospective master who walked by. I knew then you were the one I'd been searching for."

The switch fell again and again as Faye spoke, igniting waves of fiery heat wherever it landed: against Rhyanne's ribs, on the curve of her breast, on her bare mound. Faye was careful to keep her lashes light enough to bring pleasure, yet solid enough to ignite the sharp stings Rhyanne had come to expect.

She bit down on her lower lip and teetered on her heels. Arousal flashed through her body in sharp waves, guided by the motion of Faye's hand.

"Why me?" Rhyanne dared ask through sharp gasps elicited by the leisurely strokes.

"I could sell your contract," Faye mused, as though she hadn't heard the question. She halted the relentless blows and stepped in front of Rhyanne to lift her chin until she could no longer avoid her eyes. "What do you think of that?"

Rhyanne licked her suddenly dry lips. "I'm yours, Mistress, to do with as you wish."

Maybe the next master will want me. She pushed the frivolous thought aside. There wouldn't be another master. Not after tonight.

Faye made a sound of agreement, then bent her head on an angle, studying Rhyanne's face. Unable to look away, Rhyanne did the same. Though no longer young, Faye Laurens possessed the kind of ageless beauty women in the pleasure trade envied. Her sharp, chiseled cheekbones accented a small nose and full mouth. Black lashes bordered limpid blue eyes. Touches of gray streaked her shimmering black hair, adding to her mysterious, authoritative appeal.

All things considered, Faye hadn't been an unpleasant mistress, despite her reluctance to sample Rhyanne's talents. Rhyanne didn't even mind her particular fondness for the sharp sting of pain: both giving and receiving.

She'd been kind, too, allowing Rhyanne as much freedom as her indentured servant contract would allow. She was free to go to the market unescorted twice a week, and she had her own room in Faye's mansion, which was much more than most pleasure servants ever received.

Rhyanne swallowed hard, not daring to tear her gaze away from her Mistress's. Tonight had to be perfect for both of them. Her plan hinged on so many factors over which she had no control. It had to work. It just *had* to.

If she was caught trying to escape, all the warmth Faye had shown her would dissipate as if it had never existed. She knew the penalties for breaking a contract, and they made a million whiplashes pale in comparison to the agony she could look forward to.

The Terran government had no pity or mercy for indentured servants who tried to escape their bonds. She'd heard what happened to pleasure slaves who'd tried and failed. They were thrown in the deepest, darkest cellars, forced to service everyone from the lowest criminals to the cruelest guards until their dying day. Luckily for them, they often didn't have to wait long for their last breath to expire. The continual torment to which they were subjected quickly overwhelmed even the most thorough pleasure training, turning sex into a terrifying, brutal experience.

She suppressed a shudder and tried to smooth her face into a mask of submission. That wasn't the way she wanted to experience her first real sexual encounter. But neither could she spend the rest of her life serving someone else's needs, obeying someone else's wishes, letting someone else choose her lovers for her.

Her training had prepared her for many things, but it hadn't been able to snuff out the spark of independence that always ruled her thoughts. She yearned to be able to choose her own path, to live a life free of a master's demands. She'd seen too many women like her perish under the tight constraints of servitude, and she vowed she wouldn't be one of them.

It's worth it, Rhy. Whatever you have to do to get away from here is worth every moment of fear, every risk you have to take.

Julie's words rang clearly through her mind, and she stifled a sigh. Julie had been the closest thing she'd had to a friend at the St. Valentine's Pleasure Academy. No, she'd been more than a friend. The history books called such bonds *family*, but the word was as foreign to Rhyanne now as it had been when she'd first encountered it in her textbook.

Families hadn't existed for centuries. Not since marriage had been outlawed and all human life began in a government laboratory. People no longer conceived children as they

once did. The entire population had been rendered effectively sterile in the Conception Prevention Act of 2115.

Children had been considered messy complications. Citizens without bonds, without the ties that kept them close to one another, could live much happier, more peaceful lives. At least, that had been the reason provided for the decision at the time. Rhyanne wasn't sure she agreed, but she hadn't been given a specific reason to deny that fundamental truth, either. She knew of only one genetic mishap that still allowed for those familial bonds.

The Alpha gene.

Alphas were still able to conceive naturally. They took mates and created entire tribes. Or they used to, before there had been another act passed ruling their existence an unfortunate side-effect of genetic engineering and calling for their immediate extermination. Rumors whispered in the dark corners of the Academy spoke of government lies and hinted at the fact that the Alpha gene hadn't been a genetic mutation at all, but a naturally occurring variance in the human population.

Rhyanne had always envied Alphas their ability to form connections with others, deep permanent bonds that could last a lifetime. They were persecuted for what came naturally to them, which wasn't fair. No one should have the ability to force a group of people to obey laws that weren't created to protect them, but to destroy them. Just like no one should have the right to keep her here against her will.

As Rhyanne well knew, life on Earth was far from fair.

"What's going through that lovely head of yours, hmmm?" Faye asked, running her index finger over the line of Rhyanne's jaw.

Instinctively, Rhyanne lowered her gaze. Her skin burned where the switch had licked it, and she could see angry red marks standing out brightly against her alabaster flesh.

Faye couldn't know what she had planned for tonight. She'd been careful and had taken every possible precaution to keep her scheme secret. "I was just thinking I should clean this up before your guests arrive."

Faye peered at her intently for a moment longer, the strength of her stare bringing a guilty blush to Rhyanne's cheeks.

At last, Faye finally released her and stepped back. "Just one guest tonight, darling."

"Only one?" She couldn't keep the surprise from her voice. Wednesday nights were Faye's poker nights, routine and predictable. Faye's companions, three other women of her age, came by to indulge in a night of game playing and social intimacy, something none of the elderly women received on a regular basis. It had been the same every week since she'd arrived and Rhyanne knew well the role she had to play. She'd be expected to serve them wine and indulge their palate with a variety of flavorful concoctions currently being whipped up in the kitchen. She'd have to be meek and submissive, delighting their sense of sight as she gratified their taste buds.

Her plan hinged on the regimented schedule of the evening. By the time the women were deeply sated, she could put her plan into motion and slip out unnoticed. If the tracking inhibitor she'd been given did what it was supposed to do, she'd be out the front gates before anyone observed she was missing.

"I told you tonight was special," Faye said with a slight lift of her perfectly-arched eyebrows. "For both of us. Now hurry and clean up this mess. He'll be here any moment now."

"Yes, Mistress." Rhyanne ducked her head obediently and headed for the small utility closet carved into the side of the massive spiraling staircase.

Her thoughts raced as she yanked open the door and grabbed a piece of self-cleaning cloth. Quickly draping it over the sweeper side of a mop, she tried to make sense of the change in Faye's routine. Who could possibly be coming by unexpectedly and cause such a

furor? She'd never seen her Mistress get worked up about anyone. Faye grew excited and pleased at times with the company she kept, but she never beamed with affection as she'd had a moment ago.

More importantly, what did this mean for Rhyanne's plan? Would she still have an opportunity to slip out unnoticed through the back door? Or would she be expected to spend the entire evening at the whims of her Mistress and this mysterious guest?

She grabbed a small metallic vacuum from a nearby shelf, her heart pounding wildly as she considered the possibilities. Perhaps this was a good thing. Maybe Faye wouldn't require her services tonight at all. Maybe she'd be so preoccupied with her guest that she wouldn't pay any attention to Rhyanne's whereabouts.

The vacuum's inner core rattled with the glass remnants of her last attempt to master the serving walk as she picked her way precariously to the mess on the floor. The previous endeavor had ended much like this one, with her scrambling to pick up the pieces of broken goblets while Faye swatted her ass with her switch.

When the peal of the doorbell rang through the house, announcing the arrival of Faye's guest, Rhyanne was still bent over, gathering up the last of the shards. The scrape on her ankle had been superficial at best, and hadn't required any tending to. The stocking, however, was ruined and would need to be changed.

She heard Faye rushing through the foyer to open the door. For a moment, she thought about standing up to see the man who'd caused Faye to change her orderly plans for the evening, but thought better of it. She knew what her Mistress expected, and it was total obedience. She'd been instructed to clean up the shards before the visitor arrived, and that was exactly what she intended to do.

Low murmurs came from the foyer. A rich, masculine voice swept through the hall, though Rhyanne couldn't make out his words over the hum of the vacuum so close to her ear. Fay's laugh, genuine and completely unexpected, rang out clearly.

Only an open archway separated her from Faye and the newcomer. Ensuring she'd picked up every last shard, Rhyanne turned off the vacuum, ending the soft whirr of the machine's motor, then dared a glance over her shoulder.

What she saw took her breath away.

Her gaze locked with the bluest eyes she'd ever glimpsed. A deep, dark sapphire, they twinkled slightly in response to the slight upturn of his lips, seeming to beckon her closer.

And, oh, Saints, those lips! The man's mouth was full and sensual, hinting at pleasurable delights. The scruffy beginnings of a beard marred his square jaw and stole up his cheeks toward his lean cheekbones. His straight nose set off his blue eyes. Dark eyebrows slashed perfectly over them, matching the deep brown hue of his short hair.

A tight uniform she recognized as that of a space-faring trader encased a lean, muscular physique. Unable to resist, she glanced between his legs, where she could discern the thick length of his rapidly awakening cock.

Rhyanne took a deep breath, willing her hammering heart to slow. What had gotten into her? She'd seen men before. She'd been near them. And yet she'd never had this kind of instinctual, deeply arousing response to anyone. Her entire body heated from the inside, her sex pulsing rhythmically, almost in expectation.

Oh, this was bad. Very, very bad. She couldn't afford a distraction. If Faye gave her leave, she had to take it and run at the first opportunity. She couldn't stand here wishing for this man's hands, his mouth, or any other part of his delectable anatomy.

She licked her lips slowly and watched him follow the motion. His sapphire eyes deepened as his gaze raked over her body, then he cast a quick glance at Faye, raising an eyebrow. "You've really outdone yourself this time. I daresay that is the hottest piece of ass I've ever seen."

A rush of heat crept up Rhyanne's cheeks. She'd been so spellbound by the man, she hadn't given any thought to her rather revealing position ... kneeling on all fours, her pussy gaping open for his intimate inspection.

Rising to her feet was more of a challenge than she'd expected. She wobbled for a moment while she fought to keep her balance, then released a breath when her limbs stopped trembling.

Faye beamed a smile his way. The sight of it sent an icy chill down Rhyanne's veins. She knew that look. She'd seen it in the eyes of her teachers when the time came for her contract to be purchased by a master.

"She's yours, Quinn. All yours."

Chapter Three

Quinn. Quinton Stillwell. The name rang out through Rhyanne's mind, resonating with potent admiration. She'd heard his name often since becoming a servant in Faye's household, uttered either by the house-slaves or the occasional guest. It was always spoken with a tinge of reverence and more than a touch of envy.

A trickle of sweat ran from her temple down her cheek, and she swiped at it with trembling hands. She couldn't bring herself to remember to bow in the elegant obeisance that was the customary show of respect toward someone of his stature.

All she could do was stare. He was one of *them*. A servant who'd accomplished the impossible. He'd convinced his mistress to release him from his contract long before he'd been able to purchase his own freedom. Such a thing was virtually unheard of. In fact, as far as Rhyanne knew, Faye was the only mistress to have ever freed a domestic of her own volition.

Besides being valuable commodities, servants could be worth extravagant sums of money to those who desired their particular talents. Pleasure slaves like her were among the most expensive to own, but there were others with different skills and less training who'd fetch a healthy price at auction or through private transactions.

She'd heard that Quinton had also been a pleasure servant, but she hadn't believed the gossip. Those with her particular talents were trained from creation, and she knew Quinton hadn't had the privilege of a thorough education. Faye had brought him into her household at the age of eight, after having plucked him from the streets where he surely would have either died in quick order or landed himself in the dungeon cellars. Rumor had it Faye had then taken it upon herself to privately hire Academy professors who would provide him the necessary skills to excel in sating the needs of the flesh.

And then she'd simply let him go. Just like that, after having invested a small fortune in his education.

Right. Rhyanne fought the urge to roll her eyes at the absurd thought. Mistresses still owed the government in taxes for the servants they owned, whether freed or not. Why would anyone continue to pay for a man who no longer earned a profit in any way?

"Does she normally stand there gaping, or is this a special occasion?"

Quinn moved toward her with the predatory speed of a panther. She remained rooted to the spot, her gaze drifting over the width of his shoulders, the corded arm muscles straining beneath the tight uniform, the chiseled abs. She stopped herself just short of gazing between his legs again. Another look at the bulging appendage begging to be stroked and she knew she'd groan, letting all her inexperience and raw need show.

No, it was bad enough that she was the only pleasure servant who no one wanted to fuck. She didn't need to advertise the fact that she was a virgin.

Besides, whatever had gotten into her wasn't the proper behavior of one of Saint Valentine's children. She'd been taught better, knew better than to give in to her body's responses toward a prospective client.

Or more importantly, toward a prospective master. One who might actually thrust his thick, willing cock into her eager pussy and finally put an end to the frustration that had plagued her since she'd first learned to recognize her own arousal.

He circled her slowly, his gaze raking over her body from the tips of her toes to her mass of blonde hair, which she'd carefully piled on top of her head earlier that morning, as per the Mistress's request.

Rhyanne's nipples beaded under his scrutiny, tightening to hard points that ached to be touched. She straightened her spine and thrust her chest out a fraction of an inch, silently pleading with him to reach out and tweak a nipple between thumb and forefinger. She could almost feel the electric jolt of arousal streaming from her breast downward to peak at the apex of her thighs.

Already, her musky arousal had begun to permeate the air around her. If she could scent the unmistakable fragrance, she knew Quinn could, too.

Faye chuckled as she moved to stand beside him. "She's more trouble than most, but don't let those innocent blue eyes fool you. I'm told she's one of the few who really understands the benefit of bringing a man to the brink of orgasm and then letting him hover there, on that blissful edge, for an eternity."

Rhyanne gave a delicate shudder. She'd never heard her Mistress utter such words about her before, though her former teachers had been generous enough with their remarks. But then, she realized with a heavy twinge of disappointment, Faye had never had any reason to. Not only hadn't she been interested in sampling Rhyanne's talents herself, but she was now trying to sell her, likely for the highest price she could fetch.

Quinn stepped behind Rhyanne, completely out of her field of vision. She held her breath as he reached out and stroked the curve of her spine with the tip of his finger, sending a delightful shiver through her body.

"She's exquisite," he said. "Ready and ripe for the taking."

"You have no idea." Faye reached out and cupped Rhyanne's right breast in her hand. Her fingers slid over her flesh, tenderly caressing her skin.

Rhyanne gritted her teeth. She was glad for the distraction from the mounting arousal that made her clit ache with need, but she wanted Quinn's hands on her, not Faye's. Her Mistress awakened only well-honed reactions of surrender and submission. Quinn, however, had incited a deep, dizzying need from the first moment she'd seen him, even before knowing who he was.

She swallowed hard, contemplating her situation. Perhaps fate hadn't been as cruel as she'd first thought. Of all the people to whom Faye could sell her, she couldn't imagine a better master than one who'd already been in her place, one who understood.

Maybe if she played her cards right, he might even free her on his own. She wouldn't need to run or risk the punishment of fleeing from an unfulfilled contract. She could simply lose herself in the blissful heat of this man until such time when she'd finally have what she'd always wanted: the freedom to choose for herself.

"She's different from the others."

Was it her imagination, or had Quinn's voice taken on a low, husky tone? Could it be that he was as aroused by her as she was by him? If so, it would make things much easier. One way or another, she intended to be free by dawn.

"Rhyanne is eager to apply her education. Aren't you, sweetheart?"

Rhyanne hardly dared to breathe. Was Faye really offering what she'd been waiting for since leaving the Academy? "Yes, Mistress," she whispered.

Quinn moved forward to close the distance between them. "Ah. She speaks."

Rhyanne's heart gave a sudden lurch. His words touched her heart, the raw desire in his voice rippling through her belly and awakening another wave of pure need. His breath caressed the nape of her neck, warm and inviting. If she turned her head, she could probably brush her lips against his, feel his breath on her mouth, sample the unique taste of a man who'd accomplished the impossible.

Pressing her palms tightly against her outer thighs, Rhyanne didn't dare move. This was definitely not the time for foolish actions borne of sexual desire. He had to take the lead, and she had to follow it. That was the only way to prove she was the right servant for him, one who could fulfill his every need, his every desire, even those he hadn't yet shared with anyone and she hadn't fully experienced.

Not that she could have shifted her position without toppling over and making a complete fool of herself, anyway. Abandoning all wild thoughts of kissing Quinn before he initiated contact, she pressed her lips together to keep from groaning and focused her gaze straight ahead, locked on the hanging edges of the delicate crystal chandelier that spilled its bright fractured light over the marble hall.

Quinn's hands skimmed over her back, his palms barely touching her skin as he caressed her flesh with long, languid sweeps. Her body reacted to the tactile sensation by trembling slightly. He must have felt it, because he stopped and placed both palms on either side of her waist.

Pressed up against her, the hard ridge of his erection nudged the base of her spine. The stretchy, smooth material of his uniform brushed her skin, eliciting another small shiver.

Faye stepped back, a broad smile on her graceful face. "I'd hoped you'd like her. The moment I saw her, I knew she'd be perfect for you."

"She is," Quinn acknowledged. He reached around her and placed the flat of his palm against Rhyanne's lower belly, then used the fingers of his other hand to skim her mound and apply gentle pressure against her clit.

Rhyanne gasped, no longer able to contain her growing arousal. Her pulse quickened. Lust flooded her veins, shaking her to the core. She quivered, unable to process her body's responses to being touched by someone other than herself. After years of frustrated yearning, to feel a man's hands on the most intimate parts of her flesh nearly undid her. A lifetime of training threatened to dissipate as his thumb slid down the length of her slit.

“Good. It’s settled then.” Faye clapped her hands, summoning a houseboy from the far edges of the room.

He scurried forward, keeping his gaze on the floor. Rhyanne knew him as Raul, a skinny, shy sixteen-year old who’d been brought into the household at the same time she had. Since he had no servant skills of his own, he’d been relegated to fetching and scuttling about from one menial task to another.

“Bring a bottle of the 2380 Chateau D’Yquem. We’re celebrating tonight.”

“Yes, ma’am.” With a curt nod of his head, Raul spun on his heel. A moment later, he disappeared through the side door, no doubt heading to the wine cellar.

“That may have been a little rash,” Quinn said. He used his index and middle fingers to spread Rhyanne’s labia apart, his thumb never leaving her clit. “You know I can’t take her.”

For a moment, Rhyanne’s heartbeat stilled. When it started again, it did so with a rapid, rhythmic pounding she was certain Quinn could hear.

“Nonsense. You can and you will,” Faye insisted.

“I have enough trouble keeping my crew fed these days, with the Terran government seizing such a large chunk of every transport fee we earn. I can’t take responsibility for another body onboard Enigma, and you know it.”

Faye waved a hand in the air. “I know nothing of the sort. Besides, it’s not like I’m asking for payment. Consider her a gift.”

A gift? Rhyanne nearly stumbled out of Quinn’s grasp. If freeing indentured servants from their contracts was unheard of, giving them away like a piece of clothing you’d outgrown was absolute lunacy.

“You’ve always been eccentric, but I think you’re getting careless in your old age.” Quinn’s words were teasing, and Rhyanne could picture the upturn of his full lips as he spoke.

Faye frowned. "Watch it. I may be getting old, but my mind is as sharp as ever. And so is my hearing." She crossed her arms beneath her breasts, stretching the red silk shirt she wore over the still-firm mounds. "I want to keep you happy, Quinn. I know the only time you ever indulge yourself with a woman is when you come to see me, and even then you barely allow yourself to enjoy it. I wouldn't have to worry about that with Rhyanne watching over you."

Rhyanne gaped. As a pleasure servant, she knew she'd be asked to do a lot of things, but she'd never have guessed that babysitting a grown man who couldn't be bothered to spend a few tokens at a brothel would be one of them.

She cleared her throat, suddenly uncomfortable not being part of the conversation. She'd never been privy to the decisions that affected her fate in the past, but now that she was present for the discussion, she intended to make the most of this unusual opportunity.

"Mistress, if I may?"

Faye turned to her and lifted an eyebrow. "What is it?"

"I thought perhaps a little demonstration might help the gentleman reconsider."

For a moment, she thought Faye would refuse like she'd refused so many times before when Rhyanne had offered to prove her education hadn't been wasted. Then Faye's smile returned, widening into a full-fledged mischievous grin. She spun and headed for a broad double-door to the left of the marble staircase. "Follow me," she commanded, crooking her finger over her shoulder.

Rhyanne trembled as Quinn's fingers stopped their playful probing of her slit. Her heart raced, sending adrenaline rushing through her veins. She forced herself to recall her training and did as she was told, struggling to keep one foot in front of the other. Quinn kept his palm at the hollow indentation of her spine, silently offering support if she needed it.

Gratefully, she leaned into him as they walked. He smelled natural, the scent of the outdoors combining with his own unique musk to tickle her nose. His essence captivated

her. It was an odd aroma for a man who lived and breathed the inside of a spaceship, but she couldn't bring herself to question that small unimportant detail when she knew she was only moments away from experiencing the type of bliss she'd only imagined for so long. Her cunt throbbed mercilessly, Quinn's questing fingers having kindled years of pent-up frustration.

Faye led them into a small sitting room. Unlike the hallway, which seemed sterile and cold in comparison, this room had been decorated with plush carpeting and luxurious textures. Two rich velvet couches on either side of a mahogany coffee table were the only furniture present, but a variety of colorful artworks flickered from the vidstills framed at regular intervals along the burgundy-colored walls.

Faye sank into one of the couches. Raul returned, placed a silver tray with a bottle of wine and two glasses on the table, then retreated as quietly as he'd entered, closing the door behind him.

"You wanted to show me something?" Quinn asked, his playful tone infusing a teasing quality into his otherwise harmless question.

He remained standing in front of the door, arms hanging loosely at his sides. Despite the non-threatening stance, there was something in his gaze, something altogether hungry and predatory, that made Rhyanne question the wisdom of what she was about to do.

She took a deep breath, forcing her doubts to the back of her mind. "You've already seen what I have to offer, but there's much more to a pleasure servant's repertoire than a firm body and a soft cunt."

His eyes widened at her bold words. Obviously, he was accustomed to pleasure servants. Most were meek and submissive, the perfect vessels for overbearing, controlling masters. Quinton Stillwell had been right about one thing: she was different.

And she intended to prove it.

"Take off your uniform," she instructed in what she hoped was her most commanding voice. Before tonight, she'd never had need to use such an inflection. Truth be told, she

thought she'd go the rest of her life without giving an order of her own. The sudden shift in atmosphere, the control she exuded over her sexuality and the situation, made her head spin.

She took a deep, fortifying breath, willing her nerves to calm. "I'll need you naked for this."

Chapter Four

“Not much for foreplay, is she?” Quinn shot a direct glance at Faye, but she only lifted a slender shoulder and reached for the bottle of wine.

Quinn scowled. His fingers sought and found the zipper hidden beneath a black fold of material in the crook of his right armpit. Something was definitely off here. He’d known it from the moment he’d arrived and Faye had greeted him. Her eyes had been just a touch too bright, her laugh an octave too loud. Like she had a secret that made her inwardly cackle with glee at Quinn’s expense.

The question was, did the lovely pleasure servant know this secret, or was she just as oblivious as him of the game’s true purpose?

Quinn lowered the zipper slowly, watching the woman flutter her eyelashes to hide the spark of interest that lit her pale blue eyes. The interlocking fastening ran up the entire length of his body, practically molding his uniform to his physique. An identical zipper mirrored this one on the left side of the garment. Finished with the first, he lowered the second, his gaze never leaving hers.

Not that he could look away even if he wanted to. She was absolutely exquisite, from the tips of those ridiculous shoes -- Faye’s idea, no doubt -- to the end of her small, slightly

upturned nose. A mass of honey-blond hair had been piled on top of her head and secured with a variety of sleek metal clips and bobby pins. He yearned to reach out and unclasp them, wondering how far her unbound hair fell. Would it reach the middle of her back? The base of her spine? The back of her knees?

A tremor ran through him at the thought of that hair gliding over his fevered skin, awakening blissful sensations he rarely allowed himself to fully enjoy. His shaft jolted with a blazing lustful need, and he occupied himself with taking off his clothes instead of reaching for the delectable servant and indulging his curiosity.

In truth, Quinn was rattled. He had no idea what to make of her, and that was a first for him. He prided himself in being able to discern a person's true nature upon a first meeting. Those guys in the spaceport, for example, had been easy to figure out. He knew their type: bossy, obnoxious, arrogant. He knew how to deal with them, too. This woman, however, was an intriguing mix of innocence and spice.

In other words, a genuine enigma. And she confused the hell out of him.

She was certainly the most exotic pleasure servant Faye had owned in the years he'd known her, but that wasn't what had thrown him. No, what had truly surprised and aroused him had nothing to do with her "firm body and soft cunt" -- although those were certainly stunning qualities. It was her eyes that captured him and held him spellbound -- or rather, what he'd seen in them.

What he still saw in them.

She watched him boldly as he undressed, with an undisguised raw hunger that made his balls ache. She exuded sexual energy and savage need. Pure desire rolled off her in shimmering waves, bringing the scent of her pungent arousal to tickle his nostrils. If he didn't know better, judging by the way her nipples peaked and her pussy creamed just from looking at him, he'd have said she was sexually frustrated.

Which was absurd, of course. If there was one thing highly skilled pleasure servants didn't lack, it was sexual gratification.

Quinn tugged the loose strips of his uniform over his head and yanked his arms from the sleeves. Tossing the garment to the ground, he watched the woman's eyes widen as she glanced at his erect cock. Her lips parted and she swept the tip of her pink tongue over the bottom one, as though desperate for a taste.

Oh, yeah. She was *different*, all right.

Not bothering to hide the smirk that tugged at the corners of his mouth, Quinn reached down and curled his fingers around his throbbing cock. He pumped his hand up and down the length of his shaft and saw her chest rise and fall with her quickened breathing.

"What's her name?"

He hadn't taken his gaze off the woman, but he'd directed the question at Faye. The servant opened her mouth, looking like she was about to answer, then slammed it closed, apparently having reconsidered replying without having been directly addressed. She narrowed her eyes at him, obviously displeased at being talked about as though she wasn't in the room.

A pleasure servant with an insubordinate streak? This was getting more interesting by the minute.

Faye chuckled. "Go ahead, sweetheart. Tell him."

The woman lifted her chin another fraction of an inch before replying, unmistakable pride glistening in her depthless eyes. "Rhyanne."

"Rhyanne," Quinn repeated, taking a step forward. Might as well get right to the point. Quinn had never been a man who hinted at what he wanted. "Why do you keep looking at me as though you've never seen a naked man before?"

She paled slightly, the rosy tint fading from her cheeks. To her credit, she held his gaze.

“Let me assure you, I’ve seen many naked men.” She straightened her shoulders and placed both hands on her hips, the motion making her teeter dangerously on her heels. “Some much better endowed than you.”

From her corner of the couch, Faye cackled, a sharp, stinging sound that resonated through the room. For his part, Quinn could only stare, mouth agape. What kind of pleasure servant was she? Faye had regularly employed people with her unique skill set, and he’d grown accustomed to their subservient, demure attitudes.

Fire burned inside his cock. Instead of being turned off by her straightforward quip, his body responded by heating up further. If she was half as uninhibited while performing her duties as she was outspoken, he was in for a hell of a ride.

He advanced on her ferociously, with no intention of slowing. When he was almost upon her, she took a step backward, then another, losing her balance at the last moment and slamming into the wall.

Quinn placed both palms against the wall on either side of her head, trapping her with his body. He pressed his erection into her stomach, knowing she could feel how hot his dick pulsed for her.

“Is that so?” he whispered in her ear. His teeth closed around her earlobe and he sucked it into his mouth, drawing a groan from her lips.

Quinn’s hand skimmed over her arm and curved toward her breast. He felt her sharp intake of breath as he reached for her nipple, tweaking the hard bud between thumb and forefinger. Her groan turned into a whimper.

He released her earlobe and drew back to look into her eyes. “Then show me what you’ve been trained to do, little servant. Suck my cock into that skilled mouth of yours.”

Rhyanne glanced over his shoulder at Faye, who must have given her assent, because a moment later she flattened her palms against his chest. “As you wish,” she whispered.

She bent her knees and began to lower her body to the ground, but her teeth dug into her lower lip and it jutted out slightly, much too tempting for Quinn to resist. In an instant, he'd pulled her back up to him and slammed his mouth down on hers. A soft sound escaped a throat that was too filled with breathy wonder to be anything but genuine.

He barely had time to marvel at her reaction before savage desire took over. He probed her soft, moist lips with his tongue, urging her to open to him. She did, a little hesitantly at first, but he gave her no time to reconsider. His tongue found hers and scraped against it, seeking, tasting, exploring.

She clung to his shoulders as though she were drowning and he was her only lifeline, her fingernails digging into his flesh. And then she did something few pleasure servants did.

She kissed him back.

It was a hungry, genuine kiss that shook him to his core. Her sweet breath slipped from her mouth into his while her fingers kneaded his shoulders. On those heels, she was almost as tall as he was, and her breasts pressed against his chest, her puckered nipples as hard as little rocks against his skin.

They kissed for an eternity. He cupped her face and lost himself in the sweet flavor of her mouth. Blood roared in his ears. Her scent filled his senses, overwhelming him, overtaking every rational thought and pushing it from his mind. While they kissed, nothing else existed but Rhyanne.

He lowered his hands and wrapped them around her waist, pulling her away from the wall and closer to his body. She was right there, in his arms, yet he couldn't get enough. He needed her even closer, wanted her with a fierce desire he'd never before felt for anyone.

Quinn's heart raced, blood pumping through his veins at an alarming rate. From somewhere far away, his brain shouted a warning, but he was too enthralled by Rhyanne to pay attention. His muscles rippled against her soft curves. Fingertips lengthening, he didn't notice his claws had broken through the pads of his fingers until it was too late.

Rhyanne cried out as he scored her flesh, his claws leaving sharp scrapes in their wake. With a start, he pulled back, willing his body back to normal. His breath came in ragged gasps.

Rhyanne's lips were swollen, and she brought her fingers up to touch them while twisting from the waist to inspect the damage he'd done. He reached for her, but she swayed slightly out of his reach. The sight of her pulling away hit him like a kick to the gut.

Swearing low under his breath, Quinn gripped her shoulders and spun her around so he could see her back. A relieved sigh escaped his throat. He hadn't done much damage. The wounds were superficial at best, no more than scrapes.

It could have been worse. Much worse.

And still his cock throbbed and pounded with need, not in the least concerned by his sudden loss of control. He gritted his teeth and looked back at Faye, wondering if she'd noticed. If she had, she didn't say anything.

Faye knew what he was. He'd attacked her in his true form when he was only eight years old, barely a wolf pup. She'd fought him off, managing to get the upper hand quickly and tossing him against an alley wall. When he'd fallen to the ground unconscious, his shape had altered without his knowledge or control, and he once again became a little human boy.

He'd woken up in Faye's mansion, where he'd lived and trained as a pleasure servant until his twentieth birthday. Then his life had changed. Thanks to Faye.

Now she wanted his life to change again.

She'd been insisting on providing him with permanent female companionship for years, but none of her efforts had ever been fruitful in the past. Her sudden concern over his social life would have amused him, if he didn't know she'd been researching Alpha mating habits.

"Well?" Faye said, bringing the glass of wine to her lips. "The man asked for a demonstration of your considerable talents. What are you waiting for?"

Rhyanne swallowed hard. Her gaze darted from Faye to Quinn, her eyes impossibly wide. He knew her skin still burned where he'd scratched her, but there wasn't much he could do about that now. He'd have to hope she simply thought he'd gotten a little too amorous and had dug his nails into her back with too much fervor. The alternative was too dangerous to contemplate.

"Yes, Mistress," she murmured, her voice barely above a whisper. As quickly as her defiance had appeared, it vanished on a puff of fear.

She was scared of him. Not of Faye, who still owned her contract and could punish her in any number of ways for disobeying a direct command.

Of him.

Quinn swallowed back the bile that rose in his throat. He'd spent his childhood learning that orphan human children feared Alpha carriers as much as adults did, only they weren't as eager to betray one of their own to government agents. In the years that followed, he'd attempted to shed the painful memories of his past and don a cloak of respectability. He'd even succeeded. Until the look in Rhyanne's eyes slammed into his gut with the strength of a blade that twisted his insides.

He forced his eyes to rake over her body. His cock raged as anger at himself for letting things get out of hand poured through his veins, making his cock throb in anguish.

He knew better than anyone how deadly revealing his secret could be. Not just for him, but for every one of his crewmembers. His family. They trusted him, and he'd almost allowed his body to betray that trust.

Suppressing a shudder that raced up his spine, Quinn slid his cupped fist along the length of his cock. "You're hesitating, Rhyanne. Most masters would punish you for less."

She lowered her eyelids, her eyelashes sending sweeping shadows over her cheeks. "You're not my master."

A muscle jumped in his jaw. She was right. He didn't own her, and he had no intention of taking Faye up on her absurd offer. So then why did her words scrape his chest like razor edges of chiseled glass?

He scowled. "Your mistress has given you to me. For the time being, at least. If you're not willing to pleasure me, there are others who will. The Festival's due to begin soon and I intend to take full advantage of the wealth of sexual favors being traded on the street tonight."

Faye made a sound of disapproval, but didn't argue.

"I understand." Bowing her head, Rhyanne shuffled toward him, taking tiny steps to ensure she wouldn't fall. When she reached him, she refused to meet his gaze.

The pain in his chest intensified. He'd loved the looks she'd been tossing his way all night, hungry and full of sultry heat.

Dropping to her knees in front of him, she only reached out to him to steady herself. She gripped his hips and positioned her mouth even with the tip of his shaft. Her warm breath slid against the drop of pre-cum beaded at the tiny slit in the head of his cock. Quinn sucked in a breath on a sharp inhale.

His shaft hardened to steel. He moved his hands to the sides of her face, the same way he'd held her while they kissed. Now, though, the gesture was less about intimacy and more about the sexual heat of the moment.

When he gazed down, his breath caught in his throat. She looked so beautiful, so breathtakingly innocent as she ran her tongue over her bottom lip, close enough to make contact with his rod yet not quite willing to do it yet.

Stupid, stupid, stupid. He was letting Faye's games and his reaction to Rhyanne get the better of him. She wasn't innocent, or naïve, or any of a hundred other harmless things. She was a pleasure slave, a woman trained to fuck. A woman who'd likely had so many cocks in her cunt she'd lost track long ago.

And as she'd so keenly pointed out, many of her former patrons had been better endowed than him. Quinn gritted his teeth and thrust his hips forward, his cock nudging her mouth. "Suck me, Rhyanne. I need to feel your heat."

She parted her lips, closed her eyes and did as she was told. The sight of her fluttering eyelashes lowering over those pale blue orbs nearly undid him. She didn't want to look at him as she serviced him. She wanted nothing to do with him.

She couldn't have figured out what he was, but what if his behavior had aroused her suspicion? Perhaps the reason she was so terrified was because she believed all the rumors about Alpha carriers tearing humans to pieces with their bare hands.

Hell, hadn't he almost done that to her? A few more minutes, and who knew what his beastly nature would have allowed him to do?

Ashamed and angry at himself, Quinn dug his fingertips into her cheeks and began to pump in and out of her lips, fucking her mouth with the same hard intensity he planned to use to fuck her pussy before the night was out. If he could remind himself she was a well-trained pleasure servant rather than an innocent woman meant for him alone, perhaps he could keep his body's responses in check.

She struggled around his girth for only a few moments, gagging slightly before adjusting to him, the sweeps of her tongue over the base of his shaft effortlessly gliding against his sensitive skin.

Damn, her tongue never stopped moving! It twirled and licked as her lips encased his shaft, sucking him deep. The tip of his cock nudged the back of her throat and still she took more, drawing his rigid length inside her until her lips were almost flush with his groin.

"Fuck."

The word escaped his mouth before he could think better of it, but it didn't matter. He thought he'd known what to expect when he'd come here tonight. Faye had made it clear he owed her in more ways than one, and visiting with her long enough to bring her news from

the off-world in person once every three months should have been an easy task. Even if it did take him through a city he'd rather forget.

Faye also made it possible for him to locate other Alphas. With her help, he could give his brethren the opportunity to escape a planet that held nothing but certain death for them. The chance to rescue others like him was worth the risk of discovery.

This new game of hers, however, pushed the boundaries of what he was willing to accept.

A muscle pulsed in his jaw. He thrust harder and Rhyanne met his speed without so much as a groan of protest. On the contrary, she seemed eager for everything he had to give her, devouring his rod with every flawless motion of her full lips.

Her tongue fluttered, the tip tapping against the base of his cock as she held him fully in her mouth. She was good. Too good. Every brush of her tongue reminded him that she was experienced. Perhaps more experienced than he was, and considering his trysts with Faye's companions before he left Earth, that wasn't a reality he cared to contemplate.

Still, he knew his former mistress and her appetites. She didn't mind sharing and loved delighting her guests by granting them a romp with whatever pleasure slave had struck her fancy at the time.

Damn it, he'd never cared before. Sex had never been so ... so ... *personal*. But then, he'd never lost control of his shape-shifting abilities because of one mind-numbing kiss, either.

Rhyanne hummed, the vibration in her throat streaking through him with a powerful intensity. His rod spasmed, jerked, and his balls drew tightly against his shaft. The familiar sweep of orgasm started low in his groin and blossomed outward.

He came with a loud groan, holding Rhyanne's head in place as he pumped his seed down her throat.

Did she know that was *real* cum she drank and not the manufactured, sterile crap the government produced in their laboratory-made citizens? Did it taste different? Did she like it better, or did she prefer the synthetic flavor?

Furious at himself for caring, he pulled out of her mouth and spun around to face Faye. Behind him, he heard Rhyanne breathing hard.

"Send her away." His softening cock slapped against the inside of his thigh as he flopped on the couch beside his former patron, stretching out his long legs. "I mean it, Faye. I want her gone. Now." *Before my reactions to her do even more damage.*

Faye shook her head, the lines at the corners of her mouth deepening in disappointment. "You heard him. Go."

Quinn clenched his hands into fists and slammed them on his knees, refusing to look up until he heard the door bang shut in Rhyanne's wake. Only after he'd heard her footfalls fade away did he uncurl his fingers.

Blood seeped from his palms. His claws had been much harder on his own flesh than they'd been on hers, leaving deep, angry red gashes in their wake.

Faye sighed. She pulled out a small drawer positioned in the center of the coffee table's sleek lacquered top and withdrew a tightly coiled strip of bandages, which she promptly tossed at him.

He caught them in mid-air.

"Clean up, before you get blood on my couch." Faye reached for the bottle and filled the second glass. She waited for him to finish bandaging his hand, then handed him the wine. "What am I going to do with you?"

"First, you're going to stop matchmaking."

"Who says I'm matchmaking?" she asked, her small smile communicating her amusement.

"Me. And I also say you're damn awful at it."

She tsked softly and eyed him over the rim of her crystal goblet. “Did you ever stop to consider that maybe I really do know what’s best for you?”

Quinn scowled. “No.”

“See? And therein lies your problem. I knew from the moment I saw her that Rhyanne was your match in every way. As a trained pleasure servant, I was sure she’d be able to keep up with your appetites. But it’s more than that.” Faye took a deep breath, then released it on a sigh. “She needs a protector almost as much as you need someone to protect. She’s as innocent as anyone can be in our world, and yet she’s almost fiendish in the way she teases potential patrons. Well, what am I saying? She showed you herself. She’s practical, but feminine. Eager to please and yet determined to keep her distance from others. And hell, Quinn, she’s nearly as stubborn as you are!”

Quinn almost smiled at that, but caught himself in time. “And all that’s supposed to prove something?”

Faye frowned, her slender brows drawing together over the bridge of her nose. “Give me until dawn.”

“To do what?”

“To prove to you that Rhyanne belongs by your side.”

“And if you can’t?”

She tipped her glass back and drained the rest of the contents, then slammed it down on the silver tray. “I give up. Permanently.”

Chapter Five

Rhyanne's muscles tightened with unspent arousal even as her mind struggled to make sense of what had just happened. One moment Quinn was a breath away from fulfilling her fantasies, and the next he was hurting her with his savage hunger, his possessive hands, his harsh words.

The massive marble staircase that led to the second floor where her bedroom was located loomed large and imposing at the far end of the hall. She walked as quickly as she dared, not wanting to sprain an ankle in her haste.

She could still feel the texture of Quinn's rugged palms on her skin. Her entire body burned with the memory of his touch and her sex clenched in agony; a frustrated reminder of what could have been.

Tears stung her eyes. A pulling, aching sensation she couldn't name clawed at her heart.

Her breath caught in her lungs as she recalled his rough demeanor while she took him in her mouth. His fingertips had dug into her cheeks and he'd thrust savagely inside her. The strong flavor of his seed still lingered in her mouth, as did the ghostly presence of his thick cock pressed against her tongue.

He'd been ruthless while she'd sucked him off, almost as if he was punishing her for something. She couldn't imagine what she'd done wrong.

One thing was painfully clear. Just like Faye, Quinn didn't want her either.

No one did.

She wiped a stray tear from her cheek and concentrated on placing one foot in front of the other. Her inner thighs brushed together when she walked, smearing the moisture that had dripped from her pussy to wet her skin.

A sharp ache ran up her cramped legs. Every nerve ending in her body throbbed in response. She hurt everywhere -- everywhere but the one place it really mattered.

Annoyed at the direction her thoughts insisted on taking, she bent down and began unbuckling the elaborate straps that bound her shoes to her ankles. The Mistress had commanded her to wear them for the entire evening, and she'd done that. The evening was over. She'd been thoroughly and undeniably dismissed.

The realization knocked the air from her lungs and she dropped the remaining distance to sit on the floor with a soft *oomph*. Suddenly, she didn't trust her limbs to hold her.

Faye had sent her away. Judging by the ferocious resolution in Quinn's voice, she knew he wouldn't be coming for her any time soon. This was her best chance to get away. Perhaps her only chance.

She allowed herself one self-indulgent moment to rub her sore feet, then gathered her shoes and made her way up the staircase in her stockings. The marble felt cool beneath her soles, soothing the painful contraction at the base of her toes.

Rounding the corner at the top of the steps, she made a straight beeline for her room. Inside, she took no more time than absolutely necessary to gather her sole possession from beneath the simple, one-person bed where she'd hidden it the previous week. The traditional Saint Valentine's Festival costume was one of only two objects she'd need to make it through the night.

With trembling fingers, she pulled off the stockings and garter belt she wore, then placed them both neatly on the crisply-made bed. She wouldn't take anything that didn't belong to her. As a pleasure servant still under contract, she had no possessions of her own with the exception of those she'd carefully procured for tonight.

As she reached for the exquisite costume, her heart thudded erratically in her chest. Made of pure black leather, the garment was surprisingly supple beneath her fingertips. An abundance of metal clasps held the thin straps of leather together, jingling as she slid her foot through the leg gap and tugged the costume over her body.

The close-fitting outfit encased her body, hugging it like a second skin. The material molded to her breasts, leaving her nipples bare. The costume left her pussy and ass uncovered ... for easy access. A thrill ran up her spine at the thought.

Perhaps she'd have what she craved after all. The Festival was all about ordinary citizens indulging their wild sexual cravings with complete strangers. It was the only night of the entire year that wasn't regulated by government controls.

The government didn't like it, of course, but Saint Valentine wasn't a mere symbol. Over the decades, he'd become a religion unto himself, a deity Earth's citizens worshipped with their minds, their souls, and especially their bodies.

She didn't even look over her shoulder as she left the room. Linger would only cause feelings of regret and uncertainty to bubble to the surface of her thoughts, and she couldn't afford any distractions.

One diversion was plenty for the evening. She intended to keep her mind on her task from now on, Quinton Stillwell be damned.

Her heart threatened to break out of her chest as she crept down the back staircase. While the main set of steps were regal and imposing, the servant's stairs were drab by comparison and creaked beneath her footfalls.

She had only to get as far as the back entrance unhindered. Once there, she could slip out the garden gate and slide out onto the street, where the Festival was already in full swing. The rhythmic beat of a sultry song flowed through the thick walls from outside, barely reaching her ears. It called to her, guiding her footsteps with the promise of freedom.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

Rhyanne cried out, shrinking back from the accusing voice before recognition slammed into her brain. “Raul,” she breathed, relief flowing through her suddenly weak limbs. “I didn’t see you there.”

“Obviously not.” The dim overhead light barely filtered through the shadows of the dingy staircase. His profile was hidden in gloom, but she could make out the sharp angle of his nose and the way he squinted at her, assessing her intentions.

“You’re wearing a Festival costume.”

She detected a hint of a whine in his voice and clung on to that, desperately hoping she’d read him right. Lifting her chin, she played with a bobby pin, digging it deeper into her mass of hair. “I do as the Mistress commands. She gives the orders around here, in case you haven’t noticed. I’m to obey without question, as are you.”

He crossed his bony arms over his chest. “If she asked you to dress up for her, then where is she?”

“With her guest. I’ve been ordered to return promptly, but she’s sent me out to procure some of the devices she’ll be requiring for the evening. Some of the *pleasure* devices.” She infused as much sultry sensuality into her tone as she could muster.

“Oh.” Raul lowered his eyes. “I can hear them out there. It sure sounds like they’re having a good time.”

For a moment, Rhyanne’s heart softened. He was still little more than a child, yet his lot in life had already been ordained. At least servants like her still had a hope, no matter how vain, that they would one day be free. House-slaves like Raul were created for one

purpose only: to obey their masters' every whim, no matter how mundane or cruel, until their dying day. It was all part of the service-oriented society into which Earth had developed. Every citizen had a role to play, and that role was worth plenty in tokens and taxes.

She climbed down the last two steps and stopped at Raul's side. Placing a finger beneath his jaw, she lifted his face so he'd look into her eyes. "Perhaps one day the Mistress will allow you to attend the Festival."

"She shouldn't have to allow me," he said, his voice breaking. "The Festival is meant for all of Saint Valentine's children, not just those blessed with masters who allow them their pleasure."

He was right, of course. Even government officials had stated repeatedly that no master had the right to keep a slave housebound on a Festival night, yet some tried. Of those, most succeeded. If Faye didn't grant him permission to step off the premises, Raul's tracking chip would broadcast an alert the moment he placed one foot beyond the perimeter of the mansion. When the tracking teams found and returned him, Faye would make sure he never disobeyed her again.

"I have to go." Rhyanne brushed her lips against the boy's cheek and felt him tremble at the contact. "The Mistress will be angry if I don't return soon."

She strolled through the narrow corridor leading to the back entrance, her gaze constantly scanning every shadowy corner for more unexpected surprises. When she reached the door, she breathed a sigh of relief. From here, it was all up to her and the tracking inhibitor.

Brushing a hand through the bound hair at the nape of her neck, Rhyanne located the bobby pin she sought. It had taken her almost two months to obtain it. On every trip to the market, she'd searched out the same man. His name had been carelessly whispered at the Academy, and she'd remembered it.

Christian Locke had the ability to make her dreams of escape a reality. In return, he'd asked for nothing but glimpses of her naked body. He drank his fill with his gaze alone, never touching her or procuring her services. They weren't hers to freely distribute, and the penalties for touching a patron's pleasure servant without record of a transaction were severe.

Their meetings took the same form each time. She'd come to him and bare her breasts, spread her pussy lips with her fingers, part her ass cheeks for his intimate perusal. In turn, he stroked his cock to climax, his hot seed spurting over his belly in hot gushes while he shuddered in the throes of release.

He'd made no guarantees, and she hadn't asked for any. Just the hint of hope he offered was enough for a while. Besides, his voyeuristic tendencies allowed her to make a decision for herself, to choose who she permitted to see her body and delight in the secrets it held.

Then, last week as she'd gotten dressed and prepared to leave, he'd offered her transport off the planet. Just like that, out of nowhere. She'd been stunned. As she'd prepared to accept his offer, his eyes had narrowed, his normally plain visage twisting into something else. Something altogether disturbing.

Her entire body had trembled with vehement distaste. She wanted to leave Earth more than anything, but she wasn't prepared to take a stranger at his word. If there was one thing she'd learned at the Academy, it was that no human offered kindness to another without expecting something in return. Especially when it meant putting himself in danger.

Somehow, she knew that whatever Christian Locke asked in return for risking his life to help her flee was a greater price than she was prepared to pay.

So she'd refused. She'd expected him to be angry with her, but instead he'd only shrugged as though he'd expected her answer. Then he'd produced two small miracles. The first was the Festival costume she wore. The second was a piece of forbidden technology. Her key to getting off this planet. Crafted perfectly in the shape of a bobby pin, it slid easily into

her hair alongside a dozen others. Christian had told her how to activate it when she was ready, but he didn't broach the subject of her actual escape again.

Holding the small metal object in her hand, she prayed her benefactor hadn't lied. Rhyanne sucked in a deep breath and pricked the tip of her index finger with the sharp end of the pin. Blood welled up from the wound, gliding over the pin's metallic surface. It lit up almost immediately, flashing a bright neon green then dimming down to a subtle, shimmering gray. On the inside of her wrist, her tracking chip echoed the blaze of color, casting an incandescent glow beneath the surface of her skin.

Her head spun. She glanced around wildly, but the hall remained empty. Shoving the pin back into place, she activated the pass code to the back door and yanked it open. The thrumming beat of the Festival music crept inside the house, enveloping her in the decadent echo of exotic bliss.

Closing the door quickly behind her, she ran down the three small steps and disappeared into the garden. The gate would be open, like it always was. Faye had no reason to lock it. The tracking chip would activate a warning the moment any of her servants stepped beyond the outer edges of the yard.

She forgot to breathe as she took the last step over the invisible boundary, her gaze locked on the inside of her right wrist. Nothing.

The chip remained silent, its dull gray glow barely penetrating the thin layer of skin that covered it. Giddy with relief, she stepped out into the crowd and found herself swept away by the exuberant throng. Laughter and the sounds of raw, unregulated passion rang out all around her, combining with the sensual rhythm of the music flowing through the streets to form a dizzying tempo of pure arousal.

The costumes that draped the revelers ranged from those as simple as hers to elaborate creations with fluttering ribbons and beaded lace. Some even boasted precious gems. Glistening diamonds and creamy pearls stood out in sharp contrast to velvet, silk and taffeta.

Most exceptional of all were the masks. Glistening gold or metallic silver, surrounded by flower petals or combined with gauzy veils, they shimmered in a sea of color. Rhyanne touched her bare cheeks, wishing she could afford to hide behind the safety of a costume mask. It would at least provide some measure of anonymity, not to mention a great deal of comfort.

Her gaze danced over the display of unashamed hedonism. A blush crept up her cheeks even as her pussy clenched, her senses responding to the blatant sexuality. Everywhere she looked, men and women writhed against one another, their costumed bodies touching, rubbing, *fucking* with wild abandon.

No one protested the display. Government officers, dressed in their instantly recognizable crisp navy blue uniforms with their collars drawn up and their jackets buttoned to the neck, stood aside and watched the festivities. With a smile, Rhyanne noticed that even they weren't unaffected. They might have been on duty, but more than one man had to adjust the tight panel of his government-issue pants to ease the ache obviously pounding in his cock.

She had to move fast. She'd learned the general direction of the spaceport, but reaching it on foot wouldn't be easy. Blending in with the revelers was imperative, and a flicker of gratefulness for Christian's help zinged across her skin. Without him, she wouldn't have had the costume, or the tracking inhibitor. Perhaps she'd been wrong. Maybe people did aid one another expecting nothing in return. Christian hadn't struck her as the kind of man to be satisfied merely by the warm glow that came from helping someone else, but what did she know of him, anyway? She couldn't pass judgment, especially since he'd been nothing but kind. It wasn't fair.

Rhyanne pressed on. With any luck, Faye wouldn't realize she was missing until dawn. By that time, Rhyanne hoped she'd be watching Earth slowly disappear from the view screen of a space ship.

Steeling her nerves, she elbowed her way through the crowd. Hands reached for her, pinched her nipples, her ass, dug into her flesh. Her eyelids fluttered, years of training suddenly flaring to the forefront of her mind as her body responded to the intensity of the sensations coursing through her.

She had only to turn around and wrap her fingers around the first cock that presented itself. It would be so simple to bend over and guide the shaft inside her wet, waiting pussy. A few thrusts and it would be over. All the years of waiting, wanting, *yearning*, would finally come to an end.

Heat mounted in her cunt. Moisture soaked her labia. The heady scent of spilled seed flooded her senses, drenching her in the unmistakable aroma of sex. And still she pressed on, forcing herself to remember her goal. She had to leave Earth. Once she did, she'd be free to choose whom to fuck. She could pick anyone.

Even Quinn? She clenched her jaw and pushed aside the annoying voice that reminded her of the insufferable man. She'd seen all of Quinn she'd cared to see. He didn't want her? Well, fine. She didn't want him, either.

"Mask, lady?"

Startled, Rhyanne paused and peered at the merchant. He extended his hand, offering her an elaborate Festival mask. Created entirely out of sleek black feathers, with brilliant faux diamonds studded around the eye holes, it matched her costume perfectly.

She shook her head. "It's lovely, but I can't pay --"

"No need," the merchant said, shoving the mask forward and pressing it into her hand. "Saint Valentine's children should enjoy themselves and each other. You can't do that if you're worried about who will recognize you, and what repercussions your actions will have in the morning."

Rhyanne's pulse quickened, yet when she peered at the man, she saw nothing in his guileless dark eyes but kindness tinged with the heat of the night's lasciviousness. Realizing

she couldn't afford another moment's hesitation, she took the precious gift and draped it over her features.

"Thank you," she whispered.

"May the night's festivities bring you great pleasure," the man said, a wide grin splitting his swarthy face.

"And you."

Rhyanne bowed slightly from the waist, casting a sidelong glance at a statue of her patron deity. Saint Valentine was most often depicted as a handsome young man with a wild mane of curly red hair and a welcoming smile. Like his worshippers, he rarely wore clothes. The artist who'd sculpted his ivory likeness had obviously taken great care carving his erect member.

She pressed a kiss to the index and middle finger of her right hand, then flattened her fingers just below the tip of the statue's cock. The marble felt cool to the touch, its smooth texture inviting her to caress it further.

Murmuring a quick prayer, Rhyanne took a deep breath and broke away from Saint Valentine's comforting shadow.

The night stretched on before her, pulsing with the energy of thousands of aroused bodies. Their lust hummed over her flesh, thrumming in her veins. She swallowed hard and pushed through the crowd.

She was on her own.

Chapter Six

“How are things on the ship?”

Quinn flexed his fingers around the bandage he'd wrapped over the gash in his palm. “Fine.”

Faye crossed her arms over her chest and twisted at the waist to peer at him. “What’s wrong?”

“Why do you think something’s wrong?” He thrust his bare hand through his hair and squeezed his eyelids shut.

Music raged outside the window, sending quick beats of rhythm to filter through the thick walls. By the time it reached his ears, the sensual, erratic melody was nothing more than a drumming vibration, but it sent a jolt of excitement through his veins and deepened the headache that pounded just behind his eyes.

“You always get that look on your face when a transport doesn’t go the way you planned, or when one of your crewmembers gets himself into trouble.” She hesitated, her gaze searching his when he blinked his eyes open. “Is it Dante again?”

Quinn’s lips twitched as he tried to hide a smile. Since he’d come on board, Dante had been more trouble than any of his other crewmembers put together. He was also one of the

wildest, most independent men Quinn had ever had to command, and he didn't take orders well. Still, he'd been a welcome addition to the team. His enthusiasm at finding other Alphas and being allowed to obey his base impulses while on board had been warmly received, and he'd quickly become part of Enigma's family.

"It's not Dante."

"What about Ty? Is she all right?"

He started to nod, then stopped. Ty had Faye to thank for locating and identifying her as an Alpha carrier, though she didn't know it. Even after all these years, Quinn himself had no idea how Faye knew some of the things she did.

She had sources everywhere, both on Earth and off-world, and she was able to communicate to him the exact location and circumstances of other Alphas. Some, like Ty, ended up on Enigma. Others, who weren't suitable for a life in close quarters or under constant governmental supervision, he could help relocate to planets that were sympathetic toward shape-shifters who wished to remain anonymous.

And yet others ... well, he didn't want to think about those. They'd have been dead with or without his interference. What was it they used to say in the 20th Century? Natural selection at its best?

He swallowed past the bile that rose in his throat, determined not to think about those of his kind whom he hadn't been able to help. As Faye had told him more than once, he couldn't save them all.

No one could.

"I don't know, to tell you the truth." He swirled the wine in his glass. A drop splashed over the rim, landing on his pristine bandages. He watched it seep through the cloth, spreading as the material drank it in. "Ty's been restless lately. Worried, too. Like there's something churning in that pretty head of hers and whatever it is, it's not good."

"Maybe she can smell a storm brewing."

Faye's cryptic comment caught him off guard. Frowning, he took her hand and squeezed her small, slender fingers. "Is that why you're so concerned with finding someone for me? Are you worried something will happen to us? To the Alphas?"

"Those like you should not be alone," she stated emphatically. "Alphas have needs that the government attributes to savage streaks and uncivilized urges. But it's more than that. Your need to mate is akin to my need to breathe."

It was his turn to raise a skeptical eyebrow. "I think you're exaggerating."

"You should know better than anyone what drives you. It's in your blood. The desire to shift, to run free, to give in to the animalistic urges that always bubble just beneath the surface of your humanity."

Quinn set his glass down. Rising, he reached for his uniform and pulled it on, zipped up both sides and began pacing the length of the small room. "I've learned to handle that part of myself. I haven't had an uncontrolled shift in ..."

"What? Thirty minutes?"

Quinn scowled, remembering the way Rhyanne had been able to drive every coherent thought from his mind with no more than the touch of her soft lips. He'd breathed in her essence and had been lost to the wild appetites that had driven him since he was a child. And he'd frightened her half to death. The look in her eyes had raked right through him, drowning him in shame.

He'd hurt her, and he couldn't forgive himself for that.

"That was different."

"Of course it was. You didn't shift because you couldn't control yourself. You began to shift because your blood called out to her. Because you recognized your mate."

Quinn stopped pacing. He gaped at Faye, unable to comprehend why she looked so smug when the words coming out of her mouth were absolutely ridiculous. Did she hear herself? Did she understand just how insane she sounded? In a world that denied its citizens

the right to procreate, to choose another person with whom to spend the rest of their lives in love and companionship, Faye insisted on talking about the mating rituals of the Alpha as though she were discussing the weather.

“That’s nonsense, and you know it.”

Faye lifted a shoulder in a half-shrug. “She recognized you, too. Did you see the way her eyes widened when you walked into the room? The way her sex drenched in her cream when you touched her?”

His cock jolted to awareness. Oh, yeah. He remembered the way she’d responded to him, all right. His mouth still watered as the ghostly memory of her musky arousal played across his senses.

“She was trained from creation, Faye. How else would you expect her to respond to me?”

Faye shook her head. “She never responded to me that way. Or to anyone else I’ve ever brought into my house.” Crossing one leg over the other, she entwined her fingers and hooked them over her knee. “She’s pure, Quinn. And she’s yours. Why won’t you believe that?”

Quinn narrowed his eyes. “All right, this has gone far enough. Admit it. Now you’re just fucking with me. A *virgin* pleasure servant?”

“There’s only one woman in this house who’s begging to fuck with you, Quinn, and you sent her away. I didn’t touch her that way, and I was the first to purchase her contract from the Academy. No one else has claimed her while she’s been under my ownership. I swear it.”

Quinn tossed his head back and laughed, the sound echoing off the walls of the small room and bouncing back to him. On the couch, Faye looked taken aback, one hand pressed against her chest. “What on Earth is so funny?”

He pointed at Faye. "You are. You've been trying to convince me to mate for years, and I've always thought it was just another game you were playing, just one more challenge you'd set for yourself. Well, I still think that. But I think I've underestimated your need to win at everything you set out to do."

She pressed her thin lips together, her eyes glaring with disapproval. "You don't believe me."

"Sure as shit, I don't believe you. A servant like Rhyanne is worth more than your house and every domestic in it. I know you've always looked out for me, but I can't believe you'd go to such extremes to convince me to take a life-mate."

"It's really so hard to believe I want you to be happy?" She bolted to her feet. "I know more about the Alpha gene than even you do, and I'm not a carrier. My father was, though. And his father before him." Her lower lip quivered, but she pressed on. "The gene is normally genetically transmitted from parent to offspring, but not always. My mother was born on the Venus colony, not created on Earth. Her DNA was compatible with my father's. She was able to get pregnant and give birth to me, but I'm not a carrier. Did you hear me, Quinn? I was *born*, like you. Yet that part of my heritage was denied me. I don't know what it's like to feel the soles of my feet shift into pads, or my teeth extend to canines. I've never felt the wind on my fur. I've never --"

Quinn crossed the distance to Faye in a heartbeat and enfolded her in his arms, cutting off the rest of her rambling explanation. She felt frail in his embrace, her bones jutting through her skin. He hadn't realized just how old she'd gotten in the last few years, how her quest to ensure Alpha carriers were safe had been wearing her down.

Now that he understood, he felt like a fool.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, smoothing a hand over her hair. "I didn't know."

She patted his back then broke free of his hug, putting some distance between them. Though she forced a slight smile, she couldn't hide the pain in her eyes. "You couldn't have."

No one did.” She pulled back the sleeve of her long shirt to display the slightly raised skin on the inside of her wrist. “Fake chips aren’t hard to come by, with a bit of help. Earth’s regulations deny anyone but those created here to own property anywhere on the planet and I knew this is where I wanted to be. Where I could do the most good.”

Quinn opened his mouth to reply but a thought struck him, so fast he had to voice it. “Rhyanne. Is she ...”

“An Alpha carrier?” Faye supplied. “No. She’s human, created in a laboratory like the rest of them. She’s the genuine deal. A pleasure servant trained from birth to provide sexual bliss to anyone with enough tokens to procure her talents.”

“And you still expect me to believe she’s never put those skills to use? That would be maddening. To spend all those years training and then be forced to wait for an indeterminate amount of time before getting your first taste of sexual ecstasy. Even you aren’t that cruel.”

“Oh? Is that any more cruel than forcing her to service someone she found distasteful? Someone not of her own choosing?”

“She serviced me,” Quinn reminded her. “And I don’t think she was too happy about that.”

“Then you don’t know much about women. Or about Rhyanne.” Faye strolled to the door and pulled it open, gesturing toward the hall. “There is one way to settle this, you know.”

“How’s that?”

“Find out for yourself. Rhyanne will be in her room. Go to her and avail yourself of her considerable talents like you’ve done before with countless other pleasure servants. If you don’t believe in this mate nonsense, then this time should be no different.”

Quinn’s mind spun as he struggled to conjure a reasonable excuse why he couldn’t just march up the staircase to Rhyanne’s bedroom, hold her down on her bed and take what until

ten minutes earlier she'd freely offered. Especially when every nerve ending in his body urged him to do just that.

He walked into the hallway, stalling for time. This was his chance to put an end to Faye's ridiculous notion that he needed a mate. If he could get through the night, he knew Faye would stick to her promise. She'd never bother him with this again.

At the base of the steps, he hesitated. The unique scent of Rhyanne's natural essence drifted up the staircase, but it was faint, a mere whisper of a trace. He moved away, following his instincts and pushed through a door that opened onto a low, dark hall. The servant's hall. He looked up the rickety old stairway, remembering the way he'd run up and down those steps countless times as a youth.

"She's gone." Quinn stated, glancing at the door at the end of the hall. It led to the garden. The unmistakable aroma of Rhyanne's arousal and her own inherent pheromones told him in no uncertain terms she'd left the mansion.

"That's impossible," Faye said. "The tracking system would have activated. If she's outside, perhaps she's watching the Festival from the gate."

Quinn didn't reply. He strolled through the door into the backyard, where street music and the sounds of pure lustful exuberance drifted into the garden over the six-foot high fence. Wind chimes tinkled cheerfully in the late night breeze. The black iron gate stood open.

He turned to Faye. "As I said. Gone."

Faye leaned against the doorframe, her face drained of color. "She's out there somewhere. Find her."

He shook his head and held his palms up. "No way. She's your responsibility."

"And if something happens to her while she's running all over the city, then what? Here, with me, she was safe. Out there ... well, I don't know what could happen. I can tell

you one thing, though. If you don't hurry, you'll never reach her in time to claim her as your own."

Quinn ran a hand over his bristled jaw. "You still insist she's never had a man?"

"I swear it."

Quinn closed his eyes for a moment and concentrated on the scent of Rhyanne's essence. Oh yeah. He had it. He could easily follow her through the crowd. But could he get to Rhyanne in time to prevent her first real sexual experience from being a two-second race to the finish with a man who'd only move on to plunge his prick into the next available cunt?

"We'll see," he said.

Tugging down the twin zippers of his uniform, he found himself undressing for the second time that evening. If he was going to blend in with the crowd, he had to look like he belonged among the rampantly lustful children of Saint Valentine.

Rhyanne's aroma drifted into his very being with every breath he took. It swam through his bloodstream, stiffening his cock to impossible hardness. Jogging out through the gate, he reached for his shaft and stroked the satiny length of his rod. The tip was already wet.

Faye was right. There was only one way to settle this. With his cock embedded deep in Rhyanne's succulent pussy.

Chapter Seven

Although she'd been moving steadily through the crowd for at least an hour, it felt to Rhyanne as though she'd barely advanced a few feet. The multitude of people crowding in on her from all sides made it difficult to make any significant progress. Her breath caught in her throat and her pulse pounded incessantly in her ears. She scanned the crowd, her eyes focusing on the government officers whose dark eyes and deep frowns kept a close watch on the festivities.

The revelers were much less concerned with who might be watching than she was. Their enthusiasm and eager, lustful exuberance sent shocks of arousal streaming down her skin. She could smell their sweat. Their excitement, musky and potent, only served to feed her own growing lust. In the past hour, she'd seen a number of hedonistic acts that had sent her heart hammering and caused her pussy to cream.

She knew she could stop and join in at any time, but she didn't dare. She already feared not being able to reach the spaceport before dawn. Even the slightest delay could cause her to lose her window of opportunity. Still, she'd been tempted. A particularly daring foursome had caught her eye a few minutes earlier as they gave in to their lust with the same hunger that thrummed incessantly in her veins.

Rhyanne bit the inside of her cheek as a man wearing a deep brown hawk mask with a long orange beak wrapped his arm around a woman's waist and pulled her to him. In the span of a heartbeat, he'd impaled his cock in her wet cleft and began to move inside her. The woman tossed her black curls over her shoulder and cried out, her face twisted in pure ecstasy, her fingers eagerly squeezing someone else's breasts.

Averting her eyes, Rhyanne moved on. She'd barely made it past another mask merchant when a hand tangled in her hair. A sudden yank snapped her backward. Rhyanne gasped, struggling to keep her footing. A solid erection pressed against her spine. She could feel the length of the man's cock, thin, yet impossibly long, nudging her flesh.

"You look like a girl who can take it up the ass without putting up a fight," he whispered in her ear.

She didn't recognize his voice, and the words were much cruder than she'd anticipated. A sliver of fear chased the arousal from her veins. Her blood turned to ice as the man jerked her head back and nipped her earlobe, his teeth cruelly tugging at her flesh.

"Let me go." She squirmed and kicked the heel of her right foot backward. Her blow connected with the man's shin, but her bare sole did little damage.

Her captor laughed. "I like a woman with a bit of spunk. Let's see if you can move like that when my cock is buried in your tight butt hole."

The man tugged on her hair again, harder this time. Tears pricked Rhyanne's eyes, even as her well-trained body responded by sending another rush of heat to settle between her thighs. Panic clenched her throat. She'd wanted to experience what it felt like to fuck and be fucked, but not like this. If she'd stopped to engage in some mutual fun with the foursome, at least it would have been her choice. This man hadn't given her one. He intended to take her, whether or not she wanted him to.

She yearned to scream, but knew her cry would only get lost in the shrieks of ecstasy that tore through the night air. People surrounded her on all sides, yet she was as alone now as she'd ever been.

Fingers brushed her waist and she stiffened for a moment, though the touch didn't feel cruel or unwelcome. The hand was warm, the caress impossibly gentle. Despite herself, Rhyanne felt her muscles relax a fraction.

"The lady asked you to release her. Do it now, and I may let you leave here with your balls still attached."

Her captor gasped, his groan turning into a high-pitched yelp. The grip on her hair loosened and she spun around, her gaze flying upward to meet the eyes of her savior. Deep, dark sapphire eyes framed by midnight-black eyelashes. Her lower lip quivered as her knees sagged with relief.

Quinn reached out and wrapped his arm around her middle, pulling her to him. He wore no mask or costume, and the lean lines of his body glistened in the sterile neon light spilling over them from the spider-webbed streetlights that lined the sidewalk.

"She's mine," Quinn asserted in a husky, authoritative tone that left no room for argument. It was only then that Rhyanne noticed his palm cradled her assailant's soft sac, and the pressure he applied was none too gentle. "Leave and find someone else to bother. There's plenty of pussy to be had. Just not here."

The man's face was obscured by a leather mask that hid his features, but his dark beady eyes shone with barely contained pain. He nodded rapidly and Quinn released him. A moment later, the man disappeared through the crowd.

"Thank you." Rhyanne rubbed her hands up and down her arms to keep a sudden chill at bay. Another few minutes and it would have been too late for anyone to save her. She'd have had what she'd wanted, but at what cost?

Quinn growled low under his breath, a feral sound that made her heartbeat quicken. “Don’t ever do that again, you hear me? There’s a reason Faye keeps her pleasure servants indoors during the Festival, and it’s more for your protection than because she wants to prevent you from enjoying the celebration.”

Rhyanne gritted her teeth. She didn’t like the commanding tone in his voice, or the way he spoke to her as though she was a child. She knew what she was doing when she left the mansion, and it had nothing to do with getting off on strangers.

She glanced upward at the dots of red light flickering from the tendrils of every eight-limbed streetlight. There were cameras everywhere, monitoring each move the citizens of Vieux Orleans made. Tonight’s Festival would be recorded in detail, and no doubt played back in the home of every government official for the next year to come.

Quinn shouldn’t have been able to track her. Her chip remained lifeless, having triggered no alert. In fact, he shouldn’t even have known she was gone. After the vehemence with which he’d sent her away earlier, she’d expected him to find his pleasure elsewhere.

The Festival’s due to begin soon, and I intend to take advantage of the wealth of sexual favors being traded on the street tonight.

Sudden, swift understanding chilled her as she recalled Quinn’s words. He’d come out here to find someone more suitable, more skilled than she’d been. He hadn’t been satisfied with her; he’d made that much perfectly clear.

“I don’t want to keep you,” she said. “I’m sure you’ve got plenty of other things you’d rather be doing than watching over me.”

She jerked out of his grasp. The abrupt move must have taken him by surprise because he released her and she stumbled, stepping on someone’s foot and slamming into a soft female body. She murmured a quick apology, but kept inching backward.

Quinn swore low under his breath and followed, his footsteps sure, predatory. The glint of hunger in his sapphire eyes deepened as he watched her walk away.

Rhyanne didn't dare turn around. Her pulse hammered in her ears, adrenaline jolting through her veins. If she faced forward to see where she was going, she knew Quinn would only grab her from behind. She had to think of something. Fast.

Her back pressed against a solid structure. She quested with her palms, but found only the texture of metal, smooth and ice-cold. A building of some sort. She had to get around it, but that meant turning to see where she was going, and something told her Quinn wasn't the kind of man to give up a pursuit.

He elbowed aside two people who got in his way, then continued his pursuit. Rhyanne shifted her position along the length of the wall, backing into a narrow lane. The crowd thinned here, and only a few couples embraced in the shadows. She sought an exit, but realized the only way out was in the direction she'd come. The streetlight's blazing glare barely reached the far corner of the alley. From a window ten feet above the dead end of the street, a blue-tinted glow cast an eerie sheen over the metallic wall.

Rhyanne ran for the pocket of light, not knowing where else to go. Perhaps there was a hidden door there, or a narrow path she'd missed when she'd quickly scanned the dark surface of the wall.

Quinn followed, backing her into a corner.

No door. No path.

No escape.

Rhyanne's pussy pulsed, quivering in anticipation. The scent of his maleness mingled with the smells of raw arousal and spilled seed to drive her to the brink of insanity.

"What are you planning to do with me?" she asked when he came near, the question a breathy whisper.

His body trapped her between him and the structure behind her, though he kept his hands at his sides. His powerful chest pressed against her breasts and her nipples hardened

farther, the tips turning to sharp beaded points. Awareness pounded through her, matching the rhythm of her frenzied heartbeat.

It was the second time that night she'd found herself in the precarious position of being his captive. She'd expected to be as terrified as she'd been earlier when the stranger had promised to indulge his cravings in her body, but none of the fear or sheer terror emerged. Instead, desire took over, hard and fast. Her senses attuned to Quinn, to the sheer masculine potency of him. Her slit was soaked through, and her labia felt swollen and heavy with need.

He lifted her mask so it covered her hairline and part of her forehead instead of her eyes. "I'm going to find out whether Faye was telling the truth."

Rhyanne drew a deep breath and released it on a shiver. "I don't understand. You're taking me back, aren't you?"

"To Faye's?" He hesitated as though the thought hadn't occurred to him. In the dim shadows, she couldn't see him well enough to read his facial expressions, but she recognized the tilt of his chin as his lips neared. "I haven't decided yet."

His words spiraled through her, burrowing deep in the pleasure bud that burned, trapped between them. Was he considering letting her go?

Her fingers strayed across the broad width of his shoulders as though controlled by someone other than herself. She couldn't help it. The need to touch him was overwhelming, overpowering. It dampened her senses until nothing else mattered. Not what would happen later, or the fear of whether he'd toss her over his shoulder and carry her back to her Mistress's home like an inconsequential item he no longer had any use for.

Just this moment. This man. And the ache throbbing between her legs only he could satisfy.

"Tell me if you want me to stop," he murmured against her neck. "Because if I start, I won't be able to let you go until I find out for myself whether what Faye said is true."

“Stop?” She breathed the word on a sigh. Did he actually mean to say he wouldn’t push her, force her or take her without her permission? She was a pleasure slave. *His* pleasure slave, according to Faye. He could demand anything of her and she’d have no choice but to obey. “No. Don’t stop.”

His strong, muscular physique pressed her tightly against the wall. Her back and buttocks flattened against the straight metal. Her breath came out ragged and wanton. And still he hesitated.

Unable to wait another moment longer, she stood on the tips of her toes and sought his lips with hers. A groan slid from his mouth a moment before his tongue thrust between her lips, meeting hers in a kiss of shared frustration. She tasted his need, felt it in every answering thrust of her own tongue.

His harder-than-stone erection pushed against her belly. Moisture coated its tip, sliding over her skin as he thrust against her, his ferocious need pulsing through his hard shaft.

“I want you,” she whispered fervently. She was glad he couldn’t see her eyes or the desperation surely written on her face. “Please don’t make me wait any longer.”

“You’ve been well trained,” he replied, his fingertips questing upward over her ribcage to cup her breasts. He tweaked her nipples between the thumb and forefinger of each hand. Her back arched in response.

She couldn’t find the words to tell him the need he elicited in her had nothing to do with the Academy or the myriad elaborate texts on lovemaking. She’d read them all, could recall every position in her mind’s eye, yet nothing had prepared her for the wealth of erotic sensations that slithered through her body to burrow in her cunt when Quinn came near.

Would it always be like this with a man of her own choosing? Would she always feel as though she were drowning, losing herself in him?

She hoped so, yet doubt nagged at the back of her mind. She'd never heard anyone else speak of the raw, fiery passion that burned through her as though it were normal, something to be expected and embraced.

He applied more pressure to her tender nipples. The pain flared outward from her breasts. She writhed against him, unable to get enough, and cried out her pleasure to the night air. Quinn lowered his head and soothed the burn with his tongue, lapping and flicking at her hardened, aching buds.

Wanton arousal churned inside her. It beat against her lower belly and throbbed in her slit. He bit her right nipple, grazing it sharply then sucking it back into his mouth. The torment continued, sending swirls of heat pounding against her clit.

When she thought she couldn't take any more, Quinn dropped his hand between them and pressed his thumb to her aching bud. One touch was all it took. With his mouth clamped hard to his breast and his finger forcefully, yet passionately, nudging her tender clit, she came in a burst of pure pleasure.

Her orgasm careened through her, driving the breath from her lungs. Molten fire slid through her veins. She couldn't stifle the gasps of pleasure that broke free from her throat, or the little sobs and sighs that followed. Her body quivered, every nerve-ending flaring with more bliss than she'd ever imagined.

"Incredible," she managed to whisper. Her lips felt parched, her mouth dry and the word slipped through without thought.

Quinn chuckled, his voice husky and low. "I aim to please."

Was he mocking her? She couldn't tell, but his reply hadn't sounded cruel or thoughtless. Just slightly amused.

She leaned her head against the metallic wall. To hell with what he thought of her, or his reasons for doing this. If he wanted to bring her to the pinnacle of ecstasy, then so be it. She was going to enjoy this experience for all it was worth.

Once he turned her over to Faye, or worse, to the government officials who waited just outside the alley, any chance at erotic bliss would disappear faster than she could recover from another mind-blowing release.

She tangled her hands in Quinn's hair. Wrapping a strand around her index finger, she arched her back and thrust her hips forward. "Then please me some more."

Chapter Eight

The hitch in Rhyanne's voice tore at Quinn's defenses. He knew he should stop while he still had control over himself, but something in Rhyanne's demeanor made it impossible for him do anything but continue on the path on which he'd already set out.

His tongue swept out and lapped at a tightly beaded nipple. In response, Rhyanne quivered with desire and pressed her pussy harder against his palm. Though his fingers were soaked in her cream and, by all accounts her climax had been more than satisfactory, she couldn't seem to get enough of his hand on her sex or his mouth at her breast.

A thousand questions swam through his mind -- questions that needed answering. How had she managed to escape Faye's mansion undetected? Had she fled because he'd scared her, or was there something going on that went beyond the terror she'd felt at his subtle shift? And was she really as innocent as Faye had led him to believe, or was all the purity flowing from every part of Rhyanne's being nothing more than a well-practiced guise?

"All those men you said you've had," Quinn said, raising his voice to be heard above the high-pitched whine of a hovercraft lifting off the roof of a nearby building, "did any of them go down on you?"

Without waiting for her reply, he sank down in front of her. The smooth, sleek surface of the pavement molded slightly to the pressure imposed by his weight, cradling his knees and toes. Blue-tinted floodlights sent just enough illumination down on the alley to make Rhyanne's slit glisten with an eerie fluorescent sheen.

"Uhhh ..." Rhyanne's non-committal murmur was all the reply he needed. If there had been other men, a fact he was beginning to doubt more and more with each passing minute, none of them had taken the time to show her that lovemaking wasn't simply a one-sided act.

He intended to change that.

Quinn parted her labia with his fingers, then stared at the pink-fleshed bounty she freely offered. He hadn't had to coerce or command her to open herself to him, and that knowledge more than any other made his blood heat. A slew of emotions he refused to analyze ran through his body, flaring to an alarming magnitude inside his chest.

Faye couldn't have been right. Rhyanne wasn't his mate. He didn't need or want a permanent partner. He had enough to worry about already, and his crew were all the family he'd never thought he'd ever find.

So what was it about her that tugged at every instinctive impulse in his body? He couldn't remember ever being so aroused by anyone, nor could he recall ever wanting so badly to bring his partner as much pleasure as he yearned to show Rhyanne. But it was more than that. Not only did she stir feelings of intense sexual excitement in him, she also awakened a part of him that wanted nothing more than to protect her. Seeing her at the mercy of the man in the crowd had driven him mad with the need to shelter her from the cruelty of the world.

Not just for one night, but forever.

"I'm going to eat your sweet pussy, Rhyanne. Part your legs for me. I want to show you what it's like to be worshipped." He traced the outline of her outer labia with the tip of his

finger, and she rewarded him with a low moan. "I can tell you want this as badly as I want to do it to you. Your arousal smells divine. I bet you taste just as good."

"You might be disappointed," she said, but did as he asked and brought her palms down to the inside of her thighs, then spread her legs farther apart.

He hadn't been exaggerating. The scent of her essence made his mouth water. It clung to every air particle and slid inside him each time he breathed, until the only thing his supremely sensitive nose could pick up was the unmistakable fragrance of *Rhyanne*.

"Never," he assured her.

She slid her palms from her thighs to his hair, then clasped her fingers behind his head and pulled him to her. Whatever doubts she had, she was obviously willing to put them aside long enough to allow him to taste her. For a moment, Quinn was absurdly, unreasonably grateful for that.

Holding her pussy lips wide open, he closed the remaining distance between them and quested among her slick folds with his mouth. Her cream clung to his lips, inviting him to sample her unique flavor until she squirmed and begged for more.

He licked the entire length of her slit, lowering himself down even farther so he could reach every last spot of her delectable pussy. The tip of his tongue nudged her clit, then followed the pulsing, heated path to the entrance of her cunt. He lingered there, thrusting inside her soaked channel. Rhyanne gasped, tugging on his hair as she shoved her hips forward. Her mound slammed against his mouth, again and again, matching the rhythm he'd set with his tongue.

And still he pressed on, sliding lower, seeking the highly sensitized nerves that lay hidden in the shadowed entrance to her puckered anus. When his tongue made contact with that sensitive spot, Rhyanne screamed, bucking hard against him. He held on to her as she cried out, but showed no mercy while he greedily marked her as his own.

His head reeled with the unexpected thought. He'd done this before. Okay, not this, exactly ... he'd never done anything that felt even remotely this intimate. But he'd indulged in other extravagant sexual conquests, and while those had felt damn good at the time, they hadn't felt anywhere near as personal as giving Rhyanne a thorough tongue lashing did.

"Oh, Saints," Rhyanne murmured. "Oh, Quinn!"

His blood pumped through his veins with a savage ferocity. It pounded in his head, blending with Rhyanne's taste to drive him to the brink of madness. This time, though, when the urge to shift slammed into him, he was ready for it. He lapped at Rhyanne's juices and using all the self-control he possessed, halted the impending shift by throwing all his concentration into sucking and nibbling Rhyanne's pulsing clit. He lifted the pink, fleshy hood with the tip of his tongue and sucked on the small bud as his senses reeled with the intensity of the act.

He could pinpoint the exact moment when she came. Her body tensed and every one of her movements, no matter how small, ceased. For a second, it was as though she'd forgotten to breathe as the acute bliss speared right through her.

And then she was soaring, her cries more whimpers than groans or screams. Her fingers tightened in his hair, yanking at it, but the pain didn't bother him. There was nothing else, no other sensation in the world that could have torn his mouth away from her cunt at the moment of her climax.

He waited until she quieted and her breathing returned to normal before lifting his head from her depths and rising to his feet. "Tell me again how much better endowed than me your former patrons were."

Her eyes widened and her mouth formed a perfect "O" of surprise. Her lower lip trembled slightly. "There were no others," she whispered in a tone so low he had to strain to hear her above the clamor of the crowd outside the alley. "There's never been anyone else."

Even in the bluish tint of the florescent light, he could see the blush that crept up her cheeks. She lowered her gaze, avoiding his eyes, but he lifted her chin and forced her to look at him. "Good. You're mine, Rhyanne. Mine. I'm claiming you, right here, right now."

She sucked in a sharp breath and looked as though she was about to reply, but he didn't give her a chance. Instead, he slammed his mouth against hers, hard, and kissed her passionately, his tongue delving between her lips to share the exquisite taste of her cream with her.

He didn't take the time to consider what he'd just done. He only knew the words he'd spoken hadn't come from the heat of the moment, or the sexual intensity of the Festival. He wanted this woman. He needed her, whether she knew it or not. There was something about her that called to the primal, savage part of him, yet, instead of awakening the violent beast, it roused the favorable parts of his nature: his need to protect, to shelter, to *love*.

Rhyanne cupped his shaft. The unexpected touch made goose bumps break out across his skin. She tugged on his rod gently, then nudged her pussy with the tip of his cock. "Show me," she murmured against his lips. "Show me what it feels like to be wanted."

The raw need in her plea made him tremble. She thought she wasn't wanted? Saints above, he had a lot of work to do if he was going to convince her otherwise, until there wasn't a shred of doubt left in her mind. Being this close to her, preparing to fuck her sweet virgin pussy, had certainly eliminated all traces of reluctance from his thoughts. As much as he hated to admit it, Faye had been right. His body had known that from the moment he'd seen Rhyanne -- it had just taken his mind longer to accept the truth.

If he had to spend every waking moment of the rest of his life reassuring Rhyanne that she was everything he ever wanted but didn't dare dream of having, he'd do everything in his power to discover new ways of doing just that.

He drew away from her a little, just enough to put some distance between them. The uncertainty in her eyes tore at his defenses even further. Just when he thought she'd stripped away all the barriers between them, one simple glance threatened to undo him.

"I need a bit of room, sweetheart, that's all. I'm not going anywhere."

Relief suffused her features. He grabbed her hand and pulled her to him, claiming her mouth in a sweet, gentle kiss. He lifted her off her feet, an easy task considering her slender frame. As though by instinct, she wrapped her legs around his waist and he took a few steps forward until her back was flush against the wall.

He shifted his palms to her ass, balancing her weight until the tip of his cock nudged the pink folds of her pussy.

"Look down, baby. I want you to see this. See how beautiful you are. How well we fit together."

Scorching lust burned in her eyes. Wetness seeped from his rod at the look she gave him and his balls drew up into his sac. He didn't know how much longer he could hold out, or how gentle he could be once he felt the tight muscles of her hot cunt wrap around his length. He only prayed that self-control he'd exhibited earlier would serve him well once her inner walls closed around him.

She glanced down, but her fingers trailed across his chest. She paused at his nipples and tweaked them between thumb and forefinger as he'd done to her. The sensation drove him wild. His raging erection pounded and his hips thrust forward of their own accord. He was dying to enter her, but he wanted this experience to be memorable, and above all, intensely pleasing.

"I can't take much more of this," Quinn said. "I'm going to fuck you now, Rhyanne, and I want you to watch my cock disappear inside your sweet folds. Your pussy wants me. It was made for me."

She nodded and bit at her lower lip, her eyes glued to his cock. "You're so big." She sighed, tracing a circle around his right nipple. "Will it hurt?"

"For a moment." He placed a tender kiss on her brow. "Then it'll feel better than anything you've ever experienced."

Taking a deep breath, she squirmed slightly and lowered herself a little closer to his cock. "I'm ready."

Quinn grinned. "I know you are, sweetheart."

Then there was no more time for talking. Gritting his teeth to keep from spilling his load at the first brush of her swollen nether lips, he began to push his cock inside her. He went slowly, using every last ounce of self-restraint he didn't know he possessed. The tip of his cock led the way, stretching her, accommodating her virgin channel to the unaccustomed intrusion.

Rhyanne moaned and dug her fingernails into his chest, then lowered herself on his rod the remainder of the way. His pulsing cock-head nudged the tender barrier of her purity, then broke past it. Rhyanne gasped.

Quinn buried himself to the hilt inside her hot, tight passage and absorbed the sound of her pained cry in his mouth. He wanted to give her a minute to adjust to the unaccustomed feel of having him inside her, but she surprised him again by beginning to move. Her pussy gripped him, milked him, and he couldn't control his body's reactions to the tantalizing swirling movements of her hips.

"Yes, oh, yes," she breathed. Her eyelids fluttered closed, and the look of sheer ecstasy written on her features filled his heart.

Quinn's palms supported her ass, and he moved one of his hands sideways toward the tender rosebud of her anus. He swept some of the moisture that dripped from her pussy down onto his balls and used it to wet his finger, then pressed against her tight hole, demanding entrance.

She squirmed and whimpered, dropping her head to his shoulder and sighing against him. Her teeth nipped at the skin of his neck as he pushed his finger inside the sweet cleft between her buttocks. Before long, he'd have his cock buried there, too. He couldn't wait to show her what that felt like, to take his time and stretch her back passage, fill it with his throbbing cock.

His finger slid in past the knuckle as his cock thrust inside her unexplored pussy. Despite the fact that this was her first time, she rode him like an expert, years of training kicking in without hesitation.

"I never thought ... I mean, I hadn't known ..." The words spilled out of her in a rush before another cresting wave of pleasure rushed through her. Her inner walls spasmed around him, fluttering and holding him captive as she came with a series of sharp, mewling cries.

No force in the universe could stand against Rhyanne's fluttering pussy -- certainly not whatever trace of self-control Quinn still had left. He knew he'd lost the battle the moment she began to quiver, but it wasn't until his seed spurt forth, drenching her channel with his hot cum that he knew he was actually lost.

She'd won. In the span of no more than a few hours, Rhyanne had accomplished the impossible. She'd won him, body and soul.

Trembling with fulfillment, he wrapped his hand around the back of her neck and pulled her to him. Giving in to one final urge, he unclasped a few metal clips in quick succession, then fanned his fingers through her hair to dislodge the rest of the bobby pins. They dropped to the ground with sharp metallic clangs, and her mass of honey-blond hair spilled down her shoulders and over his chest.

Long, just as he'd imagined. It reached past the delicate curve of her spine to brush against her rounded ass.

A red, pulsing glow caught his eye, dragging his attention from Rhyanne's hair to the inside of her wrist. The angry burst flickered like a rampant heartbeat, dull and noiseless, yet with the power to bring down half the government officials patrolling the streets on top of them.

Rhyanne lifted her hand and turned it palm-up, baring her wrist. She gaped at the tell-tale light, her eyes brimming with tears. Her voice shook when she spoke, and her tone held none of the sultry heat it had just moments ago. "What have you done?"

Chapter Nine

“Relax, sweetheart. Your chip must have malfunctioned. You had to know it would send a signal sooner or later.”

Rhyanne tried to pull out of Quinn’s grasp but he held her firmly to him as she squirmed. Her frenzied writhing lifted her off his cock, and his softening shaft slid out of her, releasing a stream of wetness to flow down her inner thigh.

Her tender nipples scraped against the raspy curls that sprinkled his chest. “You don’t understand. It didn’t malfunction.”

Quinn leaned his forehead against hers and whispered soft, soothing words meant to calm her. The blue light spilling over the end of the alley caught in his eyes, intensifying the sapphire orbs to glittering gems. She couldn’t look away, mesmerized by the raw power and masculine dominance she saw in them.

Panic clogged her throat and lodged in her chest, making it hard to breathe. She slammed her closed fists against his broad, firm shoulders. Rippling muscles shifted beneath her onslaught, but otherwise it felt as though she fought against a brick wall.

Blood roared in her temples. He suddenly seemed too big, too strong a force to battle. She sagged against him, the fight draining from her as quickly as it had manifested itself.

“Put me down, please,” she begged, trying to make out the location of the scattered bobby pins past the silhouetted curve of his sinewy arm. “I have to find it.”

“You’re right. I don’t understand.”

With a sigh, his grip on her body loosened. Rhyanne flexed her leg muscles, relaxing them from their position around his waist. Her stiff limbs ached, small throbbing reminders of the vigorous lovemaking they’d shared. Heat suffused her face, the memory of the pleasure he’d aroused threatening to overpower the fear and frustration warring inside her.

The sigh of relief that slid from her throat when her bare feet touched the ground echoed through the alley, loud enough she feared it might carry right through the narrow corridor to reach the ears of the officers who stood guard just outside her safe heaven.

Rhyanne scanned the smooth metallic walls, searching for a way out. Finding none, she felt a hint of hysteria bubble forth to the surface. When had her little pleasure sanctum turned into a prison?

Ice-cold fear swept down her spine, embracing her with its chilling tendrils. This was it, then. Her well-planned, well-executed escape would come to an abrupt, bitter end, and all because she’d wanted so much to know what it would feel like to be truly wanted for once in her existence.

She fell to her knees. Palms outstretched, she used her fingertips to search the pavement for the tracking inhibitor, fully knowing that it was already too late. Christian had warned her that once activated, the inhibitor had to remain on her person at all times. The potent red blood cells belonging to her alone triggered it, connected it to her implant, and kept it operating. Once removed from that immediate contact with live DNA cells, whether blood or hair follicles, it would instantly cease to inhibit her tracking chip. The alarm would be swiftly triggered both at Faye’s mansion, and in every ear-piece or helm-screen of any government agent within the city.

Desperation set in. Not knowing what else to do, she clung to Quinn's leg and gazed up at him. "You can't let them take me. Not back to Faye's. Not anywhere."

He furrowed his brows, looking down at her with concern. "Faye won't punish you. She was worried when you ran away, but she sent me to make sure you'd be all right. I know she'll be relieved when --"

"No!" Rhyanne gritted her teeth and blinked back the onslaught of tears that threatened to pour down her cheeks. "If you meant what you said about making me yours, then it has to be tonight. You can't return me to Faye's. Take me to your ship. To the spaceport."

She held her breath while Quinn considered her request, a barrage of thoughts streaming through her mind. The spaceport wasn't simply her best hope of escape -- it was her *only* hope. She'd known from the beginning that her success depended on making it off this hunk of rock. Her contract was only binding on Earth. If she could hitch a ride on a spaceship, or heck, stow on board one, she'd manage from there.

Quinn reached down and gripped her upper arms, pulling her to her feet. He peered into her eyes intently, his gaze searching hers. "Are you all right? You're acting strange."

She licked her suddenly dry lips and nodded, gathering her courage for the performance of her life. Now, her freedom no longer depended on simply reaching the spaceport. It depended on Quinn.

A sliver of regret pierced her heart. He appeared genuinely worried about her. She knew he'd meant what he'd said. He'd accept Faye's offer and make her his. And while every part of her body cried out for more of his sensual touch, every ounce of determination she possessed urged her to get away.

Tonight was about gaining her freedom. Permanently -- before the all-seeing eyes of Saint Valentine and all his lust-frenzied children. She couldn't jump from the whip-happy arms of one patron into the orgasm-inducing embrace of another. She'd never be able to live

with herself if she simply submitted to Quinn's dominance, to his power over her, regardless of how much she might want to.

"If the house gossip about your upbringing is true," Rhyanne said, "then you know what the Mistress enjoys more than anything else. Do you really think she'll stop at a few lashes when I'm delivered to her doorstep? The switch is a part of her, and while she's always been able to stop before things got out of hand in the past, I've never tempted her wrath by escaping. I'd rather not taste the kind of punishment she'll surely have prepared for me when I return." She infused her voice with as much quivering anxiety as she could, which wasn't hard to do considering every part of her being trembled with nervous awareness.

"Fine," Quinn agreed without removing his hands from her upper arms, "but we'd better head there now. I want you checked out by my ship's doctor. You seem ... agitated."

She nodded rapidly, her eyelashes fluttering to hide the moisture dancing behind her eyelids. "Yes, yes. Whatever you want."

He spun her around and wrapped his arm around her waist, pulling her to his side. Rhyanne pressed her wrist against her outer thigh, trying in vain to hide the revealing orange glow of the implant in full alarm mode.

They slipped out from the mouth of the alley. The crowd surged around them, the revelers seeming to have only grown wilder as the night progressed. Quinn ushered her to the right in the direction of the spaceport, and Rhyanne breathed a sigh of relief. He really was a man of his word. He'd meant everything he'd said, every promise he'd made.

Her heart constricted in her chest, sending a sharp jab of pain to lodge in her rib-cage.

You're mine, Rhyanne. Mine. I'm claiming you, right here, right now.

Saints above, how she'd wanted him to. Her pussy still spasmed with the memory of his cock embedded deep in her. He'd been right about that, too. It had hurt at first, but the pain had blossomed and shifted into unbelievable ecstasy that had spread outward from the point of their joining to stream through her entire body. She'd never felt anything like it, despite

the myriad training exercises her Academy instructors had put her through. Nothing could have prepared her for the earth-shaking, mind-blowing bliss she'd experienced in Quinn's arms.

"You there!" a deep, authoritative voice called from behind them. "Stop and submit to identification scanning immediately."

Rhyanne's head reeled. Her breasts heaved, the tight straps of the erotic costume suddenly too tight and constricting against her otherwise naked form. Her body went rigid and Quinn pressed a kiss to her temple, halting their progress in mid-stride. "It's all right. I'll talk to him. We'll get this cleared up in no time."

She nodded wordlessly, wishing she could believe him. She knew better, though. Despite his assurances and easy confidence, he had no control over what the government officials would do to a runaway indentured pleasure servant. They'd take her to headquarters first, and ruthlessly examine her while debating what to do with her. Should they hand her over to her patron, or condemn her to serve at least part of the sentence handed down to runaway servants?

Swallowing hard, she nudged away from Quinn's embrace. He turned to face the approaching officers. There were two of them, both dressed in identical high-collared navy blue uniforms, both walking brusquely toward them with their index fingers pressed against their earpieces and identical frowns marring their square-jawed faces.

A woman with a cascading mass of red curls and a fox mask bumped into Rhyanne, jarring her away from Quinn. She was still close enough to touch him if she stretched out her hand. One of the officers narrowed his eyes in her direction, his gaze flicking down to her wrist.

She backed up another step, then another, positioning herself between a man and a woman who until a moment earlier had been toying with each other's genitals.

Her heart pounded so hard, it threatened to break out of her chest. The sounds of the Festival whirled around her, transforming from transient musical beats and crystalline pleasure noises to a dull, throbbing buzz that embedded itself in her brain, thudding along with a random beat.

People pressed in around her, cutting off her view of Quinn and the agents. Hands reached out for her, grabbing her breasts, tweaking her nipples, slapping her ass. Her body's well-trained responses flickered to life, sending pangs of heat to burrow in her pussy. Only the lingering impression of Quinn's thorough lovemaking made it possible for her to concentrate on something other than her relentless needs.

"Rhyanne!"

Quinn's voice thundered in her ears, breaking through all the ambient noise and clawing its way to her heart. She still couldn't see him through the throng, but just knowing he was there made her heartbeat slow to bearable levels.

A grip on her shoulder caused her upper body to twist sharply. Jarring pain coursed down her arm. She tried to wrench herself out of the powerful grasp, but only managed to jerk her shoulder joint backward, sending another wave of agony fluttering through the right side of her body.

A hand closed across her mouth. Her eyes widened and she tried to scream, but her strangled cry came out as a muffled sob instead. There were people all around, but no one looked her way. Her attacker pulled her off her feet and started to move through the crowd.

Quinn! He was near. He'd found her once against all odds and rescued her from a would-be rapist, he could do it again. He couldn't let the government agents take her. He *wouldn't!*

The man who held her veered sharply left, sliding between a parked hover-cab and a six-foot tall trash bin. The strength of his violent momentum had already carried her half-

way down the side road before the sight of the dead end ahead sank into her coherent thoughts.

Her attacker was trapped. She could hear Quinn's voice again. It came through loud and clear now, echoing down the one-way street.

"If you want to live, you won't do anything that will alert them to your position. You got that?"

Fear turned Rhyanne's blood to ice. She nodded helplessly, unable to do anything else.

It can't end like this. It can't.

Frantic, she scanned the area around her. How far away was Quinn? And who was this man? Government agents identified themselves, secure in their power and authority. Her kidnapper had done everything he could to duck out of sight. Could it be that he wasn't part of the group of agents who scanned the streets for her, warned by the alarm she'd triggered?

His voice hadn't sounded familiar, yet she still tried to search her memory for someone who might want to harm her. An enemy of Faye's? Or was this a completely random act and she'd simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time?

The man dragged her down the street. Although this lane was much wider than the narrow alley in which she and Quinn had made love, the modern three-story buildings that lined both sides of the road boasted no courtyards or passageways between them leading to adjacent streets. High-arched openings and wrought-iron balconies warred for attention with contemporary holovid-enhanced windows and doors that reflected passers-by in vivid color detail.

There was nowhere to run, and no way out.

So where was he taking her?

Agony twisted her gut, overwhelming her fear and apprehension of the events to come. If she hadn't run, none of this would have happened.

The whirling, high-pitched buzz of an approaching hovercraft made Rhyanne look up. She squinted against the bright floodlights that suddenly lit the street. Heart beating erratically in her chest, she found herself hoping she'd recognize the official government symbol etched upon the side door of the craft.

Quinn could straighten out this mess with the agents. But if her kidnapper had been acting on his own, she had no idea whether there was anything anyone could do for her.

The craft lowered in front of them quickly, the pilot navigating around the parked hover-cabs with enviable skill. The crimson metallic sheen of the craft bore no identifying marks. Rhyanne's heart sank.

With a *whoosh*, the craft's door lifted and a drop-down beam ladder fell forward to hang in front of her.

"Get her in, already!"

Rhyanne gaped. She recognized the voice, but could hardly believe her ears. Only when Christian Locke leaned forward over the passenger's seat and motioned to her attacker to climb up did she snap out of her shock-induced trance.

Despite the kidnapper's earlier warning, Rhyanne did the only thing she could. She screamed. Loudly, at the top of her lungs.

"Fucking bitch!" Her assailant grabbed her and tossed her over his shoulder. She slammed her fists against his back, but he climbed up the ladder and shoved her in the back of the craft. Her head hit the glass window, sending a blast of pain to slam behind her eyelids.

The door slid down behind the man, sealing closed. She could see him for the first time. He was massive, his broad shoulders darkening her field of vision. His head was shaved bald, but bushy eyebrows met in the middle of the bridge of his nose.

She glanced in front of her in time to see Christian yanking hard on the steering column, sending the craft surging upward with nauseating speed.

“You can’t do this,” she croaked out through parched lips. Her voice echoed through the craft, high-pitched and agitated, unrecognizable to her own ears.

“Shut up,” Christian said. “Or my man here will shut your mouth for you.”

Tears flooded Rhyanne’s eyes, but she did as she was told. Dizziness swept through her. Leaning her forehead against the side window, she relished the feel of the cool pane against her skin.

Though her vision was blurred, Rhyanne looked frantically down at the street. In the harsh glare of the craft’s floodlights, she could make out the lean lines of Quinn’s shoulders as he veered around the corner and stumbled to a sudden halt. He glanced up and the light spilled across his face, illuminating the shock and fear contorting his features.

She saw him mouth her name, his full lips curving around the word. Banging the sides of her clenched fists against the window, she shouted back at him. She’d barely managed to scream his name when her assailant yanked her back by her hair and slammed his hand around her mouth again.

“We warned you,” he growled in her ear. “Now be quiet, if you don’t want to make the rest of this journey unconscious.”

Saints, where were they taking her? She had to remain aware. It was her only chance at figuring out where she was being transported, and how to escape. Rhyanne squeezed her eyes shut, willing her breathing to return to normal. She summoned an image of Quinn’s sapphire eyes, using them as an anchor to convince herself that she’d be safe.

He’d come for her. He had to.

“Good work,” Christian said.

Rhyanne could only see the back of his head from her position, but it didn’t matter. She’d recognized him instantly. She didn’t need to see him to know what he looked like. She remembered his features as being rather non-descript, if not altogether unpleasant. A small, sharp nose and thin lips were the central focus points of an otherwise unadorned face. His

cheeks and jaw were smooth, and his dark brown hair cropped short. She'd always thought there was nothing even remotely remarkable about Christian Locke, but at the moment, he resembled the devil himself.

"Thanks, boss. She wasn't easy to grab. She had a man sniffing around her for most of the night."

Quinn. Tears washed down her cheeks anew. Quinn had been gentle with her. He'd shown her pleasure unlike any she'd ever imagined. Glancing down, Rhyanne could make out a smear of her virgin blood on the creamy pale skin of the inside of her thigh by the flickering crimson light of the dashboard controls. She tried to wipe it away with her thumb, but only succeeded in smearing it farther and making her nipples tighten with remembered pleasure.

"We're almost there," Christian said. "The ship's already cleared for takeoff."

The spaceport! A sliver of hope surged through Rhyanne. She knew Quinn had a ship docked there, but could she get away from these men and find it before government officials found her?

Gazing out the side window again, she watched as a blue structure came into view. Her attacker's grip on her mouth loosened slightly, but not enough that he wouldn't be able to instantly muffle her cries before anyone heard her.

Christian guided the hovercraft skillfully through the main dock doors, then swerved above the assembled tops of at least three dozen ships. Rhyanne gaped at the various vessels.

Which one was Quinn's? She knew trader vessels were usually much shorter and more robust than their sleek luxury passenger carrier counterparts, but she didn't know enough about them to pick one out of an assembled lot.

Christian piloted the craft to a silver vessel. A classic, needle-nosed and winged design, only the deep red markings Rhyanne couldn't identify set it apart from at least half a dozen

others just like it. Carefully, he guided the craft through the twin bay doors located just below its triangular tail.

Rhyanne held her breath as they came to a complete stop and the doors glided closed behind them.

Fuck. She was trapped. Even if she wanted to notify the authorities, she was being held against her will, she couldn't hope to do it from inside Christian's ship.

The hollow compartment in which they'd landed was dark, lit only by the dim glow of a couple of old-fashioned bulbs embedded in narrow ceiling sockets. Apprehension slid down Rhyanne's spine. Her nipples hardened from the sudden chill. Christian twisted in his seat and beamed a broad smile her way. The sight of it terrified her.

"Keep her here for now. I'll bring Dra'meer. He'll want to see the merchandise."

Bile rose in Rhyanne's throat. Her head spun. In all the years of submissive training, she'd never been addressed with anywhere near as much cold, calculating cruelty as she'd heard in Christian's voice.

"Yes, boss. She's not going anywhere."

Christian climbed out of the craft and jumped to the ground, the impact of his boots on the metal floor echoing loudly through the bay.

A small door opened in a nearby wall, allowing in another sliver of light before it closed again. A second man neared the craft, this one taller and bulkier than Christian. He reached up and yanked on the handle, pulling the door closest to her open.

His eyes raked over Rhyanne's body and he grinned, showing two missing teeth. A shiver ran down Rhyanne's spine. She suddenly felt naked, exposed. Although she'd spent the entire evening parading through the Festival nearly nude, and she was certainly used to showing off her body to Faye's companions, the way this man looked at her made her feel filthy.

The kidnapper shoved her forward. She stumbled out of the craft, landing on her bare feet. “You won’t get away with this. I have ...” She hesitated, searching for the right word. “Friends ... They’re waiting for me here.”

Dra’meer gave a sharp snort. “Did you hear that, Chris? The whore has friends.”

Rhyanne blinked the moisture from her eyes. She glanced from Dra’meer to the man who’d snatched her on the street, then to Christian, searching his gaze for some hint of the kindness she’d seen at the market while she’d repeatedly performed for him.

“The rules are simple,” Christian said. “You be nice to Dra’meer, and he’ll be nice to you. For now, he’ll show you to your quarters.”

Dra’meer reached for her, but she moved back just in time. His large, grubby paws were left clawing the air. His grin turned into a scowl, forming deep grooves around his wide mouth. “C’me ‘ere, girl. I won’t hurt you. Like the man says, you’re worth much more to us if you’re unblemished.”

Terror clawed at Rhyanne’s throat. She took a step backward, then another, but knew she’d eventually run out of room.

Christian closed the distance between them first. She held on to the knowledge that without him, she’d never have escaped Faye’s mansion. Surely, that type of kindness and the risk he’d taken for her had to count for something?

She opened her mouth to appeal to him, but a flicker of something sharp and metallic caught her gaze and made her words catch in her throat. He brought his hand up and, before she could move again, plunged the sharp tip of a needle into the side of her neck.

“Nighty night, whore,” Dra’meer said.

The man who’d attacked her at the Festival laughed, the sound slithering into her and turning her insides to liquid.

Whatever had been in the syringe worked fast. Her limbs went numb and her tongue felt heavy and swollen in her mouth. Even keeping her head lifted became an unbearable struggle.

Arms reached out for her. What small bit of clarity she still possessed screamed at her to fight back, to yank herself out of those grubby paws and kick, punch and scratch at every bit of flesh that came across her path, she couldn't manage more than a small whimper.

The cavernous bay spun around her as the men dragged her toward the side door. They lifted her over the threshold and she blinked against the sudden harsh illumination that bathed the grimy hall in neon white light. Electric panels stood open along the walls, random wires sticking out of them and flickering with electric pulses. She cringed away from the raw surges, hoping they wouldn't make contact with her skin.

"I told you she'd be worth the trouble," Christian said. He took one of her arms and draped it over his shoulder, helping Dra'meer carry her weight.

"Yeah, well, you'd better be right. We picked up three others tonight, but they're not as hot as she is."

"Rhyanne will fetch a fine price at auction." Christian paused in front of a dingy gray door. The metallic sheen had begun to peel, and bits of flecked metal littered the ground in front of it. He pressed his palm against the handprint reader to the side of the frame, and Rhyanne watched through half-lidded eyes as the door gaped open.

"Like I said, you'd better be right." Dra'meer lifted her and deposited her roughly in a wide room.

Rhyanne gazed around her and gasped, but the sound came out more like a half-hearted groan. Cages lined each side of the room, roughly six feet by six feet each. Women clutched gray bars, their faces pressed to them. They watched her with distant, disinterested gazes that Rhyanne feared mirrored hers.

Bile rose in her throat. A faint sting of hysteria nudged at her belly, but it felt vague and impotent through the drug-induced haze.

“Trust me. The girl’s a virgin. That mistress of hers refused to contract her services, and I have it on good authority she never touched Rhyanne, either. That means she’s pure, though we’ll have to have her examined and certified by a physician anyway. She’ll fetch a year’s pay at the next interstellar sex slave auction.”

Dra’meer tossed his head back and laughed; a harsh, savage sound that chilled Rhyanne to the bone. “She ain’t a virgin anymore.”

He brought his fingers down between her legs and roughly dragged them through her slit. Lifting his hand to display his fingertips to his partner, Dra’meer chuckled at the crimson-tainted cream that coated his skin. “Virgin blood. The slut’s a real whore now.”

Christian growled and grabbed her harshly by the shoulders. Shoving her backward, he thrust her against the edge of an empty cage. Pain slammed through her, a dull throbbing ache that started in her shoulder-blade and wedged itself into her heart.

“Fucking bitch. Couldn’t keep your legs closed for another few hours, huh?”

“Hey, you know that’s why these girls run.” Dra’meer grabbed his crotch through his baggy brown pants. “They don’t get ‘nuff dick at home. Guess that means we can have a little fun with her before we sell her though, huh?” His lascivious grin widened, making Rhyanne’s stomach churn.

“Do whatever you want with her,” Christian said, pulling Rhyanne by the arm, then tossing her through the opening of the cage and slamming a latch down against the door to hold it shut. “She’s no longer my concern.”

Dra’meer chuckled. “She’s no longer anyone’s concern. Just another juicy pussy in a galaxy full of stiff cock. Look at her. Those full parted lips. That revealing costume. Something tells me she can’t wait to get started.”

Rhyanne's limbs quivered. Unable to stand a moment longer, she sank to the cold floor of the cage. Dra'meer's harsh, testosterone-laden laugh turned her blood to ice. She gritted her teeth and fought to conjure up the memory of Quinn's startling sapphire eyes.

Through the onslaught of pain and denial, one realization blazed clearly: those few minutes in Quinn's arms had marked the only true freedom she'd ever know.

Exhaustion swept over her, enveloping her in a cocoon of anguished fatigue. With a last strangled moan, she gave in to the darkness, and to her memories.

Chapter Ten

Raw, unbridled fury jerked through Quinn's veins, tightening his muscles and quickening his pulse. Liquid adrenaline warmed his blood. He ran down the length of the dead-end street, screaming Rhyanne's name, forced to watch as the craft lifted and swept upward, into the infinite sky.

Dawn was breaking on the horizon. It tinted the deep night with a pink hue, as though someone had taken a brush and drawn a single broad stroke on black velvet.

The sight, which would have stirred his soul and beckoned to the part of him that welcomed the shift on any other day, only served to quicken his dread. With the Festival coming to a rapid end, the chaotic celebration would give way to rowdy crowds struggling to make their way home. Hovercrafts would soon fill the air, imbuing the atmosphere with the scent of exhaust, making it that much harder to locate Rhyanne.

"We have to find her," he shouted, turning around to face the three officers who'd followed him.

A man who'd identified himself as Jinzan lifted his massive shoulders in a shrug. "And where do you suppose we start? The alarm on her tracking chip has been tampered with. It broadcasted an alert to Headquarters, which in turn was forwarded to us, but our ability to

track her is limited at best. There's an alert out for Rhyanne Hamilton on every vidscreen in the city. She'll turn up eventually. And when she does, there won't be a thing you can do for her anyway. The punishment for runaway servants is quite severe. And non-negotiable."

A muscle jumped in Quinn's jaw. He lunged at the man, wrapped his fingers around his lapel and yanked until their noses touched. "Listen to me, you son of a bitch. You and your team are to blame for this."

Jinzan sneered and jerked out of Quinn's grasp. "If anyone's to blame here, it's you. Rhyanne is a pleasure servant under contract. Her Mistress did not consent to having her leave her property tonight, and yet, there she was, enjoying the festivities with a foreigner."

"I was bo --" Quinn clamed his mouth shut and struggled to get his temper under control. His composure normally served him well, but he knew he was too far gone to give these men any reason to doubt his story. The slightest provocation, and they'd haul him to Headquarters, where every *guest* received an obligatory DNA scan.

To find Rhyanne, he had to stay alive. If these men detected the Alpha gene in his genetic makeup, he'd doom them both to certain death.

"I was created on Earth, and you know it," Quinn said when he trusted himself to speak. "But that's irrelevant. Faye Laurens is my former patron. Rhyanne was in my care tonight."

Jinzan lifted a furry eyebrow, his skepticism clearly written in his dark eyes. "Is that so? Then why didn't Faye deactivate the tracking device before letting Rhyanne leave the house?"

"It must have slipped her mind," Quinn said between gritted teeth. "And while we're standing here arguing, the real kidnapper is getting away with his prize."

"What makes you think she's been kidnapped?" He pointed to a flashing red light situated on top of an eight-limbed street lamp. "The cameras will tell us what really happened, of course. But you didn't see anyone force her into the craft, did you?"

For the first time, a sliver of doubt nagged at Quinn. Could Jinzan be telling the truth? Had this been Rhyanne's plan all along? She'd been determined not to return to Faye's home tonight, and had seemed adamant that Quinn lead her to the spaceport. Did she know there was someone waiting there for her?

Grimacing, Quinn ran a hand across his stubbled jaw. He'd deal with that possibility when he learned more. For now, one unarguable fact still remained: Rhyanne was gone.

And he had to find her.

"Fine, then. Stay here and wait for her to turn up. I've got a delivery to make."

Another officer stepped up beside Jinzan. His gaze ran down the length of Quinn's naked body. "Ah, yes. It's hard to tell without your uniform, but you're a transport captain, aren't you? It would be a real shame if we discover that a respectable man like yourself has gotten himself into trouble by snatching a pleasure servant. Tell me, Captain, is the flesh trade just as lucrative these days as it always was?"

Quinn clenched his fists at his sides. His claws raked into his palms, sharp and perilous. The urge to flick his fingertips across the officer's jugular gnawed at his beastly instincts, begging him to give in to the violent urges that normally lay dormant in the part of him he fought to keep hidden. Tonight, though, he thought it might almost be worth a death sentence just to have the satisfaction of hearing the officer draw his last gurgling breath.

Rhyanne.

Almost worth it. But there was something -- *someone* -- who was worth more. Quinn turned around, letting the taunting provocation go unanswered. "Goodbye, gentlemen. I hope you enjoyed the Festival tonight."

The officers tossed back a few rude jibes, but their words quickly became no more than garbled background noise as Quinn broke into a sprint, heading in the general direction of the spaceport. He scanned the night sky, looking for the beacon of yellow light that signaled an empty hover-cab.

He passed a number of public transportation vehicles parked on the side of the road before he remembered that government regulations grounded hover-cabs on Festival night. It cut down on profits for the department of transportation, but it allowed Festival merchants who were taxed at twice the normal rates to bring in a goodly sum. A win-win situation for everyone, including those who wished to worship their patron Saint in full view of their deity and each other.

He was less than an hour's distance from the spaceport, at walking speed. Even without calling the shift, his Alpha gene would allow him to sprint for at least that long, cutting travel time in half.

The night's celebration had begun to quiet, and the multitude of revelers no longer filled the streets as they'd had earlier that night. As dawn continued to break and Quinn neared the spaceport, the roads grew deserted. The signs of the night's celebration were everywhere: trampled masks, scattered beads and spilled seed soiled the normally pristine pavement. The pungent scent of sex drenched the air, masking any hint of Rhyanne's essence that might have lingered on the breeze.

Still, Quinn pressed on. He had only one clue as to her destination, and he intended to follow, even if it meant breaking into each one of the docked vessels and searching every cabin to locate her.

He tempered the blind rage that simmered beneath the surface and forced himself to think of Rhyanne. If she hadn't been a willing participant in the abrupt escape, then she had to be terrified. Desire swam through his veins, jolting his cock as he remembered the way she felt in his arms, soft and curvy in all the right places, the costume's strips of leather only serving to highlight the creamy texture of her skin.

Damn it, Faye *had* been right. No matter how much he might have tried to deny his attraction to Rhyanne, the emotions that had surged within him when he'd joined with her had gone far beyond anything he'd ever experienced in the past with a lover. Rhyanne

awakened every possessive instinct in him. His nature urged him to protect her at all costs, even as his body seemed determined to quench its desperate hunger in her sweet, lush body.

Once he found her, he'd never let her go again. And no one -- not even Faye and her damnable switch -- would ever hurt her again.

The glossy outer wall of the spaceport came into view, and Quinn quickened his stride. His breath came in heavy gasps and he kept his right palm pressed over the cramp in his side, yet he pressed on. The wide bay doors that led inside gaped open, revealing the bright light flooding the vessels within.

As he rounded the corner, he slammed into a solid body. Guided by instinct alone, he shoved the man out of his way and veered left, toward his own ship.

"Hey! What's up with you, Quinn?"

The familiar voice made him stumble to an abrupt stop. He turned to face Vance Gellert, his best friend and Enigma's commander. Vance had been with him for almost a decade, since he'd first struck out on his own. The aberrant gene that swam through both their bloodstreams had forged an instant connection between the two men, a bond that had been tested over the years, but had never been broken.

Quinn clasped Vance's arm with relief. "Where are the others?"

"Most have returned to the ship."

"Most?"

Vance's upper lip curled in distaste. "Dante isn't here yet."

Quinn scowled. "I don't have time for this." The two men had been avoiding each other for weeks, yet no matter how hard Quinn had tried, he hadn't been able to get either one of them to admit to the sudden animosity between them.

He'd always said Enigma's crew was family. And like every family, though they loved each other, they didn't always get along. More often than not, it was up to Quinn to settle

minor disputes and hold people accountable. He'd have to ensure Vance and Dante cleared the air between them at some point, but now wasn't the time.

"How long have you been standing here?" Quinn asked.

Vance shrugged. "A while."

Quinn nodded. He'd figured as much. Vance hated Earth more than all of them put together, and he had reason to. He never left the spaceport when they docked in Vieux Orleans, and Quinn had a feeling even the tempting delights of Festival night hadn't been able to draw him out.

"Did you see a hovercraft come this way recently? Crimson metallic sheen, sleek design. Looked expensive."

Vance nodded. "Yeah. It descended into that V89-TR model over there." He pointed straight ahead at a silver gleaming ship. Swirling black symbols etched on its side marked it as a Venus-colony trader vessel.

Quinn's gut clenched. Apprehension slithered down his spine. Rhyanne may still be a willing participant in all of this, but with each passing moment, he began to doubt that possibility more and more. Something about this entire situation didn't feel right.

"Come with me."

He strolled down a narrow pathway toward the vessel, not waiting to see if Vance would follow. Quinn knew he would.

Officers in full Central Command uniform glanced his way, turning their helmeted heads in his direction. He knew what he looked like, striding through the spaceport fully naked, but didn't much care. On the night of February 14th, they'd have all seen much more than a nude behind and a hardened shaft.

His cock throbbed, fury and adrenaline making his blood pump and his rod stiffen. The urge to ensure Rhyanne was all right pounded through him, growing more intense with every step.

Twenty feet away from the vessel, Rhyanne's scent slammed into him. Her unmistakable essence, sweet and slightly musky, tainted with the aroma of fear. It clawed at his heart, coiled his muscles. The violent tempest that brimmed just beneath the surface of his calm façade broke free. He felt his lips stretch to accommodate a muzzle. His teeth elongated. His cheekbones ached with the strain of keeping the shift in check.

He glanced up at the vessel's bay ramp and watched two Central Command officers stroll down its length toward him. One lifted his hand and raised his index and middle fingers, signaling that the vessel was cleared for take-off.

The ship's engines revved, roaring through the port. The bay doors had begun to close behind the officers. Rhyanne's exotic smell poured through the opening. Her fragrance claimed him, stripped him of his self-control.

Her safety was the only thing that mattered. Nothing else even came close.

Breaking into a run, he focused on the rapidly connecting doors as they slid closer to one another, inch by inch. No matter how fast he ran, he wouldn't make it. Still he pushed, drawing on all his reserves to make that final leap onto the ramp.

His human body wouldn't fit through the narrow opening that remained. In another few seconds, the doors would seal shut.

Drawing a deep, shuddering breath into his lungs, Quinn bounded upward and sliced through the air, leading with his front paws. The shift completed a split-second before he lunged sideways and cleared the rapidly fusing portal.

Chapter Eleven

A low, feral growl penetrated the murky fog dampening Rhyanne's senses. She struggled to blink her eyes open.

Pain.

A sharp jab speared the back of her eyelids. Agony exploded through her head. She clutched her temples and pressed her forehead against the metal bars of her cage, willing the torment to subside.

Another distant sound echoed through her mind, a shadowy reminder of an angry snarl. It was dim, but the raw, savage power in that growl quickened her pulse. The anguish in her head dimmed to a low throb.

A tempestuous breeze whooshed past her a moment before something thumped hard against the side of the cage, rattling the bars. The creak of the metal door giving way blossomed in her ears, and even through her murky perception, the sound seemed welcoming somehow. Filled with hope.

She squinted against the bright light piercing her eyes. Through lowered lashes, she could only make out the faint silhouette of a midnight-black wolf. It stood on the other side of the cage, sapphire eyes fixed intently on her. Its teeth dripped blood.

Her head reeled. The room spun around her, and the thumping ache in the back of her skull returned. Squeezing her eyelids shut for the second time, she pushed away the vision of the wolf her fevered mind had conjured.

With the darkness came flashes of memory. They swam through her head and Rhyanne grasped at them, but they disappeared almost as quickly as they materialized.

A man's sleek, powerful chest. Her head tossed back as a thick, solid shaft pierced her inner core to move inside her. And those sapphire eyes, glowing intently, studying her.

"Come on, baby. Let's get you out of here."

Strong, warm arms enveloped her and dragged her over the cold surface of the cage floor. There was nothing rough about the way she was being held ... nothing frightening.

Gritting her teeth against the pain, she opened her eyes wide, determined to take in whatever was happening. She was in danger. That much she could remember. But why? And from who? The man with the sapphire eyes?

White light silhouetted a familiar profile.

Quinn. He had a name, and she remembered it! That knowledge alone nearly made her cry out in excitement. Only the throbbing agony behind her eyes kept her from voicing her sudden elation.

He smoothed her long hair back from her face, tucking a strand behind her ear. He held her easily in his arms, as though she weighed nothing at all.

"You're all right. It's going to be all right."

The sound of his warm, sensual voice slid through the murky shadows that still enveloped her mind. Why couldn't she focus?

Oh. In a heartbeat, it all made perfect sense. She'd been knocked out. The drug flowed through her veins, creating visions out of thin air. It even interfered with her dreams, bringing a dose of ugly reality into what her brain had conjured as a comforting, sensual experience.

“Quinn.” She ran her fingertip over the lean line of his jaw. The stubble had grown longer since the first time she’d seen him, and the rough bristles tickled her palm as she edged her hand upward to cup his cheek. “There’s so much I want to say to you.”

He turned his head and placed a kiss to her wrist, where her chip still radiated an angry orange hue. “And there’s a lot I want to say to you. But we have to hurry and find a way to contact Enigma before the slavers find us. I moved quickly and took two men by surprise after I landed in the hangar bay, but they’ll know why I’ve come, and it won’t be long until the rest of them make their way over here. Can you walk?”

Rhyanne furrowed her brows. Lines of worry bordered the corners of Quinn’s full lips, giving his sensual mouth a severe quality. She wished he’d smile. Any moment now, the drugs could wear off and she’d wake, alone and frightened, back in her cell.

She squeezed her arms around his neck and gripped him tighter. “No,” she said, though that was probably a lie. Her limbs felt weightless and heavy at once, but she could probably force herself to place one foot in front of the other long enough to go anywhere he wanted her to. If she could master walking in nine-inch heels while balancing a tray of crystal, walking on bare feet should be no problem at all.

A giggle forced its way past her lips, echoing absurdly through the slaver room. Rhyanne looked down from her spot against Quinn’s chest and glanced at a dozen other cages and their inhabitants. Women just like her lay slumped in the corners of their enclosures, some staring sightlessly at her, others dozing fitfully.

Rhyanne’s heart swelled with pity. At least her mind had allowed her to think of Quinn, to conjure a fantasy of a real man who’d shown her more pleasure than she’d ever imagined possible. If she never knew another day’s freedom, at least she had that memory. The drug tried to shove it from her mind, but it was too strong, too powerful to be denied.

She clung to it fiercely as she clutched Quinn's shoulders tighter. His muscles rippled beneath her fingertips, lean and sinewy. She'd never had a dream as real as this. She supposed there was something good about this hallucinogen after all.

"That's it, sweetheart. Hold on to me. I'm going to get us out of here."

She nibbled at her lower lip as Quinn turned around and headed for the door that led to the main hallway. It opened with a loud suction sound and she saw him grimace.

"Why don't we do something else?" she asked, resting her head on his shoulder and sweeping her fingertips through the coarse hair sprinkling his chest. "I can think of a million ways we can please each other before I wake."

Quinn hesitated. His eyes still sparkled with genuine interest, just the way she remembered, but there was something else there, a deep-seeded sadness she didn't recall seeing earlier. "Stay with me a little longer. I promise to show you every kind of pleasure imaginable once we're safe. Once we're back on Enigma."

Rhyanne frowned. "Enigma?"

"My ship."

Had she known that? How could her fevered mind have thought up the name of Quinn's ship unless he'd mentioned it previously? Yet she couldn't recall ever hearing the name of his vessel.

Voices carried through the hall, bouncing off the metal walls. Quinn swore low under his breath and ducked into a cargo enclosure. It was barely big enough to fit his muscular body, and Rhyanne's toes stuck out.

He grabbed her feet and yanked them inside the enclosure. The doors zipped closed, sealing them in pure darkness.

"Now this is more like what I had in mind," she whispered in his ear. "Put me down. Let me sink to my knees and take your cock in my mouth again. This time, I promise I'll

make it last longer. I'll drive you to the brink of madness and bring you back again, just as Faye promised I could."

Quinn groaned. His right arm supported the weight of her upper body, and his hand slid around to cup her breast. Rhyanne gasped at the intensity of the sensations coursing through her. She focused all her energy on memorizing the way Quinn's palm felt against her skin, the way her nipple peaked when he grazed it with his fingertips, the way his breathing quickened and brushed her cheek.

"Rhyanne." The word was a warning, a threat and an endearment all at once. He'd suffused it with so much passion and carnal desire, it took her breath away.

Tears filled her eyes. Yes. This is what it felt like to be wanted. Dream or not, it didn't matter. She'd treasure this memory alongside all the others Quinn had given her for the rest of her days. Every time another man touched her, every time she was forced to perform an act she found repulsive, she could cling to this moment and get through it.

Heat sank deep inside her pussy. She moaned, louder than she'd intended. In a heartbeat, Quinn's mouth pressed against hers, capturing the sound. Her back pressed into the wall and she squirmed slightly, adjusting her position. Her fingertips flew over his chest and down his stomach. She hated that she couldn't reach lower, suddenly needing to cup his cock in her hand, to feel his shaft throb for her one more time.

His tongue delved between her lips. He tasted like sultry passion and excited male. Underneath the heady flavor, there was another essence, a slightly metallic taste that resonated with familiarity yet one that her brain refused to contemplate.

This was Quinn. He tasted like *Quinn*. Nothing else mattered.

He kissed her long and hard, his tongue swirling against hers. Every swipe drove spikes of raging excitement to pool between her legs. Wetness suffused her cunt. She arched her hips, and, as though knowing what she wanted, he shifted his grasp on her legs to angle his palm directly beneath her soaked slit.

Shivers danced over her skin, warm tremors that infused her body with hot, needy longing. Nibbling at his lower lip, she pushed her ass down on his hand, giving him greater access to her pussy.

He abandoned her mouth and placed a trail of kisses up the side of her cheek. When he reached her ear, he nibbled on her lobe, then whispered, "Promise me you'll be quiet if I make you come."

"Promise." The word came out on a sigh.

"Then promise me you'll be quiet again when we move. We need to get out of here. Do you understand?"

She nodded, wordlessly. She'd go along with anything he wanted, as long as he gave her what she craved.

Quinn parted her drenched flesh and thrust two fingers inside her in one swift move. A moan lodged in her throat. She pressed her lips together, determined to do what he'd asked. He was her dream man, after all. The least she could do was obey his wishes.

"You are so damn wet," he murmured, his voice husky and low.

She yearned to tell him that it was all his doing, that she'd never had this kind of reaction to anyone, but he'd commanded her to be silent. Besides, it wouldn't matter anyway. This was her fantasy.

He twisted his fingers so that they grazed a slew of sensitive nerve-endings and began to thrust inside her using slow, rhythmic motions that set her body aflame. Her cunt quivered and creamed, pulsing around the luscious intrusion.

The scent of her arousal filled the small room. It drifted upward and clogged her nostrils. She inhaled deeply, loving the musky aroma and the passion he awakened in her.

Her body responded as though it was made for him. Her libido didn't flare to life because she'd been trained to want to fuck. It sizzled and singed her skin because he willed it

to. Because she couldn't think while he was around, couldn't breathe without her heart clenching and her pulse quickening.

She had no name for the emotion swirling through her, but she knew that whatever it was, it was forbidden. Such intense feelings led to attachment, and bonds between people were strictly prohibited unless they were supervised by the government as part of an officially approved contract. Patron, servant. Master, slave. There had to be a hierarchy, a moral order. Relationships between equals had been outlawed for centuries.

Quinn pinched her labia between his thumb and index finger, ripping a hoarse cry from her throat. Pleasure danced through her pussy, culminating in a fiery heat centered around her clit.

Quinn continued to thrust inside her. Each time he pulled out, he'd tweak her swollen lips just enough to send a blazing trail of succulent bliss through her veins.

He couldn't touch her clit from his position, but it didn't matter. The raging intensity with which he finger-fucked her, more than made up for it. He caressed the length of her slit, nipping and pinching, sliding and stroking, until she no longer cared that this would all come crashing down around her when she awoke.

"Come for me, sweetheart," he whispered. "Quietly."

She whimpered and pushed down on his fingers. Quinn added a third, stretching her entrance. Her muscles quivered as they accommodated the greater girth and then he sped up his movements, increasing his thrusts.

Fire exploded behind her eyelids. Pleasure rippled through her in waves. She pressed her lips tightly together and squeezed her eyes shut, reveling in the pulsing, flowing, drenching feel of pure liquid ecstasy blazing through every part of her body.

It took long moments for Rhyanne to recover. Quinn allowed her the time she needed, but she sensed his urgency. The drug's effects still clouded her judgment and raked the nerves inside her head with a dull, throbbing hurt.

"We have to go. Those men I heard in the hallway have to be gone by now," Quinn said, readjusting his grip. "Can you walk if I set you down once we're out of this enclosure?"

Rhyanne swallowed hard. "Yes," she said, the lie sliding between her lips just as easily the second time. After the intensity of the orgasm she'd just had, she'd be lucky if her limbs didn't give out completely the moment he set her down.

"Good."

With a flick of his wrist, Quinn activated the doors. Rhyanne sighed, leaning against him, drawing strength from his masculine form one last time. Any moment now, she'd be jolted awake.

The doors slid open. The pulsing point of a laser-beam darted over Quinn's chest, painting his skin an alarming crimson anywhere the pointer touched.

Dra'meer grinned. "Aww, if it ain't the Alpha and the slut." He motioned with his weapon toward the hall. "Get the fuck out of there. The Captain wants a word."

* * * * *

The first thing Quinn noticed upon coming face to face with the slaver captain who'd kidnapped Rhyanne was that the man looked like a rat. A tall, rather scrawny rat, who wore a black uniform similar to Quinn's. Unlike Quinn's Terran ensemble, however, his bore two crimson stripes on either side, marking him as an independent trader.

The man's narrow nose, beady black eyes and pursed thin lips were set off by closely cropped drab brown hair. The only thing missing was a long, thin tail. If Quinn hadn't spent so many years among other Alpha, he might have believed the man had alpha genes surging through his veins. As it was, he doubted it. Yet, even if the slaver was an Alpha, his actions accorded him none of the usual courtesy Quinn extended others of his kind.

The rat dealt in the black market flesh trade. That was enough to put him on Quinn's "most wanted" list. But the fact that he'd taken Rhyanne -- *his* Rhyanne -- intending to sell her to the highest bidder meant the monster wouldn't receive a hint of mercy, from Quinn

or from anyone on Enigma. His crew hated slavers almost as much as they hated Terran government officials, and for similar reasons.

“So you’re the shape-shifter who invaded my ship and slaughtered my men.”

Quinn snarled, clutching Rhyanne tighter to his chest. Instead of setting her on her feet as he’d intended, seeing the hulking giant with the weapon pointed at his chest had only served to awaken every protective instinct in him. He was determined not to let anything happen to Rhyanne. At the moment, he knew no better way to do that than not letting her out of his arms.

“They got what they deserved. Slaver filth.”

The man continued as though Quinn hadn’t spoken. “I knew I should have hired more men. When you took out those two in the mess hall, you managed to kill my entire crew. All except the pilot and my commander.”

“Listen, scumbag --”

“It’s Christian, actually. Christian Locke. And my loyal commander here is Dra’meer. I tell you this, so you’ll know the names of those who send you into the afterlife, not because I actually care what you call me.”

“Is that so, asshole? Because I can smell your fear. It’s dripping off you in waves. This whole hangar stinks of it.”

Christian yanked a sleek blue laser pistol from his hip hoister and pointed the weapon at Quinn’s chest. The aqua-colored pointer hovered near the red one Dra’meer still aimed at him.

“Maybe so. But you see, in a couple of minutes you’re going to be dead, and all of this,” he gestured with his weapon, the laser-tip bouncing off the walls of the hangar bay in which they stood, “will no longer be your concern.”

Rhyanne trembled in Quinn's arms. Her skin, slick with a cold sweat, slid against his. She murmured something incoherent and he smoothed damp strands of hair back from her forehead.

It was her fear he'd smelled, not Christian's, though the rat didn't need to know that. Since leaving the safety of the cargo enclosure, whatever drug they'd given her had seemed to tighten its grip on her mind. Upon seeing Dra'meer, she'd fainted, only to come to a few minutes later when they'd been ushered into the hangar and had found Christian leaning casually against the hover-craft he'd used to abduct Rhyanne.

As good a place as any to kill someone. Easy to clean. Convenient disposal system, too. His gaze had slid over to the small chamber that housed the airlock. A quick series of taps against the electronic panel and a corpse could be rapidly swept away into the cavernous vacuum of space. The perfect dumping ground, and one of the best ways to hide a dead body in the entire universe.

He had to find a way out of this. If he could incapacitate either one of the men, he might have a shot at taking out the other before he fired. Quinn grimaced. Who was he kidding? Taking down two armed, alert men would be nearly impossible even in full shift. When he'd first come on-board, he'd had the element of surprise on his side. He'd found two men in the mess hall and had managed to dispatch them both before they even thought to reach for their weapons.

This was different. Christian and Dra'meer knew what he was capable of. They wouldn't turn their back on him. In his human form and, with Rhyanne to protect, he didn't stand a chance.

Quinn took a step back, wanting to put more space between Rhyanne and the men. Not that any amount of distance could deter a well-aimed laser shot, but he hoped it wouldn't come to that. The slaver obviously wanted Rhyanne alive. She'd be a prized commodity at the upcoming Galaxy Auction. Quinn had heard of it, even if he didn't know where it would be taking place.

Scowling, he tried a different tactic. “Central Command officers saw me shift. They’ll have already dispatched a team of Alpha Assassins to come after you. Killing me won’t stop them.”

Christian swallowed hard, his throat constricting with the effort. This time, the acrid scent of terror that filled the bay definitely seeped from the rat’s pores.

“I’ll give them your corpse. That’ll satisfy them.”

Quinn shrugged. “They’ll still have to board you to get it. While they’re here, they’ll make a standard inspection to ensure you’re not hiding any other Alphas on your vessel. You and I both know what will happen when they find that room full of sex slaves back there. Tell me, Christian, how many of them are chipped? How many are property of Earth’s illustrious government?”

Dra’meer’s gaze slid to Christian’s. “What’s he talkin’ about, boss? What assassins?”

“Earth’s finest,” Quinn answered for him, stalling for time. If he could distract either one of them enough to get them to lower their weapon, he might be able to make a move and wrestle a pistol away from them. From there, things would get a lot less complicated, fast. “Alpha Assassins are a highly-trained elite squad of soldiers whose only purpose in life is to eliminate those with the Alpha gene. That means me.”

Rhyanne whimpered. She dug her fingernails into his shoulder, scraping his skin. He yearned to reassure her, but until they were safely off this ship, there were no assurances he could offer that wouldn’t sound like blatant lies even to his own ears.

The speaker system embedded high in the wall emitted a high-pitched chirp, then a deep voice boomed through the hangar bay. “Captain, we’ve got company. Two vessels. One’s a trader ship. The other looks too official to be anything but bad news. Do we outrun them?”

Relief suffused Quinn’s muscles. Enigma had gotten off the ground and was coming for them. That meant Vance had somehow managed to obtain permission to lift off, though

Saints only knew how he'd managed that. After the spectacle Quinn had provided by shifting in the middle of the spaceport, he'd feared Enigma would have been subjected to a full investigation.

He squeezed Rhyanne's hip, hoping the gesture was comforting rather than alarming. Enigma was on its way, but so were the Alpha Assassins. The only question was, which one would reach them first? And would either of them get here while Quinn was still alive?

A muscle jumped in Christian's jaw. He focused his gaze on Quinn. "Fun's over. We're out of time. Or rather, you are."

He lifted his weapon and flicked his wrist, gesturing to the side. "Put the girl down. I don't want your blood on her perfect skin."

Quinn opened his mouth to argue, but Rhyanne nestled her head in the crook of his shoulder. Her long, unbound tresses fell over her cheek, hiding her face. "Do as he says," she whispered, low enough that only he could hear.

He wanted to argue, but what could he say? Laser weapons were incredibly accurate, but a shot was still messy as hell. The last thing he wanted was for Rhyanne's final memory of him to be of having his brain splattered all over her.

"She passed out a few minutes ago," Quinn said, walking to the edge of the room. He hoped that would buy her a little more time before the slavers put their grubby hands on her again.

Dra'meer followed them, stopping a few steps away. He shifted his weight from foot to foot. Discomfort and traces of fear were etched across his broad features. Quinn recognized the look. The distaste written on the man's face hid the deeper terror that swam inside his veins at the thought of what the Alpha Assassins would do to him when they found those women. The assassins might have been trained for a special purpose, but their primary duty was still to the Terran government. And the government hated losing its most valuable commodity.

Gently, Quinn set Rhyanne down on the floor. She followed his lead and slumped to the ground, one arm stretched beneath her head, the other covering her full breasts.

Quinn's heart constricted in his chest. The breath left his lungs. If he was going to die, he'd die defending the woman he loved, damn it, not cornered like a wounded animal.

He spun quickly, already in mid-shift by the time the importance of his thought slammed into him. He had no time to consider the implications or the raw panic that clawed at his throat when he thought of leaving Rhyanne with these men.

His incisors elongated, breaking through the upper portion of his lengthening muzzle. The rest of his body followed suit as his hands shifted into paws, claws broke through the tender skin of his fingertips and fur sprouted from every inch of his flesh.

What began as a savage cry turned into a fierce growl as Quinn rushed toward Christian. He counted on Dra'meer wanting Rhyanne alive. It was him they needed dead.

The color drained from Christian's face. Quinn watched it happen in slow motion as his focus narrowed in on his enemy. There were no other sounds, no other sights but the man in front of him. Christian's finger twitched on the trigger.

Quinn ducked out of the way, rolling on the ground, his belly flattening against the dirty metal floor. The blue and red lasers criss-crossed over his head, missing him by mere inches.

Rhyanne screamed. The sound bounced off the walls and burrowed into his heart. Anger and sheer terror on her behalf fused together to form a surge or liquid adrenaline that turned Quinn's blood to ice.

Bounding over a partly open floor panel, he gained momentum and clawed through the air, his paws thudding against Christian's chest. His teeth found their mark a moment later, tearing at Christian's throat.

The man's death gurgle was no more than a startled sigh, but it rang in Quinn's ears as though the rat had screamed at the top of his lungs.

Not taking a second longer than necessary, Quinn spun around. A red laser-beam fried the ship-wide communication panel behind him. Quinn growled and bounded forward, knowing Dra'meer would have time to fire off another shot, maybe two, before he reached him.

That was two shots too many. He'd been lucky so far. One-on-one, with that much distance between him and his enemy, he knew he couldn't count on luck to help him through again.

With his attention fixed firmly on Dra'meer, Quinn barely saw Rhyanne stand. She was a mere blur behind the man as she took a running start and jumped on Dra'meer's back. The impact didn't knock him off his feet, but it jerked his arm and his next shot missed Quinn by a foot.

"Fucking bitch," Dra'meer snarled. "I'm going to kill you!"

Not if I kill you first. Quinn closed the distance between them in the span of a long, hammering heartbeat. He saw Dra'meer's eyes widen as he brought his weapon up to target Quinn again, but they both knew he didn't have enough time.

With a final savage howl, Quinn sheared the man's right arm with his claws, tearing at clothes and skin as he knocked the weapon from his hand to clatter onto the floor. Shoving with all his Alpha strength, Quinn knocked the slaver down and bent over him, his teeth seeking -- and finding -- their mark.

A few moments later, it was over.

Quinn shifted, slower this time, allowing his cramped muscles to lengthen at their own rate. The two men lay on the ground, their throats split open. Blood pooled around them. Even in human form, Quinn could still taste their copper-flavored essence. It slid down his tongue and clogged his throat, making him gag.

He flexed his fingers and eyed Rhyanne. She stood, flattened against the wall, her breath coming in ragged gasps. Blood spattered her skin. He'd wanted to avoid that, but at least it wasn't his blood that stained her perfect flesh.

Instead, she'd just watched him tear two men apart. In wolf form, no less. Grimacing, he ran a palm over his stubbled jaw. "I can get you back to Faye." He was surprised at how raw his voice sounded, how vulnerable. "Or anywhere you want to go."

Tears filled her eyes. Her lower lip quivered and her body shook with silent sobs. He wanted nothing more than to rush over to her and sweep her into his arms, but he didn't dare. If she hated him for what she'd just witnessed, so be it. He'd done it for her. It had all been for her.

He didn't think he could stand it if she pushed him away.

"You --" She took a deep breath, then tried again. "You saved me."

Quinn licked his suddenly dry lips, painfully aware of his nakedness, of the corpses lying at his feet. "Anyone would have done what I did. Besides, you saved yourself. If you hadn't attacked Dra'meer when you did, we'd both be dead right now."

She shook her head, her blond hair clinging to the side of her slender throat, her shoulders, her breasts. Saints, she was beautiful. And vulnerable. And until earlier that night, she'd been his.

She took a tentative step forward, then another, until she stood a mere inch away. A solitary tear had slipped down her cheek, glistening wetly against her porcelain skin. "No one would have done what you did. No one."

He reached out and wiped the tear away. She trembled beneath his touch, but no longer with fear. Sensual heat emanated from her, wrapping him in the scent of her desire, her need for him.

The smell of her acceptance was intoxicating.

They moved at the same time, coming together at once, their mouths meeting, tongues searching. He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her to him, while she stretched, stood on the tips of her toes and tangled her fingers in his hair. He could feel her heartbeat hammering against his chest, the thundering rhythm heating his blood, stirring his cock. The kiss felt like it lasted an eternity and a mere second all at once.

When they parted, he knew it wasn't enough. Even if she decided to stay with him, a lifetime would never be enough.

Quinn squeezed her hand as they headed for the door, struggling to ignore the tightening in his chest. He had no idea how he'd cope if she chose to leave, yet he knew it had to be up to her. If she wanted him as much as he needed her, she'd stay. If not, he wouldn't force her. He'd rather have all of Rhyanne willingly than coerce her to submit her body to him knowing he could never have her heart. He didn't think he could handle that.

Quinn took a deep breath, clearing the doubt from his thoughts. They still had the pilot to take care of, but with Rhyanne by his side, he knew he could stand against any resistance one man could offer.

"Come on, baby," he said. "Let's free the other hostages and contact Enigma. Then, let me take you home."

Chapter Twelve

Rhyanne woke to the scent of pine. She kept her eyes shut, breathing in the heady aroma. The crisp fragrance of nature penetrated her senses, drifting through the fog of fatigue still clouding her mind. It summoned forth images of a broad chest, a sculpted stomach, a rigid cock and deep, sapphire eyes.

Quinn.

Warmth suffused her muscles, softening her limbs. She smiled and rolled over, instinctively reaching out for him. The pillow was empty, his side of the bed cold.

Rhyanne sat up, blinking sleep out of her eyes. “Quinn?”

The rest of his quarters were as empty as the bed. Her heart quickened as she took in her surroundings. Even if she hadn’t known whose room this was, she’d have immediately recognized it as Quinn’s.

It didn’t just smell like him. It looked to fit him perfectly, from the stark, dark green sheets and pillowcases on the bed to the unadorned walls. Everything was pristine, each object in its place. Across the room from the bed, a desk sat against one wall. A vid-screen panel and a voice-activated command box were the only objects on its blue-gray surface.

Quinn wasn't the kind of man to bother with decorations, yet there were a few touches sprinkled throughout the space that made it clear he thought of this place as home. A coffee cup shaped like a giant apple sat on his nightstand, beside an electronic book reader. Three laser-pistols lined the right wall and beneath them sat a comfortable, worn chair upholstered in plaid fabric. It looked old-fashioned, yet comfortable and inviting. Like the rest of the ship.

A natural smile tugged at the corners of Rhyanne's mouth as thoughts of the past night slid through her mind.

Their escape was still a blur. When she thought back on the events of the past twelve hours, she did so as though recalling a terrifying dream best left forgotten. But she remembered Quinn, remembered everything they'd shared together. And she'd never forget the sacrifice he'd made for her.

After killing the men who'd sought to enslave her for the rest of her days, Quinn had led Rhyanne to the bridge. There, he'd easily overpowered the single pilot and used the ship's communication system to contact Enigma.

A vision formed in her mind of a beautiful woman with white, luminescent eyes -- otherworldly orbs that had seemed to see right through everyone they rested upon. The sight of those eyes had made Rhyanne shiver, conjuring impressions of the woman being able to see into the afterlife, straddling the fine line between this world and the next.

Such thoughts had been foolish, of course, but whether it had been due to the drugs or to the wealth of information Rhyanne's mind had been trying to process, she didn't know.

The woman's exotic features had filled the view-screen and her voice had been gentle, promising Quinn his vessel wasn't far behind. Rhyanne had tensed, trying to imagine the chain of servitude this stunning creature shared with Quinn, but it wasn't until they were waiting for Enigma to arrive that he'd explained the way things worked on his ship.

True equality wasn't something Rhyanne had ever contemplated. Even in her wildest fantasies she hadn't imagined being thought of as an equal to a ship's captain, or to a doctor. Yet, on Enigma, every member of the crew was respected and valued for his or her abilities.

Rhyanne still had trouble with that concept, but she knew that in time, it would grow to feel as natural to her as everything else about Quinn's life.

The door chimed a moment before it slid aside. Quinn's solid physique filled the doorway, his black uniform clinging to him like a second skin, drawing her gaze everywhere at once. She drank in the sight of him, her heart fluttering with awareness.

"You're awake." He stepped inside, letting the door glide closed behind him.

Heat raced through her body as he came closer, pulsing at the apex of her thighs. They hadn't made love upon arriving to his quarters. She'd been too exhausted, and he'd held her until she drifted off to sleep.

"I missed you," she said honestly, pulling the sheet she'd been holding to her chest down to bare her breasts. Her nipples peaked, hardening to aching, sensitive nubs.

Quinn's tongue swept out to lick his lower lip. Her gaze locked on to the sensual motion and a flutter danced through her belly, awakening longings and emotions she never knew she was capable of feeling.

He closed the distance between them, but instead of climbing in beside her, he knelt by the side of the bed.

Rhyanne frowned. "Is everything all right?"

"I suppose." His fingertips trailed a slow path up her arm. "As well as could be expected, anyway."

She reached out and smoothed a stray lock of hair back from his forehead, then ran her hand over his jaw. He'd shaved earlier. His face looked much smoother than it had the night before, but the sharp pricks of stubble growth still grazed her hand.

"Tell me," she said softly. "Let me help."

Quinn looked up, holding her gaze. His sapphire eyes glistened with sincerity and something else, something she recognized as apprehension and perhaps even a hint of fear.

Her pulse quickened in response. "What is it? You're scaring me."

"My crew found temporary quarters on Enigma for the other women Christian had been holding prisoner. They're safe now."

Anger rippled down Rhyanne's spine at the thought of what those men were going to do to their captives. She shook it off, knowing Christian and Dra'meer couldn't hurt anyone any more. "That was very kind."

"We couldn't very well leave them there for the Alpha Assassins to find. Everyone deserves a chance to be free." He took a deep breath, cringing as though the admission pained him, then continued. "We've managed to outdistance the Assassins by a decent margin, but they'll keep coming. They won't rest until they find us. Enigma has been marked as an official Alpha Carrier Vessel, which means we're to be shot down on sight if we near Earth. Normally, that wouldn't be so bad, since we'd just avoid the place, but we have a crewmember who got left behind. Dante was still enjoying the Festival when Enigma took off in a hurry."

Rhyanne gasped. "This is all my fault."

Quinn's eyes widened. He lifted himself to sit beside her. "Oh, baby, is that what you think?"

"That's what I know," she retorted. "If I hadn't run away from Faye, Christian wouldn't have captured me. You never would have shifted in front of those Central Command officers. Your ship wouldn't have been tagged. Your crew wouldn't be in danger."

To her surprise, he grinned, a full, broad smile that lit up his face. "We've been in danger before. Besides, you were worth it."

She tilted her head, scrutinizing him. "Then why did you look so worried a moment ago?"

His smile faded. "I came in here to tell you we'll be making a quick pit stop on Omega N-17. It's a space station," he said when he saw her puzzled expression. "We know people there who will take good care of the women we rescued. I came to ask if you wanted to go with them."

Rhyanne's heart lurched in her chest. She struggled to make sense of his words. "Are you sending me away?"

Quinn sighed. "Saints, no. I want nothing more than to have you by my side for the rest of my life. But I want this to be your choice. I want you to stay with me -- with *us* -- because you want to be here. Not because I own you, or because you have nowhere else to go. Because you do, you know. There's a world of opportunity out there, outside Terran influence. I can even arrange for you to meet with a surgeon who can remove that chip without damaging the veins underneath."

Rhyanne lifted her right arm and turned it up to examine the chip embedded in her skin. It still glowed a furious orange. She rubbed her wrist with her other hand and returned her gaze to Quinn's.

She suddenly recognized the anxiety in his eyes for what it was. Fear of losing her. Happiness swelled inside her. She wanted to laugh, to allow all the pent-up doubt and frustration to escape. She was free. She was safe.

And she was loved.

Forming a silent prayer to Saint Valentine, she beamed a playful smile at Quinn.

"Take off your clothes," she commanded. If she was going to get used to this equality thing, she might as well get started.

Quinn's eyebrows shot up. "Is that a yes? You'll stay?"

She lifted a shoulder in a delicate half-shrug. "That all depends."

"On?"

"How well you please me."

He gaped at her for a moment, before he realized she was joking. His laugh rang out through his quarters, infusing the room with even more of his compelling male energy.

Rhyanne breathed it in, her head spinning with the potent intoxication of this man, this moment. Their future was uncertain, but it was *theirs*.

Quinn rose to his feet and tugged down the twin zippers of his uniform. She watched as he peeled off the material and tossed it behind him. It landed on the vid-screen, covering the monitor.

He stalked toward her, his predatory gait no longer foreign to her. She remembered the way he'd looked in wolf form, all sleek lines and raw feral power. Her heart raced. He'd been beautiful as a wolf. As a human, he was breathtaking.

His shaft speared the air before him, thrusting out from among a patch of dark curls. She beckoned him closer by crooking her finger and he obeyed, moving to stand by the edge of the bed.

Rhyanne reached out and curled her fingers around his cock, then lowered her mouth so that her breath fluttered over the drop of pre-cum glistening at the tip of his rod. Quinn groaned and tossed his head back. "I thought you wanted me to please you."

"Later. Right now, the only thing I want is to taste you."

Not waiting for a response, she took him between her lips, sweeping her tongue over the tip of his cock and catching the wetness that had lingered there. The musky, slightly salty flavor of his seed flooded her senses, making her pussy clench in anticipation.

She rose to her knees, letting the sheet fall off her body. Grabbing his ass so that she had complete control over an experience she'd trained for her entire life, but had never truly been able to savor, she sucked him deep inside her mouth.

Quinn thrust his hips forward, spearing the back of her throat. She'd been too well trained to gag, and simply adjusted her grip on him so that her air channels remained free while the weight of his cock settled on her tongue.

Quinn wrapped his fingers in her hair and tugged gently, groaning as she devoured him with her tongue, her lips, her mouth. She released him for a moment and nibbled down the length of his shaft, then drew one of his tight balls into her mouth, her cupped fingers jerking over his cock.

She dug her fingers into his firm ass, bringing him closer, her tongue making quick, circular designs up and down his cock, over his sac, in the crease where his leg connected to his groin. She couldn't get enough of him. She wanted to taste him everywhere until she knew the exact flavor of every inch on his skin.

Abruptly, he yanked on her hair, tearing her mouth away from his pulsing rod. "Let me be inside you when I come. I want to feel your pussy squeeze every drop from my cock."

"Yes ... Oh, Saints, yes."

Rhyanne lay back, spreading her legs. Quinn wasted no time moving into position between her parted thighs. She watched as he grabbed his cock and settled the soaked tip at the entrance to her swollen pussy.

"Now, please," she whimpered. "I need you."

He thrust deep inside her in one quick motion, burying himself in her tight, wet heat. They both cried out as her sex gripped him. Quinn panted, his hands moving over her breasts, pinching her nipples.

She gasped at the intense fiery pleasure streaming through her. It came from everywhere -- from her breasts where his hands brushed her skin, from her cunt where his cock drove into her, from her mouth when he lowered his head to claim her lips.

She'd never felt anything more perfect in her entire life.

Quinn thrust into her mouth, his cock mimicking his motions. Her body quivered with barely controlled passion. Instinctively, she lifted her legs, wrapping them around Quinn's waist, pulling him deeper inside her.

His cock pulsed inside her velvety depths. Her inner muscles clenched around him, milking him, fluttering as raw sensations rippled through every nerve ending.

He plunged into her, sinking deeper until she knew she'd taken everything he had to give. And still he offered more, grinding his hips against hers, pressing down on her clit with slow, precise motions that hit her pleasure nub and sent heat spiraling through her cunt.

"You've been well trained." Her tongue swept out and her teeth latched on to his earlobe, nibbling gently.

"So have you," he whispered, teasing her with another small thrust.

His cock felt hard as stone inside her. His jaw was clenched, and she knew he was holding back his own pleasure, wanting her to experience release before he came.

The knowledge that her ecstasy meant more to him than his own undid her. Her pussy rippled as her orgasm broke free and shattered through her, tensing her muscles, ripping a cry from her throat.

Quinn wasn't far behind. With a feral growl she'd come to recognize, he erupted inside her. She felt his cock pump his seed deep inside her channel, soaking her inner walls. He held his weight on his outstretched arms and cried out, releasing everything he had into her.

When she was certain there wasn't a drop left, she reached up and placed a slow, open-mouthed kiss on his lips. He responded in kind, then slid off her and curled on his side, one arm draped over her belly in a possessive and altogether comforting gesture.

Heat radiated from him in waves. Their bodies stuck together, sweat drenching them both.

Even with an elite squadron of highly trained assassins on their trail, Rhyanne knew she'd never been happier.

She ran her fingertips down his chest. "I'm not familiar with Alpha mating rituals," she admitted.

Quinn laughed and wiggled his brows. “I’d say you figured out how it works quickly enough.” He tossed a leg on either side of her thighs and climbed on top of her, letting his rapidly hardening cock nudge her slick nether lips. “But just in case ... let me teach you everything I know.”

 THE END 

Lacey Savage

Lacey Savage began her love affair with romance at an early age. In high school, she checked out steamy romance novels from the public library and would often be found reading them in the middle of class.

Lacey still reads more than she cares to admit, and probably more than her husband would like, considering how many books she keeps bringing into the house. Her favorite genres have always been erotica, romance, fantasy, science fiction and mystery, so she tries to incorporate a little of each into her writing.

She initially majored in Marketing, then went back to school to major in English Literature. After earning her degrees, she decided to turn her efforts to her true passion: writing. A hopeless romantic, Lacey loves writing about the intimate, sensual side of relationships.

She currently resides in Ottawa, Canada, with her loving husband and their mischievous cat.

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