

Devarian Pleasure-Slave

Sierra Dafoe

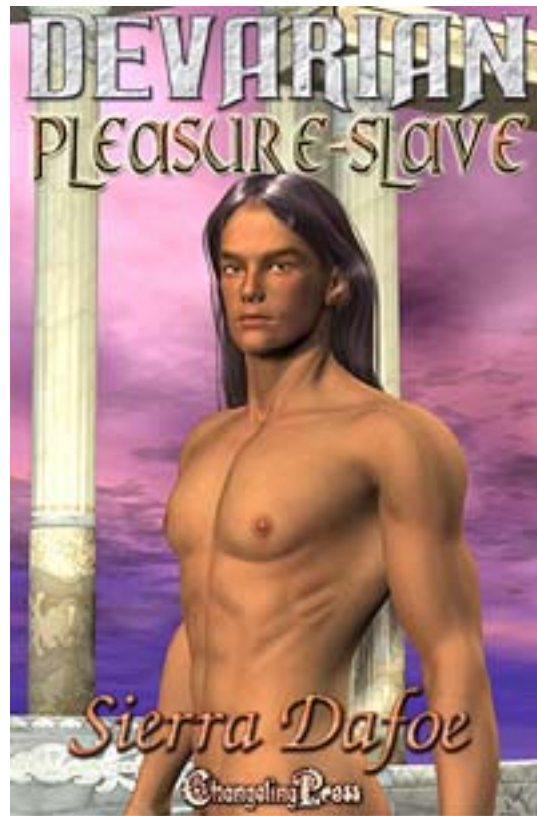
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Devarian Pleasure-Slave

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Kasmalia is a far cry from the prestigious markets of Porto V, where only the most beautiful, most finely trained pleasure-slaves are offered for sale. On Porto, it is said, one can buy the best -- but on Kasmalia, one can buy anything, no matter how depraved or illegal, an hour at a time.

The young, handsome Merkun, bound by his sex to a lifetime of slavery, nevertheless aspires to escape the clutches of the seamy brothel-owner who's purchased him. When she enters him in Kasmalia's annual pleasure-slave contest, he manages to capture the attention of the Regent of Porto herself.

With his stunning looks, his unmatched sensuality, and sheer determination, Merkun quickly becomes her favored third in her ménages. But when he realizes he is falling in love with the woman who rescued him, can Merkun capture the Regent's heart, as well?

Prologue

If she'd been a little less outspoken in her opinions, thought Lieutenant Amista as she swung the roaring Guardian around and smashed a fist into her face, she wouldn't be here now. Policing drunken soldiers on Kasmalia was hardly what she'd spent six years training for, but she had neither the family connections nor wealth to leverage herself into a *real* posting.

Which simply meant she'd have to rise on her own merits.

And, she added wryly, learn to keep my opinions to myself. She doubted she'd be particularly successful at it though.

In the meantime, she would do her duty -- however distasteful it might be.

Wrinkling her nose at the wine-sodden stench of the soldier she'd just rendered unconscious, Amista let the limp form slump into her arms. "Five demerits," she said, handing the miscreant off to the sergeant beside her. "And she's restricted to base for the next two cycles."

"Yes, Lieutenant."

Amista raked her gaze around the dimly lit room. Two tables were overturned, and the handful of scrawny, lank-haired pleasure-slaves the tavern offered were cowering against the rickety steps leading to the cramped upstairs rooms. The companions of the soldier who'd been dispatched so summarily glared at Amista with the timeless resentment of bullies who've had their fun cut short by Authority.

Well, she wasn't in this to win any popularity awards. Amista returned their glares sternly. "I trust there'll be no repetition of this?" Their headshakes were surly, but she didn't particularly want to pursue it further. "Good."

Striding outside, she inhaled deeply to clear her lungs of the smoky tavern air, and immediately regretted it. The hot, muggy evening was thick with the scents of sewage, sweat, and the spew of drunken soldiers.

The district Amista was assigned to, one of the seamier sections of Kasmalia's capital city, was far from the upscale pleasure houses and the mansions of the wealthy. Here, the brothels and bars that were the planet's main source of income looked both garish and battered in the fading sunlight.

It was, in Amista's opinion, one of the most objectionable planets in the whole Nine-Star League.

Striding through the crowd -- many of whom were already staggering, even at this early hour -- she was surprised by the sound of light, quick footsteps behind her. She turned to see a small, wiry figure darting through the pedestrians, nimbly avoiding their reaching hands.

Risking a quick backward glance -- *at what?* Amista wondered -- he crashed, hard enough to knock the breath from her lungs, directly into her midriff. Automatically, she seized the ragged tunic, then transferred her grip to his thick brown hair as the little hellion tried to wriggle away.

The frantic strength of this small, fiercely fighting person impressed her. Despite her hold on his hair, he kept lunging forward, trying to escape.

"Let me go!" he shrieked, his fingers working insistently at her fist. "Let me go!"

With a jerk, she tilted his head back, and he glared up at her from hazel eyes that burned with resentful rage. Even now he kept thrashing, unwilling to admit defeat, but his gyrations were no match for Amista's battle-hardened muscles.

So this was a boy. She'd never actually seen one before. Generally, male children stayed in the child-houses until they were sixteen, at which point they were sold off to private owners, or shipped to whatever posting the League needed them at.

This one was seven, perhaps eight, Amista guessed. What was he doing here?

The answer came soon enough, as shouts rose behind her and the boy renewed his frantic efforts to escape. She held him firmly as four heavysset women, dressed in the drab tan uniforms of child-house keepers, pounded through the crowd.

"There you are, you little weasel!" The foremost keeper, a scowling, pinch-faced woman, dashed forward as if to snatch the boy from Amista's grasp. Then, at Amista's flat stare, she checked abruptly, ducking her head in a servile fashion that did little to hide her rage. "Forgive the interruption, Guardian. That's the fourth time this one's run away!"

"Does he have some particular reason to?" Amista asked, mildly enough.

The woman shrugged, avoiding her eyes. "No more'n the rest of them," she replied. "Doesn't care for the thought of being snipped." The callousness in her voice made Amista wince inwardly.

Squatting beside the boy, but keeping a careful grip on his arms, she asked, "Is that it, boy? You don't want to be gelded?"

"I don't care about that," he answered sullenly -- and honestly, Amista guessed. He'd be too young to really comprehend what it meant. "I just want to get away."

Amista stared at him, nonplussed. "Get away? From what? From the child-house?"

He shrugged. "That. Them. All of it. I want to be free."

Amista studied him a moment. His lips were drawn into a scowl that, despite the presence of the four women behind him, had lost none of its determination. She couldn't help feeling a certain admiration for this small, scrappy creature whose thin frame held such spirit.

Glancing over his shoulder, she noted the dour anger of the women. She could well imagine what punishment had met his previous attempts -- and yet he'd tried again.

The foremost woman moved to reclaim him, but Amista waved her back. "Listen to me, boy. You'll never be free. You know that, right?"

His shoulders twitched -- a motion that was both acknowledgement and denial of her words. She repeated them. "It won't happen. Even if you did escape, there's nowhere to escape *to*. You'd be caught and brought back, and likely killed."

His eyes rose to her face, dark and haunted. They were really quite remarkable, Amista thought, a warm, liquescent hazel with flecks of gold deep within them. From their grim expression, she realized he knew quite well what the possible ramifications of his actions would be.

She bit her lip a moment, pondering. Then, lightening her tone, she raised her voice, addressing the keeper. "Seems almost a pity to snip this one."

The woman laughed scornfully. "Well, he'd never make a pleasure-slave, if that's what you're thinking. Too rebellious, and too scrawny."

"Oh, I don't know," Amista replied, tilting her head as she studied the boy. "He'll be big enough, I'd say. And look at his eyes, the bones of his face... He'll be a beauty when he's grown, if I'm any judge."

She saw the flicker of contemptuous glances the keepers gave each other. Obviously, in their eyes, she *wasn't* any judge.

She *was*, however, a first lieutenant in the Guardian Forces of the Nine-Star League, and as such had quite a bit of clout, even in a matter like this.

If she wanted to use it.

Amista decided she did. "This one stays ungelded. Understand? He's to be a pleasure-slave. And he'll behave, too -- won't you, boy? No more running away." At the rebellious look in his eyes, she added, dropping her voice to a murmur, "It's a better life than most. Take it."

He looked up at her with a sharp, assessing gaze that Amista found distinctly disconcerting in one so young. Behind those remarkable eyes, she could see his thoughts moving, turning over possibilities. "Freedom's not an option," she added quietly. "This is the best I can do for you."

He paused for a moment, then nodded solemnly. Amista released him. Resolutely, he squared his skinny shoulders and walked toward the waiting women.

At their expressions, Amista added hastily, "And don't punish him, either. He won't try it again."

Despite their black scowls, she was relatively certain they'd obey. She nodded to them, intending to stride away, but something kept her standing there, watching that small figure disappearing into the crowd, surrounded by the women who towered over him like prison guards. Something about his rigidly upright posture brought an unexpected prickle of tears to Amista's eyes.

Good luck, boy.

As she finally turned away, she realized she'd never bothered to ask his name.

Chapter One

Merkun swirled his tongue over the engorged head of Gendron's cock, then probed lightly at its gaping slit. Groaning, Gendron tilted his head back, straining forward against his bonds. Around them, Merkun could feel the hot, lust-clouded gazes of the spectators, just beyond the Pit lights, watching them intently.

He arched his spine, displaying his fine, muscular ass to the women crowded close around the Pit, and shook his head back, sending his long, lustrous chestnut hair falling, thick and straight, around his broad shoulders.

It was doubly arousing, knowing he was being watched. And useful, too. The Pit was the easiest place to attract new patrons, women who would pay -- and pay well -- to have him in the private rooms on the second floor. Sometimes they would bring him gifts. And Teretria invariably rewarded him for each new patron he secured.

He didn't really have to work the Pit any more -- at this point, he was just about Teretria's highest-priced pleasure-slave, and his nights were usually booked well in advance. But two patrons had cancelled tonight, and rather than pose in the PleasureDrome's garden, a living advertisement of the wares available inside, Merkun had volunteered for the Pit. Hanging around in the garden was boring.

Relaxing his jaw, he rocked forward on hands and knees, engulfing Gendron's rigid, throbbing cock inch by inch until his lips circled the very base, and heard a sigh of arousal from the women pressed close around the low wall. At least he wasn't the one bound tonight -- it was far easier to display yourself well when you weren't trussed to the restraining post.

He liked performing with Gendron. He liked his cock, the thickness of it, the feel of its warm hardness pressed firmly against the back of his throat. Gazing up at the blond man standing before him, his hands tied behind the post, Merkun teased the

underside of Gendron's shaft with his tongue until the bound slave whimpered, thrusting his hips forward and plunging his cock deep into Merkun's throat.

From the corner of his eye, Merkun could make out some of the women observing them -- a smattering of minor officials, city workers, and the ever-present Guardians, of course, scattered around the large semi-cellar that was the Pit room. Along the walls, tables were raised on platforms, the candles on them flickering in the darkness, but most of the room's inhabitants were crowded around the Pit itself, holding their drinks and watching. Wine-boys moved among them, refilling glasses, taking orders for the bar from customers whose gazes remained avidly fixed on the display before them.

There was no one Merkun saw who was of particular interest as a potential patron. Well, the Pit was like that -- some nights you might attract three or four new customers. Other nights, there'd be no one worth cultivating.

Reaching forward, he cupped Gendron's balls, enjoying the feel of their swollen weight against his palm. Playfully, he kneaded them, working his fingers over the taut skin, and heard both Gendron and the watching women groan. He could feel their arousal, a thick, animalistic heat that seemed to pound at him, urging him to bring the scene to its climax.

But after three years in the PleasureDrome, Merkun knew exactly how to perform for an audience, how to tease them into a state of mindless fascination -- an ability that *thrilled* Teretria, the brothel's owner. He had a talent, as she'd put it one night, for making them spread their purse strings even further than they spread their thighs.

It was a mixed achievement. On the one hand, his abilities assured him the best treatment Teretria afforded a slave -- a private, if claustrophobically tiny, bedchamber, rather than a cot in the communal dormitory, the best food, exotic scents for his skin and hair...

And on the other it meant he might *never* escape. He didn't mind his profession (if one could call it that, seeing as he had no choice); indeed, Merkun reveled in his

skills. Possessed of an innately sensuous nature, he had added to it every tool of seduction he could learn, honing his talent with a fiery determination. To be free of the pleasure-houses! Free of the grasping paws of drunken Guardians, the demands of petty officials who indulged in every strange, sordid vice imaginable...

The only way he could ever escape them would be to find a patron wealthy enough -- and infatuated enough -- to buy him from Teretria.

But Kasmalia was a far cry from the glittering sands of Porto V, home of the greatest slave markets in the galaxy, where only the finest pleasure-slaves were offered to discerning -- and powerful -- buyers. The tone of Kasmalia was different; more jaded, seamier. Conveniently situated near three major Guardian bases, the planet catered to the military -- and to a clientele that looked for a distinctly darker brand of pleasure than Porto offered.

The universal adage summed it up nicely, Merkun thought. On Porto, it said, one could buy the best. But on Kasmalia, one could buy *anything*, an hour at a time.

"Come on, slave! Suck him harder!" The shout came from a drunken Guardian with a nose that had obviously been broken more than once. She was hanging over the wall, her eyes glittering in her broad, unpleasant face. She grinned at the two soldiers with her, and shouted again. "I said harder, slave!"

Above him, Merkun could feel Gendron tense, his erection losing some of its stiffness. Looking up, Merkun caught his eye, reassuring him with a glance. Gendron's bonds were secured with a slipknot -- one yank and Merkun could have him free, in case things got ugly. It had happened, on occasion.

Cutting his gaze over, Merkun could see the flat-nosed Guardian, her face growing increasingly surly as he ignored her. If she so much as made a move to climb over the wall... She didn't. Instead, she reached out and grabbed Haru, a wine-boy still ten months below the legal age for a working pleasure-slave, and jerked him to her roughly.

Haru's eyes widened like a frightened deer's, and the boy dropped the tray he was carrying with a crash. The Guardian's hands slid over him. Sneering, she said,

"Hell with him. I bet *this* one will do whatever I tell him -- won't you, pretty?" Thrusting her hand roughly down the boy's tunic, she slobbered in his ear as she pinned him against her.

Leaping to his feet, Merkun yanked Gendron's bonds free and bounded over the wall. Without thinking, he grabbed the soldier and tugged at her arm. That was enough to let Haru twist from her grasp and bound away, yelling for Teretria -- but now the Guardian spun toward him with a snarl. With three deft moves, she had him on his knees, his arm pinioned behind his back as she straddled him, grinding his face into the carpet. Bending low, she hissed in his ear, "Fine. Then *you'll* do what I want -- slave."

Merkun thrashed, but could do nothing as she wrenched his head up, thrusting it forward against the crotch of one of her companions. "Unbutton her pants."

"I can't," Merkun gasped, tugging futilely at the arm she still held behind his back.

"Use your teeth, pretty." She pushed his face harder against her friend's groin. The harsh fabric of the uniform chafed against his cheek, and both frightened and seething with fury, Merkun closed his teeth around the snap.

"What's going on here?" A voice, stern and commanding, cut through the darkness. The three soldiers froze.

Craning his neck, Merkun managed to glimpse a tall, broad-shouldered woman, her thick brown hair cut short for ease under a helmet, in the gleaming battle-armor of a Guardian captain. Everything about her radiated a tense, poised readiness.

She glanced at the soldiers coolly. "Asha. Celebrating your promotion, I see."

The other two nodded, but Asha -- who was, apparently, the one straddling him, still pinning his arm against his naked back -- didn't reply.

"Loose him, Asha. Now."

Scowling, Asha slid off him and stood glaring at the captain. Behind her, Merkun could see Teretria hurrying down the shallow steps from the public-room.

"This ain't Marbul, Captain. I'm not under your orders here."

The captain's hand flicked out, the heavy gauntlet gleaming, and Asha's head rocked back from the blow. She staggered, and her companions caught her.

"That's for insolence." The captain faced the trio squarely. "And you *are* under my orders, Asha -- here, and anywhere else." She raised her voice, her stern, commanding tone carrying clearly through the dimly lit room. "All troops have been recalled to Marbul. General muster is at oh two hundred." She smiled at Asha. "I suggest you sober up and get to the portals -- now."

Still on his hands and knees, his long brown hair hanging in his face, Merkun could nevertheless see the stir of activity as Guardians pushed back their chairs or set down their drinks and headed for the exit. He breathed a sigh of relief as Asha turned to follow.

"Are you all right? Can you stand?"

Merkun stared dumbly at the gauntleted hand extended to him. Hesitantly, he reached for it, and felt himself pulled to his feet as Teretria rushed up. "Captain Amista, I *do* so apologize for any trouble Merkun has caused! Believe me, I will make certain he's punished for this --"

"Punished? Why? He wasn't at fault."

"But, Captain, please -- you *must* allow me to make it up to you. Perhaps a drink? Or --"

"Regrettably, I've an emergency meeting on Marbul shortly." Amista cut her off brusquely, and turned toward Merkun. Her eyes widened slightly.

Merkun knew what she was seeing -- the strong, chiseled chin, the well-molded cheekbones, the warm hazel eyes which Merkun himself didn't find so extraordinary but which nevertheless seemed to captivate women. Personally, he liked his mouth; the full lower lip that always seemed curved in a soft, knowing smile; the upper lip with its slight indentation Teretria had once described as *Gallic*, whatever that was. His skin was both clear and dusky, with a golden glow to it that looked well by the low lamplight of the Pit.

"Then another time, perhaps..." Teretria dithered at the captain's elbow.

Amista studied Merkun's face, a strange, piercing light in her cool gray eyes. Without losing his gaze, she replied, "I've changed my mind. I've got an hour to spare. How much for him?"

"Well, usually he's two hundred solars an hour, Captain, but for you..." Over the captain's shoulder, Merkun saw the avaricious gleam in Teretria's eyes.

"Shall we say half that? I haven't got time to dicker with you, Teretria."

"Yes, yes, of course..."

Without waiting for her to finish, Amista strode away toward the steps. Teretria clutched at Merkun's arm as he moved to follow. "The blue room," she whispered urgently. Merkun nodded, hiding his surprise -- the blue room was usually reserved for the wealthiest and most influential of Teretria's customers. He glanced after Amista speculatively as Teretria continued, her voice low and intent, "And make sure she enjoys it."

At that, Merkun smiled. Making sure they enjoyed it was what had made him Teretria's highest-priced pleasure-slave, after all.

* * *

Opening the door to the blue room, Merkun moved smoothly to light the scented oil lamps placed strategically around the spacious chamber. Behind him, Amista closed the door, leaned against it, and watched him with a small, ironic smile as he readied the bed, turning down the rich silk coverlet that matched the azure hue of the walls. She waited until he was finished and had come to kneel gracefully at her feet, awaiting her command.

"You don't remember me, do you?"

Merkun looked up, startled. "My lady?"

He was puzzled. His memory was one of his strengths, and he would have sworn he could remember almost every client he'd ever had, by face and sexual appetite if not by name.

"No matter." She turned to give him access to the buckles of her armor. With a deftness born of long practice Merkun stood and loosened the heavy shoulder-plates and chest guard, placing them on the armor rack beside the door.

Amista was nearly as tall as he -- of course, he wasn't as huge as some of Teretria's slaves. His appeal lay rather in the stunning proportions of his broad chest, his wide, handsomely muscled shoulders and long, tapered torso, rather than in sheer mass.

And he was, as Teretria had commented when she'd bought him from the child-house, more than big enough where it mattered.

Amista's face in profile was like granite, gracefully carved; strong jaw, broad, flat cheekbones, the brows two almost-straight lines across her high forehead. She was, he thought, perhaps a decade older than he -- her smooth forehead was still unwrinkled, but he could see where the marks of care and responsibility would soon be. She glanced at him as he knelt again to remove her shin greaves and thigh guards, her gray eyes distant, almost nostalgic.

For what? Merkun wondered as he reached for her sword-belt. She brushed his hand aside. "No, I'll do that."

He sat back on his heels, watching her. Her movements were sparse and economical, like her frame. Removing her scabbard, she laid her sword in the velvet-padded bracket. Her fingers caressed the hilt a moment -- not lovingly, Merkun thought. Pensively, rather. Whatever her thoughts were, they were far beyond his experience.

She didn't so much as glance at him as she pulled off her tunic. Underneath, she was thin as a whipcord, the muscles of her shoulders and arms standing out in sharp relief, not handsome and rounded as his were, but taut, powerful -- made for use, not show. Her breasts were fuller than he'd imagined under her heavy armor; scant, but with graceful curves and small, erect nipples. A scar, knotted and whitish, snaked across the left side of her ribcage, emphasizing rather than detracting from the smoothness of her lean abdomen.

She grimaced as she looked over at him. "Not much to look at, I know. But you're used to soldiers by now, I'd imagine."

He dropped his gaze immediately.

"No matter," she said again. He felt her hand trail down the side of his cheek and tilt his chin up. "You're beautiful enough for the both of us -- Merkun." Her gray eyes were luminous in the lamplight as she traced a finger over his full lower lip, her mouth curved in a curious smile. "More beautiful, even, than I'd expected."

"My lady?"

She shook her head, and strode to the massive, four-poster bed, sitting on the edge with her arms draped over her knees, her powerful shoulders gleaming in the lamplight. Her gaze ranged around the dimly lit room, and her forehead knotted.

Well, chasing away unpleasant thoughts was his forte. Rising, he crossed and kneeled again before her, drawing her foot into his lap. "Is this all right, my lady?" he asked as he kneaded the tough sole, his strong, clever fingers unerringly finding the sore spots.

Letting out a low groan, she replied, "Space, yes."

He massaged her foot, working his fingers deep into the arch until she groaned again and leaned back on the bed. Releasing her foot, he reached for the other.

Propping herself up on her elbows, Amista watched as he rubbed it, her eyes half-closed now, the muscles in her jaw relaxing.

"Tell me something, Merkun," she said, her voice low and husky. "Do you like what you do?"

Merkun nodded. "Yes." And he did. For some slaves, the demands placed upon them might be a burden, something to be suffered through. But he reveled in his skills. There was a certain power in the ability to please his patrons -- more, to transform them into quivering, moaning creatures, utterly possessed by their bodies' desires.

He was wholly unaware that there was a certain contempt in it, too.

But there was something about Amista -- a strength of purpose, of personality, maybe. She seemed even sterner when undressed, more forceful, as if stripping away

the shining carapace of her armor had only revealed more clearly the essential warrior beneath. The battle-toughened muscles of her stomach testified as clearly as the scar snaking along her ribcage to years of harsh experience. Her body had been used as mercilessly as his had -- but for war, not love.

"Why do you ask, my lady?" Then, greatly daring, "Why should you care?"

Amista rose abruptly. Moving to the sideboard, she poured herself a glass of wine, not looking at him as she took a sip. Her face was pensive, grave. Apparently, for whatever reason, she *did* care, and deeply.

At that realization, a novel emotion unfolded inside Merkun. No one had ever cared about him before, about what he thought, or how he felt...

Rising, he crossed to her. Then, purposefully holding her gaze, he took the glass from her hand, placed it on the sideboard, and knelt before her. He leaned forward and brushed his lips, not over the smooth flesh of her stomach, but across the hard white line of her scar.

Amista sucked in a sharp, surprised breath.

She didn't move as he dropped gentle kisses the length of the scar, following its knotted flesh below the curves of her breasts. Then he raised his mouth, and her eyes fell closed as he traced the soft underside of one breast with his tongue, swirling it closer and closer to the darkening nipple. When she arched her back, pressing her breasts forward into his touch, Merkun smiled in triumph.

Flicking his tongue over her pebbled nipple, he felt it contract further in arousal. Then, drawing back, he caressed her sides, his sensitive hands noting each swell of hard muscle, every indentation...

"Are you seducing me, Merkun, or counting my ribs?" Amista asked. She shifted uncomfortably -- not, he was certain, because she wasn't enjoying it. Her nipples were fully erect, and the telltale flush under her skin betrayed her arousal. Her voice was gruff, almost surprised, but Merkun could smell the warm female fragrance of her. Not disinterested then. Nervous?

Why?

"Neither, my lady." He looked up at her. "Does it bother you?"

"No." Her voice was clipped, cold, contradicting her assertion.

"What is it, then?"

"I... You're so beautiful, Merkun." Reaching down, she stroked his cheek, and smiled wryly. "And I..."

Merkun's eyes widened. *She* was worried about being attractive to *him*!

He closed his eyes, feeling a surge of desire so sharp it was almost painful. "Oh, my lady," he whispered. Then he stood, keeping his gaze fixed on hers as he lowered his lips to her mouth.

Amista's face softened, vulnerable in sudden confusion, and her eyelids fell shut as he prodded gently with his tongue, exploring, tasting, then breaking off to kiss her cheeks, her forehead, her firm, determined jaw.

She swallowed, her breaths deepening, as Merkun moved his mouth downward, his lips and tongue caressing the smooth skin of her neck. He was doubly determined to give this woman the best of himself.

Leading her to the bed, he eased her down onto it and sat beside her. Then, lightly, he ran his hand down the flat of her stomach, grazing the dark curls of her sex.

She gasped and spread her legs -- but instead Merkun trailed his palm back upward, cupping one small, firm breast as he lowered his mouth to it. Flicking the sensitive tip with his tongue, he heard Amista moan, deep in her throat, as her arms slid around his neck, holding him there.

In response, he suckled avidly, enjoying the feel of her nipple, warm and hard and musky sweet, in his mouth. He couldn't get enough of it. Running the flat of his tongue over it, he groaned lightly, and raised his hand to her other breast, rubbing his palm over and over the rubbery tip.

She was arching against him, her hips hungrily nudging his stone-hard cock -- but Merkun wasn't about to be rushed. Not with her. Not tonight.

Tugging her nipple deeper into his mouth, he closed his fingers around the other and pinched it lightly. Sliding his free hand down to her damp cleft, he prodded gently, feeling his cock throb at the hot slickness of her cunt.

As he tormented her breasts, Merkun stroked his thumb between her furred lips, pressing lightly against the warm nub of her clit. Amista cried out, clamping her hand around his wrist as she strained against his hand, her body shuddering with the force of her sudden orgasm.

Panting, she fell back, looking up at him with wide, wondering eyes. One strand of her short brown hair clung damply to her flushed cheek. Gently, Merkun brushed it back.

"Has it been so long, then, my lady?"

"Merkun, I... I seldom go to brothels."

A wholly unexpected jealousy spread like ice in the pit of his stomach. Merkun thrust it aside -- such an untoward emotion! -- and mustered a smile. "He is a very lucky man then, your pleasure-slave."

"I don't own one."

"You... but..."

Amista's eyes were so dark they looked almost black. "Tell me something, Merkun. Would you be doing this, now, if I hadn't paid for you? If it were your choice?"

Chapter Two

Merkun stared at her. His choice? His *choice*? The concept was so alien, so utterly exotic. Yet he remembered, vaguely, a time when he'd believed that he *should* have a choice, a time when there'd been a fierce, unquenchable determination inside him to...

What?

To be free. And he'd run away from the child-house, over and over again, heedless of the beatings he knew he'd get when they caught him, until...

"You," he breathed. She looked up at him, her eyes wide. Merkun blinked back the sudden confusion of emotions inside him. "It was you, that day in the street."

"Yes."

Merkun's heart thundered in his breast. That stern young woman who'd set him on this path... He looked at her again. She'd grown grimmer with the years, honed like a knife blade to a killing edge. And yet she'd shown an eight-year-old boy compassion and mercy.

Holding her gaze, he slid downward on the bed, trailing his chin down her stomach, kissing it, flicking his tongue into the cup of her navel. His erection pulsed with arousal. Would he be doing this right now, if she hadn't paid for him?

Yes, absolutely.

He started to move his mouth lower, but Amista caught his chin in her hands, stopping him. "Merkun, no. You don't have to do that."

At that, a grin spread over his face, welling up from someplace deep inside him. He felt gleefully wicked as he tugged his head from her grasp. "Yes, my lady. But I'm going to."

Her eyes widened in shock, and he grinned even more as he parted her thighs and lowered his mouth to her glistening cunt.

Heat exploded inside him as he tasted her, the juices of her orgasm warm and tangy on his tongue. Groaning, he thrust his tongue deep into her, hungry for more, and felt her hands slide into his hair. Thick and lustrous, it trailed across her thighs, caressing them even as he darted his tongue along the length of her clit. She bucked, raising her hips off the bed, and he groaned with pleasure as her hands curled into fists, pulling his mouth even harder against her.

She moaned heedlessly, and Merkun felt his desire redouble. It was almost unbearably arousing, knowing how much she wanted him, wanted his touch, his tongue...

His cock was so hard it felt like iron, and pre-come poured freely from the slit in its tip. Clamping his lips over her clit, he suckled fervently, his tongue lashing her swollen nub until her cries spiraled upward and she thrashed below him, thrusting herself up against his hot, tugging mouth.

He sucked even harder, and slid one finger into her hot, tight passage, so slick with her juices it felt like warm honey. Plunging deeper, he felt his mind fill with red, smoky lust as she raised herself to him, grinding her mons against his mouth and forcing his eager finger inside her as far as it would go.

Sliding his hand back, he added a second finger, pushing them into her in time with her thrusts until her body stiffened with pleasure, and her cunt clamped around his fingers, squeezing and releasing as her orgasm started. Speeding his pace, he lashed her clit with his tongue, drilling his fingers in and out of her as she peaked, crying out wantonly, her entire body shuddering with the force of her climax.

Finally, she fell back, gasping hoarsely. "*Gods*, Merkun. How do you do that to me?"

Merkun rested his chin on her belly and looked up at her. "The same way you get to Carnegie Hall." Her brow wrinkled in confusion. Merkun smiled. "Practice, my lady."

At that Amista laughed, throwing her head back. Merkun laid his cheek against the warm, hard plane of her belly, feeling a contentment unlike anything he'd experienced before. "Oh, Merkun," she chuckled. "It's been so long since I laughed."

Merkun didn't know how to respond to that, though her words sent a warm tingle of pleasure through him. "What is Carnegie Hall, my lady? Do you know?"

He felt her shake her head. "I've no idea."

Reaching up, he toyed with one breast, rolling the nipple idly between thumb and forefinger. It hardened under his touch, and Amista's breath hitched in her chest. Then he felt her hands on his shoulders, tugging him upward, and Merkun raised himself onto his arms above her.

His hair fell around them, enclosing them in a small, intimate space. Amista gazed up at him, her eyes cool and distant with so much experience, and yet wide with arousal as she stroked his back, his shoulders, the large muscles of his arms.

"You are so beautiful, Merkun. So lovely."

She was too far above him, he thought. But no -- it was *he* who was above *her*, right now, right this moment. And she wanted him there as much as he wanted to be there.

He pressed his cock lightly against her warm slit. "Is this what you want?" he whispered, feeling his voice low and hoarse in his throat. He flexed his hips lightly, pushing his hot, engorged tip between her sodden folds. "Is this what you want, my lady?"

"Gods, yes."

She arched her back, and Merkun thrust forward, feeling his shaft spread her open as he shoved in to the hilt.

She moaned, and her cunt gripped him in a vise-like hold.

Merkun trembled, fighting to hold back the fire that roared through his groin, swelling his balls till they felt like hot marble. Below him, Amista tossed her head, her groans making his head spin with need.

Her cunt was like velvet, slick and hot, gripping him with each stroke. It was absolute ecstasy to drive himself into it, feeling his huge, swollen head drag against the walls of her passage. Giving himself over to the delirious sensation, he glided in and out of her in a slow, intoxicating rhythm.

Her face went lax as she succumbed to that steady, seductive motion, dragging her back into the mindless depths of desire. Her fingers dug into the rounded muscle of his ass, and he saw her bite her lip as a hoarse cry escaped her. In response, he thrust harder, and she tossed her head back.

“Merkun. Oh yes. Please... Please fuck me...”

Twice, three times, four, he reared back and plunged into her, hammering his cock into her deliriously tight cunt -- and then she was coming again, thrashing below him, her battle-hardened muscles squeezing him so tightly he thought he might faint.

Fiercely, he clung to his celebrated control, determined to hold back, to make her come again and again, and again...

He shortened his thrusts, moving more slowly inside her till she wrapped her strong thighs tight around him, dragging him to her. With a groan, Merkun sank deep into the velvet ecstasy of her cunt. He pistoned his powerful hips forward and heard her gasp in renewed arousal.

Then she stiffened and looked up at him, her expression both bleak and oddly embarrassed. “Merkun, I... I have to ask you not to come. I’ve a strategy meeting tonight and no time for a shower.”

She might as well have slapped him. Merkun bent his head, fighting to contain his roiling emotions.

“I know it’s heartless, Merkun,” Amista said. “If you want, we can stop --”

“No.” Merkun bit off the word, forcing back the unruly confusion inside him. One thing was clear to him -- this woman had saved him. Long ago, this woman had knelt in the street beside him and said...

You’ll never be free. This is the best I can do.

But she had done that much. She had given him that much.

Smiling gently, he bent to kiss her lips. "No," he repeated. "Don't make me stop. I will not come, my lady."

Her eyes closed a moment, as if in pain. Then she nodded, and with a flex of his hips, he drove himself home.

She gasped aloud. Merkun could feel the cords standing out in his neck as he gritted his teeth, fighting the pressure building inside him. Slowly at first, then with greater confidence, he moved inside her, grinding his groin against her clit with each stroke. It wasn't hard to do, to make a woman come as you fucked her -- it just took practice, and a degree of sensual awareness.

He shifted his weight, changing the angle of contact, and Amista sighed as his pubic bone slid across hers, tugging at the swollen flesh of her clit.

Yes. Right there. She didn't have to say it -- he felt the change in her breathing, the way the heat inside her seemed to flare upward, and he *knew*.

Over and over, he thrust into her, feeling their private hair tangle together as his groin pressed against hers, rubbing back and forth across her most sensitive spot. Deep inside her passage, he could feel her heat climbing as his cockhead nudged the firm, smooth rim of her cervix. Tilting her hips, Amista rose up to meet him, spearing herself on his rock-hard shaft, taking him so deep he could feel his balls caressing the furry lips of her cunt.

As her damp, wiry hair dragged against the swollen bulge of his sac, Merkun wondered if he could keep his word -- he was so close to the edge! Her cunt clamped around him, and in response he drove in harder, pounding his cock into the inferno of her embrace.

She was moaning now, her words almost lost among her cries. "Yes... please... Oh, *Gods*, Merkun! Please... please fuck me. Fuck me hard."

Tossing his head back, Merkun hammered into her. Grabbing her thighs, he shoved them upward, pinning her open below him as he slammed into the very center of her being.

A wave of fire seared through his balls, and he seized her ass roughly, sat back on his heels, and dragged her to him. She clamped her legs around his waist as he pulled her onto his lap, holding her so tightly her breasts were mashed against his chest. Then, thrusting upward, he raised her off the bed and pounded up into her, over and over.

Her moans became cries, then gasps, then high, keening whimpers, and she shuddered violently as she clung to him, her head pillowed on his shoulders, her arms wrapped tight around his back, her cunt squeezing and releasing his cock as she came, her juices exploding around him. He stroked inside her -- once, twice, three times.

Then Merkun froze.

No more. He couldn't take any more. If she so much as twitched, he was going to come.

Gently, he lowered her back to the bed, and carefully withdrew.

Panting, she lay facing him, her gray eyes studying him in the lamplight as she slowly caught her breath. Merkun lowered himself to the mattress, feeling the hot, dull throbbing of his unreleased orgasm deep in his groin. The ache was almost unbearable, but still he managed to summon a smile as he turned to her.

"All those years ago," she murmured softly, her hand playing through his thick, long hair.

"Yes," he agreed. "All those years."

"Eleven, was it? Twelve? How old are you, Merkun?"

"I'm twenty, my lady."

"And did I do the right thing, Merkun?" Her eyes were dark again, somber. "I know it can't always be pleasant..."

Merkun bit back a bitter chuckle. *Pleasant*. That was one way to put it. Maybe he should tell her about the horse-breeder who brought her own dildo, modeled after her favorite stallion...

No. Amista didn't need to know that. And it *could* have been worse -- he'd seen the work-slaves who toiled in the city, consigned to jobs that left them stooped and broken before the age of thirty. She *had* done her best for him.

It wasn't her fault it wasn't good enough.

"What do you want, Merkun?" Her voice was almost a whisper.

He smiled thinly. "You know what I want."

She sighed and rolled to a seat. "I know it's not perfect, Merkun, but the League *does* have its good points. I don't know if I can explain just how horrible things were, before --"

He cut her off brusquely -- an enormous breach of etiquette, but just then Merkun really didn't care. "The hour is up, my lady."

"I know." A rueful edge crept into her voice as she braced herself on the edge of the bed. "I'm not sure I can stand."

She pushed herself upright, her legs wobbling slightly. Her eyes darkened again as she looked down at him, still lying naked on the bed. "Oh, Merkun," she murmured. "You truly don't belong here."

At that, an emotion so sharp it made him gasp lanced through his heart. Closing his eyes against its intensity, he whispered, "Then take me with you."

Amista sighed again, and sat back down beside him. Reaching over, she took his hand and held it between her own. "I can't, Merkun. Believe me, it's not that I don't want to. But even if I sold everything I owned, I wouldn't have the money to buy you."

More briskly, she rose and crossed to the armor rack. Dutifully, he followed and helped her dress, securing her chest guard, buckling on the heavy shoulder-plates. Smoothly, he knelt before her to strap on her greaves, then sat back, his head down.

"Look at me, Merkun."

He raised his head. She stood before him, dressed in her heavy armor, buckling on her sword belt. "This is what I am, Merkun. I'm a Guardian captain. I'm not an admiral, or a commander-general with a private estate on Cetia VIII. Even if I *could*

afford you, my home is a barracks or a battle cruiser, wherever I'm posted. It's no life for you."

"And this is?" He couldn't keep the bitterness from his voice.

"No. No, it's not. Merkun..." He looked up again at the musing, thoughtful tone in her voice. "How would you like to go to Porto?"

Merkun froze in shock.

Porto. Even in the brothels of Kasmalia, pleasure-slaves whispered its name. Porto, where slaves were groomed for the most discerning buyers, buyers who took them into their own households, feeding them, caring for them -- *keeping* them, most importantly. On Kasmalia, the life of an aging brothel-slave tended to be brutally short.

Merkun's reaction must have shown in his eyes, because Amista held one hand up warningly. "I can't promise anything. But..." She tapped her fingers on her sword hilt. "Yes. Yes, that might..." Decisively, she turned for the door. "Come."

Confused, but feeling a flutter of unexpected hope, Merkun followed her down the broad staircase and into the first-floor public room. Wine-boys moved between the crowded tables, and pleasure-slaves were posed here and there about the room, enticing the customers to purchase more than just drinks. Amista strode toward a corner table where Teretria was entertaining a city councilwoman. She turned to Amista with a smile. "Ah! Captain. Were you pleased with your purchase?"

"Indeed, Teretria. He's extraordinary."

Teretria smiled, and shot a catlike glance at the councilwoman. Merkun knew she was thinking that, while she might not have gotten two hundred solars from Amista for him, she might be able to get *three* from the councilwoman now.

"In fact," Amista continued, reclaiming her attention, "I think you ought to enter him in the annual contest."

Merkun gasped in shock.

"What?" Teretria blinked. "Well, that's certainly high praise, Captain, but..."

"But?" Amista watched, her lips curved in a cool smile, as Teretria shuffled uncomfortably.

The annual Kasmalian pleasure-slave contest was an *enormous* event, and the notoriety that accrued to the brothel fielding the winning slave had made the careers -- and fortunes -- of many a brothel owner. But not only were the stiff entrance fees a deterrent to a pinch-purse like Teretria, the event was entirely Kasmalian in nature -- carnal, perverse, and utterly brutal. Slaves had been known to die in it, especially during the elimination round. Many more were ruined for life, good for nothing afterward but being gelded and made into work-slaves.

Merkun swallowed, feeling a twist of fear in his gut. But Amista glanced at him, her gaze level and confident. "I'll even pay the entrance fee myself, Teretria. Provided, of course, you pay me back from the prize money -- if he wins."

"And if he doesn't?"

"Then you owe me nothing." Amista didn't even glance at her. Instead, her cool gray eyes held Merkun's intently. "But I think he will."

Chapter Three

"Orgy" didn't begin to describe the scene around him. Merkun rocked on his knees, trapped between the blond slave below him, his hips tilted back as Merkun drove into his ass, and the black-haired one who stood, straddling the blond slave and thrusting, over and over, into Merkun's hot mouth.

The elimination round was simple -- and brutal. Fuck until you couldn't fuck any more. The slaves fought to bring their rivals to orgasm, as many times as it took till they collapsed from exhaustion, while trying desperately not to come themselves.

You've got the control, Merkun, Amista had whispered in his ear before she'd left. *Use it.*

His balls were an agony of frustrated fire. Sweat poured down his back and from his brow as he thrust, over and over, into the delectable ass turned up toward him. The slim blond slave had incredible muscular control -- he tightened his passage rhythmically, sending flares of heat along the length of Merkun's straining shaft.

Desperately, Merkun slid his hand from the slimmer man's hips down around his waist and closed his fist on the blond's cock. Using the pre-come spilling from its throbbing tip as lubricant, he dragged his hand up and down the slave's shaft, stroking first lightly, then harder and harder as the slave cried out below him.

The raven-haired man made the mistake of looking down. At the sight of Merkun's cock plunging into that tight ass, he groaned, his hips jerking involuntarily forward as Merkun devoured his shaft, lashing his tongue against the pulsing vein at its base.

Blood roared in Merkun's ears, almost drowning out the clamor of harsh, ragged cries and the agonized moans of arousal around him. Beyond it, he was dimly aware of

the hushed, intent silence of ten thousand spectators, packing the enormous arena. It was the Pit all over again, on a scale so massive it staggered the imagination.

Eighty pleasure-slaves had entered the ring. More than forty had been eliminated in the first five hours, stimulated and prodded into orgasm after orgasm until they'd cried out, begging for mercy. Some had simply fainted in exhaustion and been borne off by contest officials, their limbs dangling limply over the sides of the stretchers. One, Merkun was fairly sure, had suffered a heart attack. He'd seen the vidcams that bristled around the arena turning to zoom in on the man's agonized face as his features had clenched and his body strained forward in the climax that shook his huge frame, bursting his heart.

It's the best I can do for you, Merkun.

The annual contest usually lasted for four days, running around the clock -- although there'd been one infamous year when the elimination free-for-all had lasted a grueling twenty-six hours. The last two days had been heaven in comparison. Each slave had had thirty minutes in the ring with a randomly assigned judge who scored him on technique, overall attractiveness, and how many times he brought her to orgasm. Merkun had known enough to play to his strengths, bringing her to a peak three times with his skilled tongue and fingers before penetrating and riding her to two more hot, screaming orgasms.

There were no judges during the elimination; it was a test of endurance, pure and simple. The sharp-eyed contest officials, though, in their trademark striped shirts, circulated constantly through the writhing mass of naked bodies. Any attempt to injure or disable your opponents was grounds for disqualification, and the punishment was brutally simple: the brothel-house owner who'd fielded the offending slave was jailed, her property confiscated. The slave himself was put to death.

That didn't mean, of course, that there weren't other attempts at cheating -- the intrigues and jockeying for advantage were almost endless. Slaves favored to win had sometimes been poisoned, scant days before the event. And there'd been judges who'd made a career of the contest, retiring quite handsomely off the constant flow of bribes.

Finally, even jaded Kasmalia had had enough. Now the event, which was video-beamed to every planet of the League via live feed, was overseen each year by an off-planet dignitary who served as both Grand Marshall and supreme judge. Her decision was final, incontrovertible and (in theory, at least) incorruptible. And *this* year, the dignitary presiding over the event was the Regent of Porto.

I know her, Merkun -- not well enough to request she buy a pleasure-slave as a favor, but I know her. I can mention your name to her, at least. Impress her in the contest, and...

Amista had trailed off then, but her message had been clear. Not a promise, no, but a *chance*. It was more than he'd had any reason to hope for.

I can't possibly buy you, but I can do this. Then she'd looked at him and smiled, an ironic nostalgia he didn't understand in her piercing gray eyes. *Good luck, boy.*

He was going to need all the luck he could get.

Somewhere nearby, a man cried out, his deep voice forced into harsh, breathy yips as he peaked. Merkun clenched his eyes shut, tried not to listen to the erotic ecstasy in those agonized cries. He tensed as the slave below him thrust his hips back frantically, engulfing Merkun's aching cock all the way to the balls, trying to push him over the edge before Merkun's stroking fist forced him into climax. The sharp, musky scent of the dark-haired slave above him filled Merkun's nostrils, and he tried to ignore it, tried to ignore the heady delight of that thick, pulsing shaft invading his mouth, bruising his lips as the man seized his hair and plunged, deeper and deeper. Merkun felt saliva explode in his mouth, and ran his tongue around the swollen rim of the man's cock, so distended it stood out, meaty and distinct, from the hot, rigid shaft. He heard the man gasp, and a first deliciously salty pulse of come flooded his mouth.

Fighting against the need roaring in his own groin, Merkun swallowed reflexively, his throat muscles working around that hard cock, and heard the man groan in anguish. At the same time, he pumped his hand smoothly up and down the blond slave's erection, tormenting him mercilessly until the slimmer man bucked below him, lost in an abandonment Merkun's entire body screamed for. Desperately, Merkun clenched his abdominal muscles, bracing himself.

It almost wasn't enough. The blond slave's sphincter tightened unmercifully as he came, squeezing Merkun's cock until agony shot through him. The slave quivered below him, writhing and screaming, and the world went black around Merkun as he clawed for self-control. White fire burst behind his closed eyelids as he fought back the orgasm beating savagely at his balls.

Then the slave slumped below him, screaming again as Merkun's rigid shaft jerked from his ass, leaving him gasping and twitching on the floor of the arena. Above him, the raven-haired slave shuddered, and Merkun redoubled his efforts, driving his head forward against the man's groin, engulfing his thick cock until the man could take no more. Burying his hands in Merkun's long hair, he slammed his hips forward with a despairing shout, and dragged Merkun's face hard against him as he hammered his shaft deeper, shooting wave after wave of semen into Merkun's waiting mouth.

The slave's knees buckled, and he fell onto his ass, staring up at Merkun through exhausted, lust-bleared eyes. Taking the opportunity, Merkun raised his head and scanned the ring. Perhaps twenty slaves remained. He watched a man faint, crumpling to his knees and then to the padded mat. The vidcams panned, following his collapse.

Nineteen, now.

Only an even dozen would be considered for the final round.

Merkun struggled to his feet, ignoring the searing torment in his groin. Distantly, he heard roars of approval, and realized the crowd was cheering for him. He could barely hear them over the thudding of his heartbeat. Every nerve in his body pulsed with the balked desire to come, and he felt that need, that *drive*, burning in his loins like a fire.

Merkun raised his gaze to the glassed-in judge's box. What was she like, the woman inside there? The Regent of Porto? Would she really buy him? Take him with her?

Then, deep and secret, another thought whispered in his mind. *Is any woman worth going through all of this?*

Turning, he scanned the remaining contestants, shaking his sweaty hair back from his eyes. Across from him, he saw another man, blond and tall with a chest like a bull's, rise to his feet as the slave he'd been sucking off fell in a dazed heap and was carried off. He caught Merkun's gaze and smiled challengingly, a cold, proud light in his icy-blue eyes.

No. Oh no.

The slave facing him was Tallan, the champion of last year's contest. He stood, hardly even sweating, his massive erection jutting from its nest of golden curls. Merkun froze in dismay. He couldn't take Tallan, not now, not with his cock already screaming for release and his balls feeling like they'd been pumped full of molten concrete. Despairing, longing, he watched Tallan stride firmly through the knot of writhing bodies, heading purposefully toward him. Just the sight of that huge, gleaming body sent a renewed pulse of heat through his overstrained balls.

But another slave struggled back to his feet, his red curls matted with sweat as he reached out for Tallan, dragging him into an embrace that made Merkun's cock harden further, straining out from his body with an urgency he was so perilously close to giving in to. He could see Tallan's tongue twining with the red-haired slave's as the two of them sank to the mat, wrestling for position. Merkun watched, unable to tear his eyes away, as Tallan tumbled the redhead onto his back, lifting his thighs and thrusting that enormous shaft hard between the cheeks of his ass. The red-haired one rocked his head back, groaning, and reached beneath his hip to caress Tallan's balls.

Stop watching! Stop watching, you fool!

Horried, Merkun realized his hand was sliding toward his cock, automatically moving to clamp tight around it. His entire body ached to take his shaft in his hands, work the hypersensitive skin back and forth along his rock-hard erection as his eyes drank in the sight of Tallan's hard, rounded ass, bunching and releasing as he plumbed the slave's depths.

Stop!

With a wrench, he yanked his gaze away and saw the enormous arena whirling around him, the tiny faces of the spectators blurring...

No! He slapped himself, hard. Just in time, too. Another slave had uncurled himself from the limp, twitching form of the man he had bested, and beckoned to Merkun with a damp, sneering smile.

There were two choices. Fuck, or concede. Gritting his jaw, Merkun staggered toward him. This man, too, was huge -- if he'd been standing, he would have towered over Merkun. In fact, Merkun had spent much of the elimination feeling dwarfed by the sheer size of the men he contended with.

Even as he approached him, Merkun's knees gave out, and the man's smile grew broader. "Oh, I think you're done, slave," he said as he reached out. Grabbing Merkun's hair, he tugged him forward. "Is that how you like it, little one? On your knees?" Viciously, he thrust Merkun's head down, pinioning him against the mat, his ass raised. Merkun felt a heavy hand clamp on his hip as the slave moved behind him and slid his iron-hard cock between Merkun's ass cheeks.

Merkun smiled grimly, his expression hidden by the fall of his hair. *Mistake, slave.*

In theory, at least, his opponent had the superior position -- he could control his strokes and the degree of penetration, and was able to reach under, as Merkun had done, and caress his rival's erection easily, while Merkun, on the bottom, was reduced to reaching back between his thighs to stimulate the other man's balls.

But Merkun had a talent this man had not guessed at, and smiling, he waited till the slave had settled in, rocking in a slow, steady rhythm that sent his shaft deep, pressing against Merkun's prostrate, while at the same time he closed his fingers around Merkun's cock and tugged -- far too eagerly -- at his erection.

Even better. The man's grip was so rough it had the effect of dampening his arousal, rather than increasing it. Slowly, at first imperceptibly, Merkun rocked back to meet the man's thrusts, each time tightening his internal muscles just a bit at the peak of penetration. Without even realizing it, the man responded, pressing in harder as his

rhythm increased. Merkun rocked back further, clamping down harder, lifting his head as he felt the man let go his cock to grab his hips in both hands. Craning his neck, he saw the man staring downward, his jaw lax with urgent desire as he fucked Merkun's ass.

Merkun stopped rocking, instead letting the man behind him pull his hips back, dragging him roughly onto that huge, stone-hard shaft. It felt incredible inside him, filling him almost entirely, but Merkun forced the sensations to the back of his mind and concentrated on gripping and releasing with his well-developed muscles.

He could hear the man panting now, his hoarse breaths in time with Merkun's squeezes as he drew back and slammed deep, again and again. Twice, three times, four -- then Merkun clamped down for all he was worth, trapping the slave's cock in a vise-like hold. He felt the man shriek and go rigid as his balls contracted, shooting wad after wad of thick, scorching come.

At the sensation of heat flooding his passage, Merkun bit his lip hard, feeling his cock buck and flex as the man's swollen head prodded his prostrate, sending an almost overpowering ache searing through him. Then the man slumped, and Merkun carefully rolled to one side, taking his vanquished opponent with him. Quickly disengaging, he rose to his knees and looked down at the man who was clutching his still-spurting cock in his hands, screaming in agony as his body clenched, over and over, sending milky-white streams of semen spattering up across that bull-like chest.

The roars as he rose to his feet this time were overwhelming, and Merkun stood unsteadily, feeling as if he were hollow, nothing but air wrapped around the leaden anguish in his groin. Gasping for breath, he gazed around the ring that, not seven hours ago, had been packed with bodies. Two slaves stood shakily to the left of him, nine more to his right. The others had all been eliminated.

They stood, panting, coated with sweat as the crowd whooped and bellowed, making the arena vibrate with the cacophony of their cheers. In some ways this moment of the contest was the cruelest of all -- for now, having survived the elimination, they might find it had all been for nothing. Of the remaining twelve, only two -- those who

had had the highest scores in the first round -- would go on to the final one-on-one match.

There was nothing they could do but stand and wait.

Finally Merkun saw a door open at the end of the center aisle. Bathed in light, glittering like a queen, the Regent of Porto glided through the now-hushed arena to the competition floor. The judges followed her, like royal attendants. Merkun stared in wonder.

She was so tiny! Dressed in deep crimson, her flaxen hair piled in an elaborate chignon, she appeared almost childlike against the massive slaves before her. There was, however, nothing childlike at all about the curves of her body, with its generous swells at breast and hip, or the calm, inscrutable gaze she turned on each slave as she paused in front of him, murmured a word, and passed on to the next.

Stopping in front of Tallan, she smiled, her eyes coolly assessing. Then, turning to the audience, she took his wrist and raised his arm into the air.

The arena exploded into noise as the audience applauded the first of the final challengers. Merkun bowed his head, feeling despair and exhaustion roil in his gut. There were three slaves still, between Tallan and himself, and he waited with a growing certainty of failure as the Regent moved down the line.

He heard her pause before the man on his left and murmur softly, "Bravely done."

"Thank you, my lady," the slave murmured back -- but Merkun could hear the crackle of disappointment in his voice.

Then it was his turn, and he waited, his eyes cast down, for her soft-spoken words, both commendation and condemnation, for they'd mean that he'd failed. That he hadn't made the cut. Instead she said nothing, and at last Merkun raised his head -- and found himself looking down into the most remarkable eyes he'd ever seen. A variegated blue, almost purple near the edge of the iris, they seemed to dance like sunlight reflecting off a deep mountain lake.

She smiled up at him, and took his wrist. Merkun's head whirled as she raised his arm high, and his ears rang with the sound of reverberating cheers.

Chapter Four

Twelve hours later, Merkun watched from the shadows as Tallan strode into the ring for the final round.

Space, the man was *huge*! His broad chest flexed as he preened for the audience, basking in their wild applause. His thick yellow hair was caught back in a ponytail, falling halfway down his back between shoulders that seemed to Merkun as wide as a mountain.

Each round of the contest was vital -- the scores from the first-round judges meant nothing if one didn't survive the elimination. And if one *did* make it into the finals, those scores, however glowing, could be overturned in the one-on-one Merkun now faced.

Bracing himself, breathing deeply, Merkun watched as Tallan posed, preened and waved for the cheering crowd. Once again, Merkun cast a quick glance at the judge's box. He could see nothing behind the plate glass, yet he sensed eyes behind that blank surface, a hidden presence watching, waiting...

Determinedly, Merkun stepped into the ring.

At last Tallan turned toward him, and the referee stepped back. Tallan smiled, flashing white even teeth, and Merkun, preternaturally aware of the watching crowd, the flat electronic eyes of the focused cameras, drew his shoulders back as the enormous man walked confidently toward him, his half-hard erection bobbing with each firm stride.

"Shall we dance, slave?" Tallan said, and smiled.

Then Merkun did something so unprecedented it drew gasps from the audience and wiped the self-assured smile right off Tallan's face.

Pointedly, unmistakably, Merkun sank to his knees, gracefully bowing his head in the universal pose of a pleasure-slave awaiting the will of his lady.

* * *

"How *dare* you shame me like that?" Hauling him by the hair, Teretria thrust him into the blue room, slamming the door behind her. Merkun quivered with exhaustion and fear.

In the twelve-hour respite allowed between the elimination and the final one-on-one, images of Tallan had haunted him. He'd kept seeing that huge, assured form rising from the seething mass of pleasure-slaves, his eyes unerringly seeking out Merkun, pinning him beneath that icy blue gaze...

And Merkun had jerked out of an exhausted sleep, sweating, feeling his heart race and the ache of unslaked desire in his loins. Gingerly, as gently as if he was touching a paying patron, he'd stroked his rock-hard erection, wincing at the agony in his overstrained balls. Touching himself was not relief, but sheer torture. As he came, his pent-up juices bursting out of him in one thick, burning rush, Merkun had screamed into the sterile silence of his cell.

Through that long, solitary night he'd pictured Tallan over and over, the proud, haughty gaze, the arrogant stance... Desperately, he had milked his cock, hoping it would give him some advantage on the morrow, knowing full well Tallan was doing the same. It was too easy to imagine the enormous slave, that huge cock jutting before him, his fist working over the slick, swollen shaft...

At the image, Merkun had sobbed into his pillow and ejaculated yet again.

But somewhere in the dark hours, the idea had occurred to him. He'd replayed in his mind every glimpse he'd had of Tallan, the way he'd pinioned the redhead, fucking him mercilessly, his heavy jaw thrown back in arrogant triumph. And remembering that look, Merkun realized there might be one weakness, one chink in Tallan's armor.

So he'd played his desperate gambit. And as he'd bent his head, letting his gleaming chestnut hair fall around him in ritual submission, Merkun had heard the sharp intake of Tallan's breath, and knew he'd been right.

What he'd done was almost unthinkable. By that one simple action he'd accorded Tallan the symbolic status of a woman, an owner. Merkun didn't dare peer up through the fall of his hair to see Tallan's reaction, but he could *hear* it, in the sudden increase in his breathing, in the dry click in the champion's throat as he swallowed.

Merkun had planted the fantasy in Tallan's head -- and, he'd suspected, it was a fantasy Tallan had imagined often.

It was something, at least. It was a start.

Ultimately, it hadn't been enough.

Teretria had hauled him directly from the arena back to the PleasureDrome, heedless of his exhaustion and the way his knees threatened to buckle. Now she shoved him forward, and he fell face first onto the bed. "No, stay like that," she commanded as he started to roll over. He felt her yank roughly, first one arm, then the other, securing his wrists to the posts of the bed.

Then he heard a sound that made him cringe in terror, a sound he'd feared from his earliest childhood.

The snakelike whisper of a whip unfurling.

Merkun sobbed into the soft satin sheets. For all his efforts, the Regent of Porto hadn't so much as glanced at him as she'd stretched up on tiptoes to drape the winner's ribbon around Tallan's thick neck. Had Amista even mentioned him to her?

Merkun had no way of knowing. He hadn't seen her, though, in that vast sea of faces.

There was nothing left to hope for. No escape for him, ever. He would die here, cast aside as soon as his hair showed the first signs of gray.

Now Teretria was tying his legs. Merkun braced himself, gritting his teeth, but it did no good. As the lash seared across his back, he screamed aloud.

He'd almost forgotten what it was like to be whipped.

How he'd hated them! The women who'd caged him, teaching him to lower his eyes and say "Yes, my lady" and never daring once, not *once*, to say no! How many times had he run away, only to be dragged back and whipped, again and again?

Until the day Amista had found him, set him on this path which seemed to promise at least a bit more of freedom than the life of a work-slave. But what difference was there, in the bitter end? Any woman with money could use him however she liked. Teretria could beat him till his back ran with blood. Could kill him, even -- no law prevented it. Not on Kasmalia.

He was nothing. An object. A slave, nothing more.

You'll never be free. You know that, right?

Yes, he knew it. It was branded into his brain, his bones, in the lacerated skin of his back. Some treacherous part of him almost believed he *deserved* this, deserved what was happening to him, for even having dared to dream, once, of freedom.

His pulse roared in his ears and he twisted, shrieking in pain as the beating continued. Fire lanced across his shoulders, his back, his hips... The world went gray around him, and he reached for that grayness, seeking to escape into the sanctuary of unconsciousness, but the pain went on, and on, and...

The thud of a door slamming open.

"Teretria, stop!"

He knew that voice. Dimly he put a name to it, just before Teretria spoke.

"Captain Amista." Teretria's voice was cold. "I'm afraid you can't make me. Now, please leave."

Another biting whiplash. Merkun shrieked. Amista swore.

"Really, Captain, there's no need to watch. There's nothing you can do about it, after all."

"No." A new voice, this one a smooth, warm contralto. "But I can. Damlorn, untie him."

Merkun heard footsteps crossing the room, felt hands at his wrists, his ankles. He bit back a cry as blood rushed back to his extremities -- his thrashing had cut off the circulation.

"Thank you, Damlorn." The footsteps retreated.

"How *dare* you?" Teretria hissed. "This is *my* brothel, *my* slave --"

"Indeed." Merkun could easily picture a smooth nod, ceding the point. "But I'd like to buy him."

A shocked silence. Then Teretria laughed. "And what would you want with him, Excellency? He can't possibly compete with the pleasure-slaves of Porto."

She jabbed Merkun in the ribs with the butt of the whip, and he cowered away from that cruelly prodding shaft. Through bleary, blood-filled eyes he saw a swirl of crimson, a tiny, flaxen-haired form...

The Regent of Porto.

She stood, almost casually, an enormous pleasure-slave behind her. Amista stood near the door, clenching her fists -- but it was the Regent who had the real power here.

Merkun could think of nothing but escaping Teretria's whip. Gone were any feeble thoughts of freedom, any hopes, any dreams... Nothing mattered but avoiding that hideous pain. Quivering, beyond exhaustion, he dragged himself up, and slumped to his knees at the Regent's feet.

She glanced down at him, smiling. Those remarkable eyes seemed to shimmer, both fathomless and bright, swallowing up the room, the whole world, and Merkun's heart ached at the warm compassion he saw in their depths. "That's hardly your concern, Teretria," she murmured. "Come, how much for him?"

Teretria's face was black with fury. "He's not for sale, Excellency."

At that, the Regent laughed merrily, tossing her head back. "But this is Kasmalia! And everyone knows, on Kasmalia *everything* is for sale." Her tone grew sharper, full of veiled threats. "Isn't it?"

"I run an honest house, Excellency." Teretria's tone was as cold as ice -- but there was a current of fear beneath it that Merkun, at least, could hear.

"I'm sure you do. But we're wasting time." The Regent's voice was clipped now, cool and impatient. "How much?"

The pause seemed to stretch out forever. Then Teretria replied flatly, "Fifty thousand solars."

Merkun stiffened. Impossible! No slave was worth that, not even the best-trained slaves from Porto! Did Teretria hate him so much then, for what he'd done? Was she determined to keep him, simply to punish his impudence in the ring?

"Done."

He hadn't heard right. He couldn't possibly have heard...

Teretria's lips twisted in a savage sneer. "You're mad. Despite Captain Amista's hopes, he's not even the best pleasure-slave on Kasmalia."

The Regent laughed again, the sound silvery, almost girlish. There was a merry glint in her eyes as she handed a purse to Damlorn and gestured for him to give it to Teretria. "Is that what she said? That's not what she told me. She said he was the best pleasure-slave in the *galaxy*."

Merkun stared, open-mouthed, at the tall, grim woman who leaned now against the doorpost, her muscular arms crossed over her chest. The room spun around him, and the floor was tilting strangely, no longer opulently carpeted oak but a sudden vortex, sucking him downward...

"Catch him, Damlorn. He's fainting."

The words were distant, blurred. They were the last thing he heard before the world whirled away.

Chapter Five

"So. You've rejoined us. How do you feel?"

Merkun blinked awake, dimly aware of the softness of silk against his battered body. The Regent sat on the edge of the bed, smiling down at him gently. For a moment, he didn't recognize her. "I... better."

"Good." She brushed a sweat-stiffened strand of hair away from his face. "Can you eat?"

Memory stirred sluggishly -- the whipping, Amista's appearance, the words of this woman who'd bought him... hadn't she?

"My lady?" he whispered, the words passing almost soundlessly between his cracked lips.

The Regent's smile was as merry as sunlight on spring grass. It made her look young, even younger than he. "Yes, Merkun. I am your lady now."

"But..." He tried to sit up, but his arms quivered under him, and a wave of nausea shook him as agony lanced through his lacerated back.

"No, lie still." She pushed him down gently. "You mustn't try to get up yet."

He had little choice in the matter. His limbs shook like an old man's. So far had he fallen from what he'd been only a few weeks before!

Collapsing back against the pillows, he struggled against the emotions inside him. He wouldn't cry, not now, not in front of this woman who had saved him. Instead, he squinted against the sunlight, brighter than any he'd ever known, and tried to make out something of the room he was in.

The walls around him seemed to shimmer with color. No. No, the walls themselves were white, but...

His head swam, and he closed his eyes, only then becoming aware of the splash of playing water somewhere nearby. *A fountain*, he thought. And the dancing color was refracted light, bouncing off the fountain's streams.

Porto.

It hit him, like a wave or a strong gust of wind. He was on Porto.

It was too much, all of a sudden. Tears stung his eyes, trickling from beneath his closed lids down his cheeks. His chest heaved.

"Shh. It's all right. It's all right now. You're safe here." Her cool, soft hand stroked his forehead. "Ah, Damlorn."

Merkun opened his eyes again as the door swung open. A slave, so tall his head almost brushed the lintel, entered with a tray in his hands.

He hadn't really looked at Damlorn before, in the blue room. He'd been in too much pain, too exhausted. Now Merkun studied him surreptitiously with a sensation very like envy.

Damlorn was so perfect he took Merkun's breath away. His thick, gleaming hair was gold -- not yellow or blond, but *gold*, as rich and shining as bullion. His long, graceful neck flowed down to powerful shoulders that fairly rolled with muscle. His broad chest, tanned a deep amber hue, tapered to a taut, rippling torso. Crisp hairs coated his powerful thighs, as shimmering gold as his long, braided hair, and a trail of soft curls led from his navel down to a penis that, even soft, was enormous. Merkun could see the strong pulse of veins, running down over the flat of his stomach to that extraordinary cock.

So this was a Portan pleasure-slave. Merkun dropped his eyes, appalled that he'd ever, even in his boyhood, had the audacity to imagine himself the equal of slaves such as this. And now... His gaze fell on his own wasted, bruised body, and he flushed with shame.

Damlorn moved forward silently, bringing a small, carved table and setting it by the bed. He placed the tray on it, and knelt silently. He was *huge*, fully six inches taller

than Merkun himself, but proportioned as handsomely, all flowing lines and muscular grace. No square, awkward, muscle-bound meatheads here. Not on Porto.

Staring at Damlorn, Merkun felt the first stirrings of panic. What in space was he *doing* here? He couldn't begin to compete with this silent, gleaming Adonis. Not even at his best had he come near to equaling the sheer perfection of this man's beauty.

Why had the Regent bought him? Why should she keep him? What did *he* have to offer fabled, formidable Porto?

Timidly, Merkun raised his gaze to the woman seated on the edge of the bed. She was such a tiny thing! Standing, her head would barely reach his shoulder, and she'd be utterly dwarfed by the slave kneeling beside her.

Her features were delicate in her small, heart-shaped face, her wrist bones slim and elegant, but the soft, creamy curves of her shoulders and hips were generously full. Her face, Merkun noted now, was lightly lined -- she was older than he'd thought, apparently. Then she smiled again, her remarkable eyes meeting his, and the impression of age vanished like a mirage. As Damlorn uncovered the dishes on the tray, Merkun's stomach growled in response.

"How long has it been since you ate?" she asked.

Merkun shrugged, and hissed through his teeth as the small motion sent fire streaking across his back.

The Regent's eyes narrowed. "We have punishments for her sort, on Porto. Here." Lifting a silver goblet from the tray Damlorn had set down, she held it out -- but Merkun's hands shook so badly when he tried to take it that the watered wine sloshed on the white silk sheets. With a gasping sob, he buried his face in his hands.

After a while he realized the Regent was holding him, cradling his head against her warm, soft shoulder. He jerked back in shock, and she looked at him, her eyes now a deep, solemn violet.

"I'm sorry you had to go through that, Merkun." She held the goblet gently to Merkun's cracked lips. "Here. Don't worry about the sheets." He swallowed, and felt

the watered wine race along his trembling limbs. Shortly, the tremors eased, and the woman smiled. "Better?"

Merkun nodded weakly.

"Good. Now, let me feed you. You'll regain your strength quickly."

Carefully, Merkun swallowed the broth she fed him, his head spinning. Why were they being so kind to him? It was almost unreal -- she was feeding him! She, the Regent of Porto, with her own two hands! Somehow it frightened him -- it was too much. He was nothing -- *nothing*! And yet her eyes were so warm...

The soup was gone, and the Regent put the spoon down. Merkun turned his head and looked about the room.

The door through which Damlorn had come was of carved *kardet* wood, bleached a warm golden hue. The walls were gleaming white marble, pierced with tall arches. Beyond them was an enclosed patio, or courtyard, he couldn't tell which. He could see the fronds of some tree he didn't know stirring in a soft breeze.

"My lady..." Merkun paused, unsure how to continue. "What... Why am I here?"

The Regent laughed. Dimples appeared in her soft, round cheeks. "I bought you, Merkun. Don't you remember?"

"No -- yes -- that wasn't what I meant, my lady. I meant, why?"

Tilting her head, and looking more girlish than ever, she asked, "Does it matter?"

No, he supposed it didn't. He was here. He was safe -- she had said so, and he believed her. Merkun realized belatedly he didn't even know her name.

The Regent smiled. "Can you stand?"

To his surprise, Merkun found he could. Shakily, he climbed from the bed, and the Regent gestured for Damlorn to help him. Slipping a steadying arm around his waist, Damlorn led him to the arches.

The room beyond was vast, a sort of half-enclosed portico with columns on two sides. Sunlight poured through the columns, bringing with it an unfamiliar, salty tang

on the soft breeze, and a throaty, muted roar that grew and crashed and faded, over and over. It was a sound Merkun had never heard before in his life.

In the center of the room, he saw a shallow rectangular pool some thirty feet long. A fountain splashed into it, reflecting the slanting sunlight into a thousand brilliant, flickering prisms. Flowers tumbled in brilliant profusion from urns, and potted trees waved their feathery fronds below the high marble arch of the roof. Couches and divans were scattered here and there amid the foliage, but the room was currently empty.

It was a paradise.

"Come," Damlorn said -- the first word he'd spoken. He led Merkun to another door ten feet away, and opened it. Inside, Merkun saw the gleam of porcelain and Damlorn cleared his throat, looking remarkably prim for a man who was, but for the bright green gem glinting at one earlobe, entirely naked.

Gratefully, Merkun pulled the door shut behind him, only now aware of the leaden pressure in his bladder.

When he emerged shakily, Damlorn slid a hand under his elbow and half-supported, half-carried him to the pool. The Regent was seated on the edge, naked, her soft, rounded calves kicking like a child's in the water. She glanced over her shoulder, grinning impishly at the two of them, and Merkun couldn't help swallowing at the sight of her generous breasts, and the soft, womanly curves of her thighs.

Averting his gaze, he lowered himself carefully into the water, surprised to find it pleasantly warm. Just below the surface, broad marble steps led to the bottom of the pool, and Merkun sank gratefully onto the first step, feeling the water lap around his quivering thighs. Damlorn slid in beside him, and Merkun stared as he took cleansing lotion and a cloth from a ledge running just under the pool's rim.

"This is a *bath*?"

The Regent grinned, that merry light dancing in her eyes at his shock, and tugged him gently between her knees, facing away from her. "Yes," she replied, "this is where the pleasure-slaves bathe."

Reaching for the cloth Damlorn held out, she laved Merkun's shoulders with the most delicate of motions, patting gently at the red weals and crusted blood. Merkun winced, and Damlorn rose silently, dripping, and returned a moment later with a pot of salve. The Regent took it and applied it carefully as Damlorn glided to the deeper part of the pool and swam. Watching him, Merkun felt the sting in his back start to ease, and closed his eyes, feeling tears sting them again.

"Why?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Why what, Merkun?"

It was too much. He was a slave -- a *Kasmalian* slave. A sob he couldn't suppress burst from his lips.

"What distresses you?" The Regent turned his face to hers and studied him, her eyes sober and concerned.

"I -- this. All this." Merkun waved an arm vaguely. "I don't deserve this. I'm not like Damlorn. I don't belong here."

"Oh?" Her gaze darted, inquisitive as a bird's, from Merkun to Damlorn who, at her glance, swam with smooth, graceful strokes back toward them. "Why not?"

Merkun watched as the enormous slave reached the shallow section and stood, the water sluicing from his toned, suntanned body. *Like bronze, he thought, smooth and hard and perfect...*

"I just don't." He dropped his head, stung by the contrast between Damlorn's golden perfection and his own, battered form.

"I don't understand."

"Look at him, my lady -- and look at me. Look at *me!*"

The Regent was watching him, her gaze quiet and inscrutable. "I *am* looking."

"Then why?" Merkun was shocked to realize he was almost shouting, but he couldn't seem to help it. "*Why*, my lady?" His chest heaved with the tears he couldn't allow himself to shed, and his voice dropped to a hoarse whisper. "Why are you being so kind to me?"

“Oh, Merkun.” The Regent smiled, reaching out to brush his hair back from his face. Her hand lingered, tracing Merkun’s cheekbones, the line of his lips. “Do you not know yourself?”

At that, the last of his self-control burst like a dam, and suddenly he was crying, gathered close into small, soft arms, sobbing out his fear and sorrow on the warm bosom of the Regent of Porto.

She held him, her hands stroking his hair, his neck, murmuring softly as shudders of anguish and relief shook his frame. Her lips brushed his ear, his throat, the line of his jaw, and even in his torment Merkun felt his cock stir. Turning his head, he nuzzled blindly at the firm, ample breasts that brushed against his cheeks. His lips parted, seeking, and he felt his head shifted slightly, his mouth placed against one large, dusky nipple. With a ragged gasp, he drew it into his mouth, feeling it harden as he suckled hungrily, the salt of his tears mixing with the sweet warm taste of female flesh.

The Regent cradled his head, holding him against her, and Merkun burrowed into the generous sanctuary of her full breasts. Sucking hungrily at the nipple filling his mouth, he raised his hand to her other breast and squeezed lightly. It overflowed his outspread fingers, its smooth, pillowy softness like velvet against his hand. The rubbery nub of her erect nipple rubbed back and forth across his palm. He kneaded her breast, hearing her breath deepen into small, catlike purrs as he suckled desperately, his chest still heaving with unspent sobs.

“Damlorn,” she whispered, and Merkun felt Damlorn’s hot, moist mouth close around his throbbing cock. The pleasure was almost indescribable and, sighing, Merkun turned his head, dropping his cheek against the Regent’s breast as he gazed down at the man who knelt now on the step below him, his lower half beneath the warm water that caressed Merkun’s thighs and scrotum. His full, soft lips dragged lightly at Merkun’s swollen glans, and Merkun moaned as Damlorn’s tongue flickered over the slit, teasing a first pearly drop of come from its depths. The interlaced braids in his golden hair caught the light, and Merkun felt an urge to reach out and touch them, let his fingers tangle in their intricate design.

"Go ahead," the Regent whispered. Tilting his head, Merkun looked up at her. At the gentle affection glowing in her blue/violet eyes, a harsh, disbelieving sob burst from his throat, and desperately he reached out, closed one hand in Damlorn's hair, and dragged the pleasure-slave's mouth down hard on his shaft.

Gently, the Regent turned Merkun's face back toward her breast, and a shuddering sigh shook him as he took her offered nipple deep in his mouth. Letting his eyes fall shut, he suckled mindlessly, lost in the comfort of that full, rounded breast, in the soft, tugging heat of Damlorn's mouth on his cock.

The water lapped, warm and soothing, at his swollen balls, and Merkun felt Damlorn close his fingers around them, massaging their fullness as he drew Merkun's cock in to the hilt. Drawing his head back, he ran his tongue along its length, and Merkun groaned, feeling his cock thicken further and his slit gape in anticipation.

Supported in the Regent's arms, Merkun leaned his head back against her shoulder, nursing eagerly at her breast. Smiling, she lifted his other hand and led it to Damlorn's hair. The Portan pleasure-slave didn't resist as Merkun buried his fingers deep in his braids, and dragged Damlorn's mouth downward as he thrust his hips up, plunging his cock into Damlorn's throat.

"Yes," the Regent breathed, "that's right, Merkun. Do what feels good."

She gasped as he drew her breast even deeper, sucking almost savagely at its sweet, enticing tip. Groaning, he knotted his fists in Damlorn's hair, fucking his mouth roughly as Damlorn fondled his balls, sending flares of fire through their pulsing hardness. Merkun thrust deeper, slamming himself into that hot, waiting mouth as Damlorn devoured his cock, his tongue lapping eagerly, and the Regent arched like a cat, shoving her nipple into Merkun's mouth...

Merkun cried out, his voice hoarse and half-muffled against her heavy breast as his hips bucked upward, his balls tightening to marbles as he shot jet after jet after thick, liquid jet deep into the heat of Damlorn's sweet mouth. Damlorn's throat worked around him as the slave swallowed, sucking hungrily as Merkun's balls pulsed and contracted, determinedly milking every last drop.

Slowly, Merkun relaxed his hold on Damlorn's hair, feeling his thundering heart start to ease, and let his lips whisper, soft and full, against the Regent's dark, erect nipple. "Thank you, my lady."

Hardly daring to look up, he lapped it gently, grazing it lightly with his teeth, and heard the Regent's soft, aroused gasp, and her chuckle. "Oh, Merkun," she breathed, hugging him to her. Bonelessly, he dropped his head back against her, let his eyelids fall shut, rocked in a warmth he hadn't felt since the womb. He made a small, sleepy protest as she moved under him and he felt himself shifted to Damlorn's strong arms.

"Look after him, Damlorn. When he's healed, bring him to me."

Merkun opened his eyes long enough to whisper, "My lady..."

The Regent, who'd risen and was turning away, paused and looked down at him. "Yes, Merkun?"

"My lady, what is your name?"

She smiled, and the dimples appeared again in her soft cheeks. "It's Marcella," she replied. Turning her smile to Damlorn, she murmured, "He really is quite special, isn't he?"

Then she was gone, and Merkun felt himself lifted and borne like a child back to his bed. "Damlorn?" he asked as the slave set him down. He was barely able to keep his eyes open. "Damlorn, do you hate me?"

The frank puzzlement in Damlorn's blue eyes reassured Merkun even more than his words. "Why would I hate you?"

"Then will you stay with me, till I fall asleep?"

A soft, surprised smile creased that bronzed, handsome face, and Damlorn sat and took Merkun's hand in his own.

As he drifted into sleep, he heard Damlorn murmur, "Yes, my lady. Yes he is."

Chapter Six

Light slanted in refracted beams through the water, and the muted hiss of the surf grew to a sudden roar as Merkun broke the surface shouting, and held his arm triumphantly aloft. On the sand, Damlorn laughed as Merkun shook his dripping hair from his eyes, sending a spray of gleaming droplets into the air. He swam toward the shore, the conch shell he'd found on the bottom clutched in his hand.

"For someone who's never seen the ocean, you've taken to swimming like a duck to, well, water," Damlorn said as Merkun, panting slightly, strode from the waves and tossed him the conch. "Now you'll see." Shaking out the water, he hefted it, his golden braids hanging almost to his ass as he blew a long note that echoed across the bay, startling a flock of gulls into flight.

Merkun's eyes widened, and Damlorn grinned as he handed the conch back. Wonderingly, Merkun turned the heavy shell over in his hands and asked, almost absently, "What's a duck?"

Damlorn pointed at the gulls. "Like them, only uglier."

Merkun snorted. "And I suppose you're a swan."

"Too right," the taller slave replied comfortably, settling himself on the sand. Merkun flopped down beside him and rolled onto his back. The vicious lashes, carefully tended, had healed quickly and cleanly, and now even the scars were fading beneath his deep tan. The large, heavy muscles of his shoulders and thighs had thickened with swimming, and his long chestnut hair was streaked with gold.

Once he'd discovered the ocean, Merkun couldn't get enough of it. The sensation of floating, his body buoyed on all sides by mild, heaving water, was intoxicating, and the endless, constant roar of the waves made him feel light as air somehow, as if he

could soar like the birds wheeling above them, their hollow cries strangely mournful above the hiss of the surf.

To either side, the coastline curved outward, forming a bay upon which sailboats scudded, borne along by the warm, steady breeze. Behind them, the shore rose upward, crowded with broad-leafed plants and glossy green bushes, their flowers riotously bright against the dark foliage. A path winding through them led up to the Priory, its graceful white columns gleaming at the top of the bluff.

Merkun folded his hands behind his head and tilted his chin against his chest, looking out over the sparkling water. It reminded him sharply of the Regent's eyes, shading from bright turquoise to a deep, shadowed purple, always changing, always different...

Marcella.

He whispered the name in his mind, remembering how she'd held him, how she'd touched him. It had been three weeks since that day in the pool, and he couldn't stop thinking about her, wondering about her. Even when he was sleeping, she haunted his dreams.

It was unnerving. No woman had ever done that before.

"Damlorn?"

"Hmm?"

Merkun paused, and decided he really didn't want to ask the blond slave about the Regent. He hadn't seen her since that day, and he wondered, sometimes, if she'd forgotten about him. On the nights Damlorn disappeared from the pleasure-slaves' wing, Merkun knew full well he went to her -- and the thought of them together made him toss on the silken sheets of his bed, sleepless and irritable.

That, too, unnerved him.

Instead, he asked, "Did Amista really say that?"

"Say what?"

"You know... About me being..."

"The best pleasure-slave in the galaxy? Yes."

Merkun glanced at his friend, grinning. "She's obviously never met you, then."

"She said I fuck like a well-oiled machine."

Merkun swallowed, his grin fading, and tried to think of a suitable reply. But Damlorn just smiled slightly and lay back, closing his eyes. Merkun followed his example, and lay listening to the gulls, the rustle of foliage, the soft, throaty roar of the waves.

"I love it here," Merkun said at last.

"Yes."

Merkun rolled onto his side, looked down at the taller man stretched close beside him. "How long have you been here?"

Damlorn shrugged. "All my life."

"You're lucky, then." Merkun sighed enviously.

"Don't think I don't know it." Rising, Damlorn extended a hand, hauling Merkun up. Companionably, they strolled along the soft white sand. Idly, Damlorn collected a handful of flat, round stones, sent them skipping out over the water. Merkun tried it once or twice, but his invariably hit the rising swell of a wave, and disappeared into the water with a plop.

"Lucky," he repeated. "Since it's not like you can leave."

Damlorn glanced at him. "Why would I want to?"

"Because... Just because. Not every slave is lucky enough to live on Porto."

"Ah." Damlorn was silent a moment. With a flick of his wrist, he sent a stone flying. It bounced five times before sinking into the waves. "But you could have left the brothel, couldn't you?"

Merkun snorted. "Sure, if I wanted to commit suicide."

"So the consequences of leaving would have been a bit dire. But you *could* have."

Merkun turned to stare at him. "What? So that makes me free? The fact that I could choose to be killed?"

Damlorn shrugged. "All I'm saying is, you still had a choice. Not much of one, granted." Then his face grew serious. "I don't know, Merkun. I never really thought

about it much. I just don't see how things can ever be changed." He stood, looking out over the bay, the soft breeze stirring his braids. After a moment, he asked softly, "If you *could* leave, would you choose to?"

"I don't know. I don't think so."

"Good," Damlorn replied. "I'd miss you."

Merkun darted a surprised glance at that bronzed, handsome profile, but Damlorn only smiled slightly, and jerked his head toward the path. "Come on. Let's go wash the sand off."

* * *

There were twenty-eight slaves currently in the pleasure-slave's wing of the Priory, Damlorn had told him -- "Twenty-nine now," he'd corrected himself, grinning at Merkun. Merkun had met all but a few of them over the past few weeks, and liked most of them, but he was grateful to see the pool empty as he and Damlorn strode through the colonnade.

With a boyish exuberance that took Merkun by surprise, Damlorn launched himself into a run, and leaped into the deepest part of the pool. Water splashed up, washing over the floor, and Merkun laughed and jumped in alongside him. Spitting water like a dolphin, he surfaced, only to be dragged under again as Damlorn dunked him.

Spluttering, Merkun responded in kind, and the two of them splashed in the water, laughing and shouting. At last, Damlorn let himself float on his back, his golden chest heaving. "Oh, Merkun," Damlorn said, "you make me remember what it's like to laugh."

Amista had said that, too -- or something close to it. Oddly embarrassed, Merkun slid under the water and swam, holding his breath. When he surfaced, he saw that Damlorn had moved to the edge of the pool, sitting on the top partially submerged step, his long arms stretched out along the pool's rim.

There -- he had sat right there, right where Damlorn was now, with the Regent's arms around him, and Damlorn's mouth on his cock...

The soft, steady splash of the fountain was loud in the silence. Merkun felt his own cock thickening under the surface of the heated pool. He could remember distinctly how it had been, having that warm water lapping around his balls while Damlorn sucked him...

Damlorn, too, had been kind to him. And suddenly Merkun was determined to repay some of that kindness.

Ducking under the water again, he swam forward, surfacing with his mouth full of water between Damlorn's thighs. Damlorn laughed in surprise, and then stopped abruptly as Merkun closed his mouth around his friend's cock, letting the warm water in his mouth gush out around it. Damlorn's shaft twitched, lengthening against his tongue.

Merkun lapped it, urging it to erectness, then pulled back to glance up at the handsome blond slave. Damlorn was watching him from under half-closed lids, his face flushed with sudden arousal. Encouraged, Merkun turned his attention back to Damlorn's erection.

It was huge, the head purple with desire, curving smoothly from the firm tip to the thick, meaty rim, so broad Merkun had to stretch his jaw wide to take it in his mouth. The slit gaped beneath his darting tongue, and Merkun could taste a first slick bead of come in that delectable crevice. Kneeling one step below Damlorn, with Damlorn's knees brushing his shoulders, Merkun plunged his tongue deeper, searching for more, and was rewarded by the sound of Damlorn's harsh gasp.

Wrapping his fingers around that stony shaft, Merkun lapped eagerly, curling his tongue around Damlorn's velvety head, bending forward to take it again in his mouth and drag his teeth lightly across the underside of the rim. Damlorn's breath roughened, and one hand came to rest in his hair, the long fingers tugging gently through his chestnut locks. "Merkun," he whispered, his voice rough with lust.

Emboldened, Merkun squeezed Damlorn's shaft harder, working his hand up and down, feeling the beat of bulging veins against his palm. His own cock was straining flat up against his abs, his balls heavy with three weeks' worth of come.

Merkun rocked on his knees, teasing himself against his stomach, feeling a sudden flush of heat at the feel of water against his spread cheeks, caressing his sphincter.

Cupping his other hand around Damlorn's huge balls, he toyed with them lightly, and felt Damlorn buck. Another spurt of pre-come flooded his mouth, and Merkun began suckling in earnest, rolling Damlorn's testicles between his fingers. Damlorn groaned, and closed his fists in his hair, pulling him ever so slightly downward.

Relaxing his throat, Merkun took him as deep as he could, smiling to himself as Damlorn thrust up to meet him. Merkun moaned around his thick shaft, straining to take more of him, just a little bit more -- but it was impossible. He couldn't take it all.

Regretfully, he pulled back, letting the head pop from his mouth, and instead straddled Damlorn who looked up at him in shock and naked desire. Dropping his hands heavily on Merkun's shoulders, he whispered hoarsely, "Merkun, are you sure?"

Merkun smiled, rather smugly, and reached for a bottle of lotion on the ledge of the pool. "Remind me sometime to tell you about a horse-breeder I knew."

Smearing a thick dollop over the head of Damlorn's cock, he grinned at Damlorn's anticipatory groan, positioned himself carefully, and lowered himself.

Damlorn's cock was so hard it might as well have been iron, and yet the spongy head gave just a bit as Merkun pushed down against it. *Space*, it was huge! He could almost see it, in his mind's eye -- the twin humps of the glans pressing together, forcing the gaping slit between to a crack as his sphincter surrounded it, easing it in. He felt the band of his muscle open further and further, stinging a bit as Damlorn's cock stretched him open wider than any man ever had.

The sensation sent shudders racing through him, first of heat, then of cold, as Damlorn's head slipped in further. Surely -- *surely* -- he'd reached the rim of it by now! Dismayed and exhilarated, Merkun realized he hadn't and, grabbing Damlorn's wrists, he panted, "Push down. Push me down onto it."

Again, Damlorn hesitated, his eyes black with lust. Merkun nodded, unable to speak, and his eyes widened as Damlorn's biceps bunched. Then, with a groan, Damlorn shoved downward, spearing Merkun on that enormous, incredible cock.

Merkun tossed his head back and screamed in ecstasy as he felt Damlorn's head pop past his entrance and muscle its way deep into his passage. "Oh, *gods*," he cried, collapsing bonelessly against Damlorn's taut chest. He could feel Damlorn trembling beneath him, the great thighs quivering, his chest rising and falling as he struggled for control.

But Merkun didn't want him to *be* in control. He wanted to give back some of what Damlorn had given him, here in this very pool. His cock throbbed against Damlorn's steely abs, his balls crushed between their intertwined bodies.

And still Damlorn's cock wasn't halfway inside him.

Turning his head, Merkun licked Damlorn's neck, traced the curve of his ear with his tongue. "More," he whispered urgently. "Give me all of it, Damlorn." Raising a hand to his chest, he squeezed Damlorn's nipple, pinching the small brown nub firmly between thumb and forefinger.

Damlorn's body shook in a deep, convulsive shudder. Then, as if possessed, he clamped his hands around Merkun's hips, and shoved down hard. Pressing his massive shoulders back against the rim of the pool and tightening his thighs, Damlorn lifted them both from the water as he strained up into Merkun's ass, thrusting again and again, forcing his way deeper. Quivering, Merkun raised himself upright, grabbing Damlorn's waist and pushing downward to meet him, working that huge, rock-hard cock inch by inch into his passage. His head lolled on his neck as he murmured incoherently, "That's right, Damlorn, all the way. I want all of it. Deeper..."

Damlorn's teeth were clenched, the cords standing out in his neck. With a final, furious roar, he slammed his hips upward. A lightning bolt of lust lanced through Merkun's cock as Damlorn's shaft sank home, seated inside him all the way to the balls.

Never had he felt anything remotely like this. Damlorn's cock pulsed inside him, filling him utterly, impaling him to his navel, it felt like. His balls were snugged tight

against Merkun's ass cheeks. Pinned on that massive, fabulous shaft, Merkun quivered and twitched, feeling his own cock straining.

With a gasp, Damlorn dropped himself back to the step, and Merkun shrieked as Damlorn's cock, which he would have sworn couldn't go any deeper, sank in even further as Merkun slammed down upon it.

Lifting his head, he gazed into Damlorn's eyes -- and then Damlorn's mouth claimed his, raking it furiously, sucking his lips till they felt deliciously bruised. Moaning into Damlorn's fierce kiss, Merkun rolled his hips, working that cock inside of him.

Panting for breath, Damlorn gasped, "Sweet gods, Merkun, you're incredible."

Smiling, Merkun guided Damlorn's hand to his shaft, and hummed with pleasure as his fingers closed over it. "Yes," he gasped. "Oh yes, Damlorn, harder."

Tightening his hand into a fist, Damlorn obeyed, savaging Merkun's shaft till Merkun bucked against him, feeling his coming climax tingle deep in his balls. His tip scraped across Damlorn's abs as Damlorn pumped him, and Merkun arched his back, increasing the contact, grinding his balls against Damlorn's groin. "Harder," he panted. "As hard as you want."

Damlorn's hand clamped in a stranglehold, and Merkun shrieked with pleasure as with his other hand, Damlorn seized Merkun's hard, swollen tip, pinching it unmercifully. Merkun jerked and shuddered, reaching out blindly to claim Damlorn's nipples, twisting them in response as Damlorn pinched harder.

Leaning forward, Merkun braced himself on his knees and raked his teeth across Damlorn's chin. "Now fuck me," he demanded. "Fuck me till I scream."

Damlorn's eyes flew open, black as midnight. Pinning Merkun with his gaze, he slammed his hips upward, sending a shaft of white-hot fire through Merkun's groin.

"Again," he panted, and Damlorn obeyed, hammering himself into Merkun's ass as he worked his cock. "Again..."

Damlorn needed no further urging. Shoving Merkun's hips down tight against his with one hand, he raked Merkun's cock with the other as he thrust, and thrust, and thrust...

Merkun could feel Damlorn's cock swelling further, his balls tightening as he drew close to the edge. Lifting up, Merkun drove himself down on that massive erection, squeezing it tight, and felt his own peak starting. Rocking himself on Damlorn's cock, feeling that huge, meaty head so deep inside him he thought he'd pass out, Merkun clung to Damlorn's neck as the giant slave fucked him, groaning hoarsely in his ear, murmuring his name over and over.

Then Damlorn roared as his juices burst from him, flooding Merkun's passage in hot, searing waves. Merkun could feel every throb of Damlorn's balls as his orgasm went on, and on -- and then Merkun was coming, his cock pulsing in Damlorn's tight grip, shooting in hot, creamy bursts across Damlorn's abs. Leaning back, Merkun strained down against him, forcing Damlorn's cock to its deepest point as his passage spasmed around it, drawing a ragged groan from the blond slave's throat as his balls contracted again, spurting the last of his come into Merkun's ass.

Panting hoarsely, Damlorn stared at him, his huge body shaking. Merkun quivered, then froze as he heard a voice behind him.

"You make that look so enjoyable, Merkun, I'm almost tempted to try it."

The Regent stood at the edge of the pool, hands propped on her hips as she looked down at them. Hastily, Merkun tried to jerk away, but Damlorn held him firmly, smiling in reassurance.

"I take it he's fully recovered, then?" the Regent asked.

Damlorn chuckled through still-ragged gasps. "Let us hope so, my lady -- else he'll be the death of me."

Flushing, Merkun dropped his gaze. This wasn't at all how he'd imagined their second meeting. Now she would hate him, punish him, never let him near her...

"Forgive me, my lady."

"Forgive you? For what?"

Startled, Merkun looked up at her, saw the small smile that curved her pink lips, the dimple in her cheeks as she gazed down at him from those incredible eyes. "Then... you're not angry?"

Her smile turned wickedly playful. "Not unless you're too exhausted to do it again tonight." Her gaze flicked to Damlorn. "You'll bring him to my room?"

He nodded, and the Regent left, her skirts swirling behind her. Merkun swallowed nervously, his eyes still fixed on the spot where that vibrant, diminutive form had been. He looked at Damlorn, cleared his throat, looked after the Regent, and swallowed again.

"Yes," Damlorn said, his voice dry and amused, "she does take some getting used to, doesn't she?"

Chapter Seven

Merkun's apprehension grew with the shadows. By full dark, he was as frightened as he'd ever been in his life. Despite Damlorn's assurances, he couldn't escape his certainty that he'd be punished, that the Regent would beat him.

Or worse, send him away.

For weeks, he'd been fantasizing about seeing her again, longing for the chance to show her how grateful he was. Lying at night in a bed more luxurious than he'd ever known before, he'd imagined this evening, over and over, every nuance, every detail -- how he'd kneel before her, how he'd murmur her name, the way she'd lift his chin and smile down at him, those remarkable eyes warm with approval...

Marcella, he'd whisper, as he'd bring her to peak after hot, panting peak. *Marcella...*

And sometimes, as his hand savaged his cock, he'd hear her whisper back, her voice rich with passion, *Merkun, oh Merkun...*

Instead, as Damlorn opened the carved wood door to the Regent's bedchamber, Merkun couldn't even bring himself to meet her gaze.

She was seated on the edge of an enormous bed, naked, her feet kicking like a young girl's. Once again, Merkun was struck by the contrast between her childlike demeanor and the fine wrinkles around her crystal-bright eyes. Her body, though, was all woman, tiny as it was -- those warm, full breasts, almost out of proportion to her diminutive frame; the generous curves of her thighs and ass; the soft, rounded calves and smooth, creamy skin.

Marcella. She was ageless, unpredictable. She defied categorization.

And she had saved him. Merkun sank to his knees, bending his head before her.

There was a long silence, and finally he looked up. She was watching him curiously from her seat on the bed. Damlorn had crossed to her and knelt now at her right knee, his eyes closed, his head resting gently against her thigh as she stroked his braids. "Are you frightened, Merkun?"

He nodded, swallowing.

"That'll change. Come here."

He moved to kneel across from Damlorn. Tilting his head, his friend smiled at him, then closed his eyes again. The Regent looked down at him, and he dropped his gaze. Gently, she tilted his chin up. "No, look at me. And listen. I have twenty-nine pleasure-slaves, Merkun, some of whom I've never even slept with. I hardly expect you to sit around waiting -- use it or lose it, right, Damlorn?"

Damlorn chuckled.

"And I enjoyed very much what you did for Damlorn today. He's so large, he always has to be careful with me." Bending forward, she kissed Merkun's lips. "Do you think you could do that again? For him, and for me?"

Merkun could feel tears stinging his eyes. She *wasn't* angry! She wouldn't punish him. Gratitude roughened his voice as he answered, "Yes, my lady."

The Regent smiled. Gently, she tugged him down against her breast and, feeling her back arch, Merkun nuzzled her, rubbing his cheek lightly over her warm flesh. Damlorn, he saw, had already raised his head, his tongue running slow, lazy circles around one large, dusky nipple, teasing it slowly into a point. The Regent's hand played through his braids, cupping his head close against her. Merkun curved his hand around her other breast, enjoying its full, warm weight against his palm. He lapped his tongue over the rubbery nub, and heard her sigh in enjoyment. Then he closed his lips around it and drew it into his mouth.

Facing each other, kneeling, the two men suckled hungrily, their cheeks and jaws occasionally brushing, their hands playing over each other's as they squeezed and fondled her large, womanly breasts. Turning his head, Damlorn found Merkun's mouth, drawing him into a scorching kiss before lowering his mouth back to Marcella's

erect nipple. Merkun snaked his tongue out, playing it next to Damlorn's, feeling her nipple tighten further under their stroking.

Their tongues slid over each other's, around, pausing to dart into each other's mouths before returning to circle that sweet, pebbly nub. Raising his gaze, Merkun glanced at the Regent. Her eyes were bright with arousal as she watched the two men lapping her tit. "Kiss him again, Merkun," she murmured. "Make him moan for me."

Gathering Damlorn close, Merkun rose up onto his knees, bending the blond slave's head back as he thrust his tongue into Damlorn's wet, open mouth. Panting, Damlorn clung to him, his arms around Merkun's waist, his lips soft and yielding under Merkun's hard kisses.

Rocking his hips forward, Merkun jabbed his cock against Damlorn's, feeling their tips rub against each other, already slick with pre-come. Damlorn groaned as Merkun's shaft prodded his. Reaching down, the Regent cupped their balls in her hands, rolling and teasing them, then squeezing them lightly. Merkun gasped, feeling fire flare straight through his cock.

"Oh, you like that, don't you?"

"Yes, my lady," he groaned into Damlorn's mouth. "Yes."

She squeezed harder, and the fire inside him redoubled, gaining an edge of urgency. "What do you want, Merkun?" Her fingers tugged at his balls. Merkun gasped.

"Anything you want, my lady."

"Yes, but what do *you* want?"

His balls pulsed in her grip, heavy and aching. Her fingernails raked them, tormenting and arousing, and Merkun groaned, his voice low and gravelly in his throat. "I want to fuck."

She smiled delightedly and, wrapping her hands in his hair, she tugged his head to her and kissed him deeply. Damlorn shifted as she did, lowering his mouth to her cunt, and Merkun stared down, transfixed, at the sight of his tongue darting between

her soaked folds. The Regent closed her eyes in erotic enjoyment, then whispered in Merkun's ear, "There's lubricant on the table."

Rising, Merkun fetched it, and returned to find Damlorn on all fours in front of the Regent, his mouth working eagerly at her glistening cunt. His ass was thrust upward in obvious invitation, and Merkun swallowed, his cock flexing at the sight. The Regent glanced at him from under heavy lids, and smiled.

"You said you wanted to fuck, didn't you?"

A shudder of pure lust shook his frame and Merkun kneeled, carefully spreading the lubricant over Damlorn's rectum before placing his cock against that tight, puckered hole. Damlorn arched his back, urging him on as Merkun pressed his cock inward. Watching it slide, inch by inch, into that firm, muscled ass, Merkun felt his knees turn to water and his head spin with lust. Damlorn nudged backward, pushing him deeper, and Merkun raised his eyes to meet the Regent's gaze.

Her eyes had darkened to a deep, smoky violet. They captivated Merkun -- it seemed as if she could see straight inside him, could feel every flex of his cock, every pulse of his balls as he muscled deeper, working his shaft into Damlorn's ass. Her lips curved in a lazy smile as lightning speared through him, making him gasp and shudder. Damlorn's sphincter gripped him unexpectedly, sending an ache of desire straight from the tip of Merkun's cock to his balls.

Tugging Damlorn's head tighter against her, the Regent leaned back. "Now fuck him, pretty Merkun. Fuck him hard as you like."

Swallowing, Merkun nudged his hips forward gently, and felt Damlorn thrust back against him, growling impatiently. In response, Merkun surged forward, grabbing Damlorn's hips as he slammed in to the hilt. Damlorn groaned and redoubled his assault on the Regent's cunt, his tongue flickering over her clit as he pistoned a long, agile finger into her cleft.

Merkun slid back out, feeling Damlorn's passage squeeze his shaft, teasing him delectably as he slowly withdrew. "Harder," the Regent purred, and Damlorn's groan

seconded it. Leaning forward, Merkun spread Damlorn's cheeks wide, and jabbed his cock inward, hearing Damlorn moan hungrily, deep in his throat.

White sparks seemed to explode in his balls, and his self-control fled. Clamping his hands around Damlorn's hips, Merkun drilled his ass, slamming so deep his balls were trapped between their bodies with each hard, thrusting stroke, sending flares of mingled pain and pleasure straight through Merkun's cock. Hoarse cries seemed to pour from his throat as he pounded, faster and faster, feeling his need rise like a tsunami wave inside him.

Marcella's eyes burned into his, glowing with lust, her breath coming faster as his peak approached -- and then he was coming in thick liquid spurts, staring into her eyes as he bucked, pouring his seed into Damlorn's ass. The Regent arched beneath Damlorn's tongue, crying out and thrusting her cunt down upon his invading fingers, as she watched Merkun's face with hungry desire.

Panting, she sprawled back on the bed as Merkun, slumped over Damlorn's hips, struggled to catch his breath. He rocked once or twice, his cock sliding easily on his spent come, and withdrew.

Straightening, Damlorn turned, pulling him close even as Merkun's knees buckled, and held him against that broad, velvety chest.

"Wash him off, Damlorn," Marcella commanded, "and make sure he's hard again by the time you're done." Rolling onto her side, she grinned at Merkun impishly. "I don't think it'll be difficult."

Considering the way his cock twitched at her words, Merkun suspected she was right. Quirking an amused eyebrow, Damlorn rose and pulled Merkun up, leaving him standing there while he fetched a washcloth, and then sank to his knees at Merkun's feet. The Regent curled around to watch as he bathed Merkun's cock, running the damp cloth up and down his shaft until Merkun dropped his head back, swallowing in renewed arousal.

Then he felt Damlorn's mouth close around his erection. Automatically, Merkun raised his hand to Damlorn's head, stroking his braids even as Damlorn sucked him

deeper. Rocking his hips, Merkun thrust between those full, soft lips. It felt fabulous -- but it wasn't what he wanted. It wasn't what he'd dreamed about, all those nights, fantasizing about the woman lying on the bed, watching.

Turning his head, he looked at the Regent.

"Now," Marcella whispered, "come up on the bed."

She positioned him over her, and like a dream, Merkun slid into her tight, creamy cunt. Her folds were so slick he almost fell into her, plunging in to the hilt in one long, slow, sweet thrust. Holding himself up with one arm, he looked down at her, his hair falling around them, shutting them away in their own private world.

I want that, Merkun realized, dismayed, *I want this woman all to myself.*

It was one more thing he'd never have.

"Must I?" he whispered, before he could stop himself. "Must I share you?"

Her eyes widened, surprised. Their expression grew tender a moment, and she smiled. Then her smile turned wicked. "But it is I who am sharing you."

Wrapping her thighs around his waist, she whispered, "Bend your knees."

Merkun swallowed, feeling lust sear through him as he understood what she was commanding. Settling her ass firmly against his groin, he brought his thighs up under her back. In this position, his ass was tilted slightly up and, through a haze of desire, he felt Damlorn move behind him, that enormous cock snuggled tight against his ass.

"Now fuck me, Merkun. Fuck us both, my beauty."

Closing his eyes, Merkun rocked back, feeling his cock slide from Marcella's honey-slick cunt as his ass pressed back firmly against Damlorn's shaft. Damlorn's hands grabbed his hips, and slowly, slowly, he felt that huge cock invade him, making him shudder as he took it deeper. When he felt Damlorn's balls brush against him, Merkun shifted, gliding deeper into Marcella's intoxicating slit.

Rocking smoothly between them, he fucked them both, his asshole gripping Damlorn's cock, his own shaft plumbing the Regent's depths. It was incredible, dizzying -- the feel of that enormous shaft deep inside him, the hot, silken caress of

Marcella's tight cunt. Merkun's balls were like marble, so hard and full they ached with each stroke, and yet the agony was heaven, a searing, delicious torture that made his head spin. He could come, right this second -- and yet he wanted this second to last forever.

"Now let him fuck you, Merkun. Will you do that? Let him fuck you, let him fuck us, my darling, my beauty."

He would do anything for her. Anything at all. Pushing down into her, Merkun kissed her throat, his hands coming up to cup her firm breasts as he tilted his ass, ready for Damlorn's pleasure.

"How hard can he fuck you, Merkun?" the Regent whispered.

"As hard as he wants, my lady."

Merkun felt the Regent's nod, and pillowed his head on her shoulder, his hands squeezing her breasts, as Damlorn spread more lubricant around his huge shaft and thrust in hard.

Merkun gasped, and below him, Marcella moaned in pleasure as Damlorn's massive, muscular body thrust Merkun deep inside her. Damlorn reared back, and drove in again, deeper. This time, Marcella shrieked, and Merkun had to grit his teeth to keep from coming right then.

"Do you like that, Merkun?"

"Oh, yes, my lady."

"Tell Damlorn what you want."

Merkun could feel his balls dragging against Marcella's furred lips, her soft, downy hair tickling their taut, swollen surface. He gathered her close in his arms and said hoarsely, "Fuck me, Damlorn. Fuck us both. Fuck us hard."

Damlorn complied, sending that thick, long cock so deep inside Merkun that Merkun felt he was being split open, even as the motion rammed his cock into Marcella's cunt. "Gods!" they screamed out, almost in unison, and Damlorn pistoned forward again, hammering into Merkun with a frenzy that ground Merkun's pubic bone against Marcella's clit.

It was like the ocean, Merkun thought dazedly, his body washed back and forth by huge tidal forces, borne up on the soft watery swell of the waves. Trapped between them, his ass spread open so far it made his head spin with pleasure, his cock squeezed by Marcella's delectable cunt, he floated on the delicious, maddening sensations, feeling himself rocked closer and closer to some unreachable shore.

"Oh, my lady," he whispered, "share me any time."

He could feel Marcella's cheek dimple as she smiled and the rumble of laughter in Damlorn's broad chest. Then there were no more words, only the throb and thrust of sensation, growing fiercer, harder, deeper, till Marcella was writhing below him, and he could feel Damlorn's cock swelling inside his ass, pulsing with the orgasm he held back by main force.

It was Merkun who came first, his groin grinding against Marcella's, pushing her over the edge. She came, crying up into his open mouth, even as Merkun felt Damlorn's cock throb inside his spasming passage and the first flood of semen pour into his ass. Screaming, shuddering, they clung to each other, feeling the waves of ecstasy build, one to the other. Marcella peaked again, her moans in his ear, and Merkun felt his balls tighten with a second, sudden climax, agonizing in its intensity. His asshole clamped down, and Damlorn groaned in pleasure, hammering harder as he shot wad after wad into him, seemingly endless.

Finally, quivering with exhaustion, they slumped to the bed, Merkun's cock still deep in the Regent's slit, Damlorn snuggled tight against his ass. After a moment, the Regent wriggled, eyeing Merkun with mock outrage. "Exactly whose bed is this?" she demanded.

"Yours, my lady."

"Then *I* get the middle." Disengaging herself from him, she crawled between the two men, collapsing with a happy sigh against Damlorn's enormous shoulder. She was asleep almost before she'd settled into place.

Propping himself on one arm, Merkun looked down at her, studying the curve of her lashes against her soft cheek, the sweetly curved lips, the tumbled hair. Bending gently, he kissed her cheek, and drew the sheet up over her smooth, warm shoulder.

As Merkun settled back to the pillow, Damlorn's eyes caught his over the flaxen mass of her hair. "Yes," he murmured, "it's almost impossible not to feel that way about her."

Chapter Eight

He was happy, Merkun insisted to himself as the weeks passed in a lovely blur. Days on the beach, splashing in the waves. Nights spent entwined with Damlorn and the Regent, rocked in a heady eroticism that dwarfed any other encounter.

He was happy, he told himself, over and over. *Happy.*

Yet he wasn't. Not that he was jealous of Damlorn -- it wasn't that he wanted Marcella to feel less for the blond pleasure-slave, or to exclude Damlorn from their lovemaking -- he cared too much for Damlorn himself to want that. It was just that Merkun wanted her to feel more for *him*.

Damlorn loved her, with a warm, steady, devotion. But he, Merkun, *worshipped* her. And she felt nothing but fondness for him -- the same fondness she felt for all her slaves.

That fact gritted inside him, chafing at him like sand in an oyster. But there was nothing he could do about it, nothing but tell her every night with his hands and tongue and cock, how she made him feel.

Until the day she took him and Damlorn with her on a surprise tour of the slave market.

Merkun's eyes widened at the fluttering silk tents, the endless variety of sleek, stunning slaves posed among them. Yes, he thought, admiring their smooth, unscarred bodies, things might have been very different if he'd been born here.

Then he heard, like an echo of his memories, a whispering swish in the distance, followed by a cry.

Merkun darted after the sound, feeling a sudden rage blaze in his heart. The Regent called after him, but he didn't stop. Pursuing that sound, he ducked between the tents, vaulting over ropes and ducking under canopies until he emerged behind one

large red and white striped pavilion and stopped short at the sight of a slave bound to a post, his back red with blood as a slave-trader whipped him.

Merkun's head throbbed, and the tents seemed to spin around him. *Even on Porto*, he thought, feeling sick. *Even on Porto*.

Fury and despair throbbed in his gut. He thought he might vomit.

"Merkun!"

Bent over his knees, Merkun heard the Regent's stern call. She would whip him for this, too, he was sure -- dashing off without even a "by your leave, my lady." But what did it matter? It was all just a farce anyway, a pretty game that she played.

It was all just a game.

Merkun heard the Regent approaching, with Damlorn's heavier footsteps behind. "Merkun, what in *space* are you --"

Her words didn't trail off; they simply stopped, as sharply and cleanly as if cut off by the fall of an axe. Merkun glanced up to see her looking past him, her eyes narrowed with fury. Briskly, she strode forward, her tiny body bristling with outrage.

The trader stood frozen, the whip dangling in her hands. Finally she found her tongue, started to stammer, "Your Excellency, I... he..."

Merkun felt Damlorn's hand on his shoulder, and straightened slowly. Other traders had gathered, lined along the backs of the tents that formed this small, enclosed square. Merkun could see the spatter of the slave's blood on the glistening white sand.

"Damlorn!" the Regent called sharply.

Squeezing Merkun's shoulder in reassurance, Damlorn crossed to the post in six long strides and untied the poor slave. The Regent turned to the watching traders as he did so, her flashing eyes raking over them. "Will you tell me you didn't know of this? Will any of you *dare* tell me you didn't know?"

No one answered. Grimly, she nodded, and gestured to the slave. "One of you is going to take him. You are going to keep him as your personal slave. Which of you is it going to be?"

The traders shuffled, until one older, heavysset woman stepped forward, and took the slave gently from Damlorn.

"Good. Now," Marcella said. Turning back to the erring trader, she ripped the whip from her hands. "Damlorn, tie her."

"My lady, I..."

"Do it!"

For the first time, Merkun saw Damlorn cower in the Regent's presence. Quickly, his face alternately flushing and going white as a sheet, Damlorn bound the stunned trader's hands to the post. Then he hastily retreated to stand by Merkun, who stared at him in shock. "But..."

Damlorn shook his head, silencing him.

Marcella turned to the traders again, raising her voice. "You all know the laws of this market."

"But..." protested the bound trader, her face white with fear. "But the League --"

Crack! Marcella spun, wielding the whip. A red weal appeared on the trader's back, and she screamed.

"The League allows each planet to decide its own internal affairs, as you knew full well when you applied for a trader's license. Would anyone here like to surrender their license?"

Silence.

Grimly, the Regent raised the whip again.

* * *

Afterwards, she strode back to the Priory, still in a black fury. Merkun and Damlorn followed her silently to her office, and Damlorn bowed and withdrew immediately when she ordered them out. Merkun, however, stood still as stone as the Regent paced, flipping angrily through papers. Finally, turning back toward her desk, she saw him and snapped, "I said leave me, Merkun!"

"No, my lady."

"What?"

Merkun could feel the passion blazing in his eyes, and she apparently saw it, although she misread its meaning. "I know you're angry, Merkun, but not even I can afford to shelter every slave who's mistreated!"

"No, my lady. That isn't it." Striding toward her, he swept her into his arms, and brought his mouth down against hers -- hard.

Shocked, furious, trapped between him and the wall, she pushed against him. But even though he was nowhere near Damlorn's height, Merkun still towered over her. She glared up at him, her eyes narrow with rage. "You go too far, Merkun."

"No, my lady. I haven't gone far enough." Lowering his lips to her neck, he slid one hand up her front, cupping the full, heavy curve of her breast. He could feel her heart pounding -- in fury, or arousal? He didn't know, didn't care. All he knew was he needed her -- *now*. She was magnificent, regal -- she was his love.

"Merkun, this is *not* the time. You'll have to wait."

But he could feel her nipple hardening under his caress, and her chest heaved, not with anger, but with growing lust.

Merkun smiled at her. "No."

She opened her mouth -- to scream, to swear at him, he didn't wait to find out which. He covered it quickly with one hand as he moved closer, pinning her against the wall. His fingers tormented her breast as he panted in her ear, "No, my lady. You may punish me, whip me, send me away. You can even kill me, my lady. But I will not wait, Marcella."

Her eyes widened at the use of her name. She didn't resist as he lifted her in his arms, her back braced against the wall as his hands pushed her skirts up. Finding her warm cleft, Merkun grinned as he felt the ready slickness coating her folds. She gasped as he pushed a finger up into her, and wrapped her thighs around his waist.

His cock, already hard, dug against her stomach as he whispered, "Ask me something, my lady. Ask me if I would be here, doing this, if I were free."

"Would you?" she asked, her eyes suddenly dark and vulnerable.

He smiled and, raising her easily, lowered her onto his throbbing shaft. His lips trailed across hers as he murmured, his voice a low, dangerous growl in his throat, "Yes. Oh yes, my lady."

Pinning her against the wall, he thrust up into her, ramming home all the way to his balls. She cried out in ecstasy, "Merkun. Oh, *gods!*"

Urgently, he cupped her ass in his hands, supporting her as he hammered his cock into her, feeling her heat spiral up to meet his. "Don't send me away, my lady," he whispered. "Please, don't ever send me away."

"Never," she panted hoarsely. "Never, so long as I live. Say my name, Merkun. Say my name as you come."

And he did, dragging her hard against him as his balls exploded, rocking his head back with the force of his orgasm. "Marcella," he cried out, his neck arching as she shuddered against him, peaking in his arms. "Oh, *Marcella!*"

Epilogue

"She was quite a bit older than she looked, Merkun. You must have guessed that."

Merkun nodded silently, and Amista studied him. He wasn't young himself anymore. Silver streaked his chestnut hair, and his body, while still solid with muscle, no longer had the toned elasticity of twenty. His face was wooden, mask-like in the grief he refused to display openly.

Amista sighed. "I loved her, too, you know. I think we all did."

Merkun glanced up at her, looking vaguely surprised.

Amista sank to a seat, feeling the stiffness in her bones. The years had been hard on her. Her face, she knew, was lined now with care, and her short hair was almost entirely silver. Her frame though, was still as erect as ever -- she was no longer a captain, but High Commander of the Nine-Star League's forces, and would carry herself as such despite any aches or pains.

"It's been a long road, hasn't it, from that boy who crashed into my midriff in the streets of Kasmalia? A long road for both of us."

Merkun smiled slightly at that. It was a reaction, at least. Better than the daze he'd seemed to move in ever since the funeral. Briskly, Amista turned to the purpose of this meeting. "Before she died, Marcella asked me to give you a choice."

A flicker of curiosity in those liquid hazel eyes, still utterly captivating despite the lines at their corners. Amista paused, not sure how to continue, not sure what to say -- or how much.

"When Damlorn passed away, I promised Marcella that if anything... happened to her, I'd buy you."

She looked away then, studying the walls as she continued. "I'm no longer a struggling Guardian captain, Merkun. I have a home now, an estate. You'd like it there, I think. If you... if you want to come with me."

Glancing at him, she bit her lip slightly -- an undisciplined response she'd never have allowed herself in front of her troops.

There was so much more she could say, so much more she could tell him. Beginning, perhaps, with the fact that she'd taken no other pleasure-slave to her bed since that long-ago night on Kasmalia.

No, Amista. He doesn't need to know that. Let his choice be his own.

Still, it was hard to say nothing, to wait...

But he remained silent.

"Or, if you'd prefer, I am to see you're set free."

At her words, Merkun's chin jerked up, like a spooked horse tossing its head. Emotion flared in his eyes, sudden and violent, hoping, disbelieving...

Amista nodded in response, reaffirming what she'd said, making it real. "You'd have to be gelded, of course. And you'd never be able to leave Porto -- I can enforce Marcella's will here, but... She's left you a good bit of money. But I don't know how you'll survive, after it's gone."

He stared at her, his entire frame trembling with the emotions racing through him. Amista waited. The years had been kinder to him than to her, but still, he would never see forty again. Was it even fair, to be offering him this now?

When he spoke, his voice was no more than a hoarse whisper, as passionate and heartfelt as when he'd asked her to take him with her, all those years ago. How many things would have been different, if she had?

It was a useless question, she realized. There was no way to ever know.

"I'll survive," he answered. "I'll find a way."

Accepting the inevitable, Amista bowed her head.

When she looked up again, Merkun was watching her, a strange smile, both ironic and gentle, playing about his beautiful lips. "So, after everything, it appears you were wrong, my lady. All those years ago."

You'll never be free, boy. You know that, right?

Amista closed her eyes, whispered, "Yes. I was wrong."

She heard Merkun rise, his footfalls moving away from her. Looking after him, she saw him striding, his back rigidly straight, down the hallway toward the open door beyond. Amista felt a not-unexpected prickle of tears.

"Good luck, boy," she whispered. "Oh, good luck."

Six Years Later...

Merkun ducked through the flap of his tent and stood a moment, enjoying the cool stillness inside its azure-blue walls. He'd grown stout during the years since he'd been castrated, and his skin now was a deep leathery bronze, burnished by the bright young star that gave his planet its name.

His planet. What a strange thought that was! Even now, it still took him by surprise when he thought things like that. But it was true, he was free, he was a citizen of Porto -- a second-class citizen, true, but still...

And he had been freed, not by arms or rebellion, but by the love of a woman.

Arms wouldn't have helped him in any case, Merkun mused, remembering how easily that drunken soldier -- what had her name been? Ah, yes, Asha -- had bested him. The thought of Asha led, as it invariably did, to Gendron, and Merkun wondered again what had become of the blond slave who had always smiled so easily, who had performed with him often in the PleasureDrome's Pit.

Had Gendron deserved slavery? Had any of them?

Such thoughts always plagued him on the days when the new slaves arrived. But today, Merkun felt a strange excitement as he walked toward the large inner room of the tent.

He wasn't sure when the idea had come to him. It had been so nebulous at first, and even now its chances of success were, he knew, infinitesimally thin. But, remembering the warm compassion in Amista's eyes, her hard soldier's muscles, Merkun had begun wondering -- what might such a woman, such a warrior, do for a man she truly loved?

As Marcella had loved him. Even now, the memory of her soft, dimpled smile tugged at his heart. What a woman she'd been! He would have loved her, no matter what her station -- but it had been her station that had enabled her to set him free.

And so, for half a dozen years, Merkun had trained the most beautiful, bewitching boys he could find into the greatest pleasure-slaves the League had ever seen. He'd become rich in the process, but that hardly mattered -- what mattered was his boys, scattered like seeds across the galaxy. Seeds waiting to fall into fertile soil.

What might happen then?

Merkun didn't know -- but he hoped. He hoped.

Today his heart beat loudly in his chest as he slid through the curtain into the inner chamber. A boy kneeled there, a seventeen-year-old boy of such beauty it stole even Merkun's breath when he looked at him. Tall and clean-limbed, the boy knelt as he'd been taught, his long, ash-brown hair falling around him as smooth and gleaming as silk. Gently, Merkun tilted his chin up, and looked down into eyes that were a clear, liquid gray -- eyes any woman might well fall in love with.

"Kantou," Merkun whispered, and smiled.

Kantou.

Sierra Dafoe

Sierra Dafoe published her first erotic romance with Changeling Press in May of 2006, and hasn't stopped since! Named a Rising Star of Romance in July by Love Romances and More, she received three 2006 CAPA nominations including Favorite Erotic Author (a fact which still has her stunned!).

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