

Gabriel's Gift



Jeanine Berry

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Chapter One

Sarah Jacobson steered her car down the narrow aisle of the Bear Valley Mall parking lot, her tires crunching over a fresh coating of snow. She'd rushed to the mall from work only to discover that a few thousand other people had gotten there sooner with the same idea. The lot was jammed, and she'd spent the past fifteen minutes seething with frustration as she hunted for a spot.

Red brake lights flashed on the vehicle ahead of her and, further down the row, two cars backed out. Maybe miracles still happened after all, even when Christmas shopping. She slid into one of the slots and got out, feeling the knife-edge of the fierce winter wind bite her cheek. She clutched her hood and bent her head as she hurried toward the glittering lights of the mall. The Christmas decorations had been up for weeks, since before Halloween, but as usual she'd put off doing the dreaded Christmas shopping until the last moment.

She slipped on a patch of ice and waved her arms to regain her balance, attracting the stares of other

shoppers. The thought of breaking her leg right before Christmas didn't improve her mood. She faced a hazardous hike to the entrance of the mall, and the weather reminded her too much of a Weather Channel program on blizzards at the North Pole. After a long, mild autumn, the winter had turned fierce. A blizzard last week and two dreary days of snow this week had heaped close to two feet of the white stuff on the city. Piles of snow the size of small mountains towered at the back of the lot. It was a typical Midwestern winter—cold, ice, snow and more snow.

After her near fall, Sarah kept her head down and watched for the frequent icy patches, using the sound of the Salvation Army bell as a guide to the location of the mall entrance. Glancing up to orient herself, she saw the glass doors straight ahead. The bell ringer stood in front of them. He was dressed in a Santa Claus suit and stood poised in front of a large black kettle. He jingled his bell each time someone approached the door and shouted "Merry Christmas!"

"Bah, humbug!" Sarah muttered under her breath. She hated Christmas. It was a time of terrible loneliness when you were single and your family consisted of one distant brother. Ever since her mother and father had died, there'd been no family Christmas. She and her brother had never gotten along and had kept up the pretense of a relationship only for their parents. After their deaths, she'd spent one miserable Christmas in his home as an

unwelcome guest who felt like an intruder.

This year she'd decided to stay in Rockford, the town where she taught English at the local high school. She would tough the loneliness out. She wanted to ignore Christmas, but that didn't excuse her from the last-minute rush to buy presents for the fellow faculty members she counted as personal friends.

She reached the curb to the sidewalk and looked up in relief. At the same moment, a man in a black coat stepped between her and the Santa Claus with his clanging bell. The man smiled at her. It was a golden smile, full of some mysterious radiance. It stunned her as if it had physical force. Her spirits lifted despite the icy wind that plucked at her hair and blew snowflakes in her eyes. The man's smile brightened as he lifted a sign in one hand while holding out a tin cup with the other.

Oh, God, he was another beggar. Her spirits plummeted again. There were so many of them this Christmas, with the local economy slumped into a recession—too many for any one person to help. Better to donate to a charity and know where your money was going. Tough luck for him, but the world was a cold, hard place and the spirit of Christmas giving was a myth.

Speeding up her pace, she kept walking toward the doors, intending to ignore him. She read the sign automatically and was two steps beyond the man before its message sank in.

HELP AN ALIEN GET HOME FOR CHRISTMAS.

The message was printed in big block crayon letters on white cardboard, each one alternating red and green. The colors of Christmas. The cardboard fluttered in the icy wind.

Surprise made her turn back and take a second look. Anger made her open her mouth.

"You should be ashamed of yourself." She stomped over to him and pointed an accusing finger at his sign. "There are plenty of real charities in need at Christmastime and you have the gall to come here and make a joke out of your begging."

He held out his tin cup to her, his blue eyes serious. "No offense meant, lady. I'm an alien visiting your world and I need money to get home for Christmas. Care to give me some?"

She planted her hands on her hips. "I think you should leave. I'm going to report you to mall security."

"If you wish." His voice was calm.

Sarah bit her lip and gave him her sternest look, the one that quelled rebellious teenagers into silence. She wished he would just go away. She didn't want to get him arrested by calling mall security, even if he did deserve it for making a mockery of Christmas goodwill.

He certainly didn't look like an alien. She'd seen her share of *Star Wars* movies, so she supposed she knew what an alien looked like. And he didn't look like the type to be begging for money in front of a

mall either. In fact, he was well-dressed. He had on a sturdy pair of boots and a clean pair of jeans. Over it he wore a long, black wool coat that must have cost him a tidy sum at one time. A jaunty red scarf was wrapped around his neck. The black coat hid most of his body, but she couldn't help noticing that he was tall and stood braced against the winter wind with the calm confidence of a natural athlete.

Her look faltered a bit as she concentrated on his face. Not only was he well dressed, he was downright handsome. He looked enough like Brad Pitt to make her fantasize for a moment that he could be an alien using some advanced cloning technology.

She squashed that ridiculous thought. No, he must be a nut case. The problem was, he didn't look like a nut case. He looked delicious, with his shoulder-length golden blonde hair blowing in the wind and his midnight blue eyes staring into hers. He even had a cleft in his strong chin, and a cute little dimple appeared in his right cheek when he smiled his devastating smile. In fact, if this man was an alien disguised as a perfect human male, he'd done an excellent job.

"You'd better go," she urged. "If security spots you, you'll be arrested. Malls are considered private property. No soliciting without permission."

Her glare increased. She assumed an aggressive stance and folded her arms across her chest.

Sarbal cri Rabor held the sign a bit higher and watched as her eyes flashed again. It was a delight to tease her. She was so responsive to his every move. The sign had worked exactly as he'd hoped.

He increased the radius of the mental field he'd put around them, a field that diverted the attention of other passersby from the two people standing in front of the mall. He didn't want this perfect moment interrupted. If all went well, he would achieve a major step toward his ultimate objective.

Relaxing a bit now that he had her full attention, he took a moment to admire his prize. Her coat covered her figure, and the hood shadowed her face, yet even with all those distractions her essential loveliness shone through. He saw it in her eyes, huge in her pale face, their green color beautiful and mysterious at the same time, deep and fathomless as the sea. She was like the sea inside, too—a woman with depth and character, brave enough to face what he had in mind for her.

He'd realized her sterling qualities the instant he first saw her in the bookstore. He saw them in her total concentration, in the charming way she bit her lush lower lip, while her eyes scanned a page. He'd almost spoken to her then, so strong was the urge to reach out and brush her silky auburn bangs out of her eyes. He'd resisted, waiting for the perfect moment to begin their dance of courtship—this moment.

He blew out his breath in a long white plume and flashed his dazzling white teeth at her, his dimple

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deepening. "You are very kind to notice a poor beggar." He held up his cup. "Please make a donation so I can return to my home world. Transporter beam operators charge an hourly rate to beam people up to the mothership."

"What the—!" The man had watched way too much *Star Trek*. She stomped her booted foot in some slush. "Okay, I warned you. Be a kook. I'm going to find security now."

"I need twice as much as usual because I intend to transport two people," he said without even blinking.

She knew she should leave, but something about his calm confidence galled her. That and the way everyone else ignored them, walking around them as if they weren't there. It was strange that no one else seemed to be taking any notice of the bizarre sign or the handsome hunk of a man who carried it.

The whole thing was weird. Usually, she was the first to run at any sign of unusual behavior. She liked living a quiet life. Yet something in his compelling gaze held her, making her forget her plans to rush in and out of the mall, making her ignore the icy wind.

"So it's money you need, and then you'll call your ship and beam right up? I'd love to see that." She lifted her chin, determined to call his bluff, and reached into her purse. Withdrawing a single dollar bill, she stuffed it into his tin cup.

"There. That ought to be enough to get you back to Mars."

He reached out and took her hand as she withdrew it from the cup. Despite the fact that he stood in the open without gloves, his hand was warm. Sarah's eyes widened in surprise as a surge of electricity exploded up her arm and spread through her body. She blinked as a delicious sensation of warmth pooled in her most intimate parts.

Delight danced over his features. "Thank you. I am indebted to your generosity. Your gift has created a bond between us." His fingers lingered over hers, his index finger tracing a double loop on her hand. A chill ran through her as she recognized the symbol for infinity. He was a kook, all right.

Sarah opened her mouth to answer him, then thought better of it. Any further conversation would only encourage his delusions, whatever they were. She snatched her hand away and glared at him. Why on Earth was she standing here in the bitter cold in front of a warm mall arguing with a man who claimed to want money to pay a matter transporter operator to beam him up?

Beam me up, Scotty! There's no intelligent life down here. She was nuts to even speak to him.

His blue eyes sparkled as if he read her thoughts. He leaned toward her and lowered his voice to a confidential whisper. "They're having a sale on perfume at J.C. Penney's. I know Pam would love a bottle of Seduction."

Pam? How did he know that Pam was her best

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friend on the school staff? Her eyes widened. "Who are you?" she yelled.

He waved his sign in the air. "I am a connoisseur of Earth women. I've examined quite a few in my tireless search for the perfect one. Pam, Sue, Mary, Jenny, Betsy, Martha, Jean and Joan."

She realized he was playing with her. His selection of Pam's name had been pure luck. He was some pervert who got his jollies arguing with shoppers on their way into the mall.

Turning on her heel, she resumed her trek toward the entrance, brushing aside the Salvation Army Santa on her way. Only when she got inside the first set of glass doors did she look back.

The man in the black coat with the weird sign was gone.

Chapter Two

The cold snap broke a day later and by the weekend it was balmy enough for Sarah to plan a trip to the ice-skating rink. Every winter the city flooded the soccer field next to the high school and set up a warming shelter for those who loved to skate.

She timed her arrival for late afternoon when the kids were ready to leave, exhausted at last after a day of swooping and skidding around the ice. The lovers who liked to come out and skate under the light of the moon had not yet arrived. As far as she was concerned, skating was a solitary activity, a dance between her flashing blades and the slick freedom of the ice.

"You need a boyfriend," her friend Pam had told her that very afternoon over a cup of tea in her apartment. "You spend way too much time by yourself. It's not good to be so solitary."

Sarah had bitten her lip to keep from telling her best friend to mind her own business. Her fellow teacher meant well, but they'd only known each other

for two years and Sarah kept most of her feelings to herself. If she told Pam she found most men boring, she'd sound arrogant, but it was the truth. She often wondered what man could ever measure up to the heroes who strode through the pages of the fantasy books she loved.

Not a single one of the men she'd met so far. That much was certain.

"You need to get your mind out of books and into real life," Pam had added.

But Sarah didn't like real life all that much. That was the problem.

After the conversation with Pam, she needed some time alone on the ice. She found a seat in the warming booth and pulled off her boots. Her skates were white, and when she wore them and whirled around on the ice, she felt like Cinderella waiting for her prince.

She'd discovered skating as a child. It was something her brother would never do. He considered it a sissy sport. Now, it often fit her mood as a loner. She could launch out on the ice, surrounded by other skaters, and yet be in a separate world, gliding to her own inner music.

After the disturbing incident at the mall with the man who claimed to be an alien, she'd begun to feel her differences more than ever. She thought it an odd coincidence that this man purporting to be an alien had approached her, a woman who felt alienated from the culture of twenty-first century Earth most of

the time. His very interest in her had increased her feeling that she was an odd fish.

Then something even stranger happened. When she went to bed that first night after their encounter, he appeared in her dreams. She'd dreamed about him every night since. His golden smile haunted her waking hours. He never spoke in the dreams, only stood at her side, a warm, protective presence. Sometimes he stroked her hair or kissed her cheek. The dreams made her feel cherished. She'd wake up smiling, and this morning she'd woken up humming a happy little tune, something she'd never done before.

The dreams seemed to work a transforming magic in her. The silent male presence radiated acceptance. Her heart started to open to the idea of sharing her life. For the first time, she welcomed that idea. As a child she'd felt like a stranger in her parents' house. The unwanted girl they'd had before the birth of the perfect son. In high school she'd buried her face in her books and never even dated. College was better—there were plenty of eccentric people at college—but now that she was living in a small city again, her nonconformity stood out once more. By the third night, she welcomed the dreams, welcomed his visits. She started to think of him as her alien.

Her run-in with him at the mall made a good story, but no one seemed interested in hearing it. Her fellow faculty members were aglow with their holiday plans, and she had few friends outside of the school. Presents and decorations and the menu for family

gatherings around an ornament-laden tree dominated the conversations in the teachers' break room. Pam had gotten married that summer and was now absorbed in masterminding the best Christmas dinner ever to impress her new in-laws. Rose, her only other close friend, was leaving three days before Christmas to fly home to New York and a house packed with relatives.

Sarah tightened the laces on her skates and wondered for the fifth time that day whether she should accept the invitation offered by Martha, her brother Sam's wife. It had been far from gracious: "If you don't have any other plans for Christmas, you can always come here," Martha had told her in polite tones at the end of their last phone conversation.

"Oh, I've got plans," she'd said. *Plans to stay away from you.*

Damn Sam and his tight-assed wife. The perfect son who'd made the perfect marriage. Sarah suspected she was a little bit too imperfect for their tastes. A mere schoolteacher dressed in ordinary clothes from stores where the common people shopped.

She tugged on the laces and told herself it didn't matter. She would ignore Christmas this year. A few presents for her friends, nothing else. No tree. No special dinner. Another winter day, except she'd be off from work. She could curl up with a good book on the couch and read the day away.

Her skates laced at last, she tottered awkwardly

over the snow-covered grass to the edge of the ice and then stepped onto the smooth surface. Leaning forward and pushing with her legs, she began a long graceful glide around the edge of the rink. The early winter twilight turned the ice a deep crystal blue. A dark cloudbank to the west was edged with gold from the setting sun. She wondered if it might start to snow. That would be wonderful. Snow would drive everyone else away.

In the distance, a bell began to ring, five long mellow strokes. Suppertime was approaching at last. Voices faded as the kids gathered up their skates and headed home to warm houses and hot meals.

The rink was nearly empty now. A lone teenage girl and her boyfriend were having a good time at the far end, chasing each other on the ice, laughing and shouting, then grabbing each other's arms and whirling around in dizzying circles. They were obviously in a world of their own. Sarah straightened up and clasped her hands behind her back. Gliding easily in a smooth loop around the nearly empty ice, she tilted her head back and waited for the first star of twilight to appear.

Your planet is far too cold. I would love to see you skating naked on the ice, though.

The sudden thought erupted from nowhere. She faltered and almost fell. It was not so much the shocking words as the incredible image that accompanied them. A picture flashed through her consciousness: She was skating under a twilight sky, with the sun streaking the far horizon with gold and

purple clouds. She wore pristine white skates and nothing else. She was doing one of the fast spins the professionals so often did in their routines, her blades spinning on the ice, her legs close together, her arms raised gracefully high above her head. Her breasts were lifted high by the position of her arms, the nipples taut with cold. The wind played with the long strands of her auburn hair as she whirled.

As swiftly as it had come, the vision vanished. Shaking, she skated over to a nearby bench and sat down. She bent over, pretending to examine her laces while she fought to regain her composure. Where on Earth had that incredible image come from? She supposed her imagination was as active and as sensual as anybody's, but she didn't normally picture herself nude in public. Heat burned through her body and flamed on her cheeks, untamed by the cold winter wind.

Lifting her head, she glanced around to see if anyone had noticed her faltering on the ice. The playful young couple who she'd seen at the far end earlier was gone. Someone else stood on that side of the rink though, under the barren, ice-covered branches of a tree. In uncertain twilight, she could only make out a tall form wearing a long, black coat.

She shivered and looked away, a mixture of fear and excitement shooting through her. It couldn't be him. He belonged in her dreams now. It was the twilight confusing her. The rink lights should come on soon.

You came to skate, she reminded herself, getting up. Gliding out onto the ice again, she had a perverse desire to whirl her body around in the way she'd pictured in her mental flash. She dug into the ice and skated fast to build up some speed, then launched into a dizzying spin. She let her body twirl in a tight circle on a single blade as she lifted her arms into the air.

Her breasts moved under her heavy winter coat as she raised her arms. Mounting heat blazed up between her legs as she pressed them together and spun around. Strange, indeed ... she'd never had a sexual fantasy while skating before.

She came out of the spin feeling a little wobbly and settled into another slow glide around the rink. With a sharp crackle, the rink lights came on. She blinked away the brilliance and glanced over at the tree.

Her alien stood there, dressed in jeans and his black wool coat, the red scarf around his neck. His lustrous blonde hair glowed under the bright lights.

She pivoted and headed in the opposite direction, her heart pounding. Had she somehow acquired an alien stalker? No, there was no need to be paranoid. It was probably a coincidence.

A coincidence that he haunted her dreams.

A coincidence that his blue-eyed stare fastened on her and followed her as she fled across the ice.

I want to watch you skating nude in the falling snow. I want to watch the snowflakes kiss your naked flesh with a million fleeting kisses.

Another picture leapt into her mind: She was nude

again, alone on the ice, with a thick snowfall of heavy white flakes drifting down around her. Warmth wrapped around her despite the cold, the same sheltered warmth she'd known in her dreams. The wind was still and the heavy crystal flakes shone like falling stars under the lamplight as they landed on her bare skin and hair one by one.

She moved slowly, the sound of her blades muffled by the thick snow falling around her, her eyes closed, her arms outstretched, her legs parted slightly, as if she wished to expose her nudity to the world. The snow settled on her bare skin with a thousand soft touches, icy fingers caressing her all over and melting into dew against her warm flesh. Thick flakes dusted her auburn hair and clung to her eyelashes. Her breasts were pale and white with cold, the rosy nipples standing out in bold relief, and the dark red hair between her legs gleamed with the moisture from the melted snowdrops.

Sarah staggered under the power of the erotic image. Her momentum carried her to the bench and she collapsed upon its hard surface, digging her fingernails into the wood. It was a relief to touch something real after that mind-blowing image. She lifted her head to the cold wind, welcoming the chill after the fever of the vision. Her heart pounded and the private place between her legs was on fire, throbbing with a desire to feel the cool kiss of snowflakes on her most intimate flesh.

Sabal watched as his Earth woman reached the bench, her sexual distress making her awkward on her skates. A moment before she'd glided around the ice, a vision of loveliness and grace. The images he'd sent into her mind had done this to her, shattering her composure. Although he'd made several visits to Earth over the years, each time he came he was amazed at how little sexual energy it took to send these fragile humans over the edge.

It didn't matter. He was patient. He would train her in the ways of his people, step by erotic step. The process had already begun when she handed him the dollar in the mall, granting her permission for courtship. The sign had been a brilliant idea, a moment of pure whimsy that had worked beyond his imaginings.

Great Spirit, the woman was beautiful. It was a crime to hide such sweet curves beneath a bulky winter coat. And the fact that she apparently abhorred the cosmetics the other females of her species slathered over their skin pleased him. Her skin was perfection already, the color of rich cream splashed with rose petals where the cold brought color to her cheeks. He imagined her hidden parts where the sun seldom reached. The mounds of her breasts would be milky white, her blue veins showing through the delicate skin, her nipples a bright pink in contrast.

He wanted to send her that image too, to share his

growing passion with her, but he knew it would be too much for her right now. She was balanced on a slender knife-edge, her mind rocked by events beyond her comprehension. He needed to move with slow care, leading her deeper into his tender web by tiny steps, gentling her with controlled arousal so as not to spook her, until finally her trust reached the point where she would yield to his every desire.

He rubbed his gloved hands together in anticipation, his own nerves tingling with the stimulation of their sexual dance. Sex was vibration, pure and simple. It was energy moving in the body, giving intense pleasure. Humans could only endure so much of that energy. To survive on this harsh world, they had shut too many of their systems down. Anticipation tightened his muscles as he planned how to reawaken her innate abilities one by one. He would raise the level of vibration in her body with exquisite slowness. With each tiny step beyond the edge, she would grow stronger. Their mating was a certainty.

Reaching down, he rubbed the erect flesh between his legs, making it a promise. Patience...that was the secret in dealing with these humans...he would court her with infinite patience. The wait would be worth it. Straightening his shoulders, he walked over to her, ready for the next move in his intricate game. As he approached, he saw her bend over and reach down to the snow-covered ground.

Without thinking, Sarah scooped up a handful of snow and pressed it to her burning cheek. The chill shocked her back to reality. She looked around at the sound of footsteps crunching over the snow and was not surprised to find her alien standing next to the bench.

"The snow cools your cheeks, but the secret depths of your womanhood are burning with the flames of unsatisfied passion," he said. His blue eyes blazed with ardent fire as he gazed at her.

She bit down on her lip, fighting fear. His words sounded like something out of a bad novel, but they stuck her with tremendous impact anyway. Because it was true. Bad novel or not, her secret places still throbbed from the erotic vision. A wild urge seized her, an urge to stand up and strip off her clothes and glide out onto the ice to see if reality could compare to that thrilling sensation. Her heart thundered in her chest as she fought the unexpected desire. It was so unlike her, or at least unlike the reserved mask she presented to the world. Even as she resisted, she could not deny that some deep part of her responded to the sensual visions. It was uncanny how he seemed to know exactly what she was thinking, exactly what she was feeling.

Fear made her want to fight back. She clenched her hands around the edge of the bench and glared up at him. His gold-blond hair framed his face like a halo, and his blue eyes probed her as if seeking entrance into her soul.

"Who the hell are you?" she demanded feeling naked under that unwavering stare, despite the several layers of clothing that covered her body. Perhaps she should report him to the police as a suspicious character so they could run a trace. Maybe he was an escapee from some mental institution. Didn't drugs heighten your perceptions? Maybe that was why he seemed to know her every thought.

An amused look flashed across his face at her question. "You may call me Gabriel."

"Gabriel," she scoffed. "That's the name of an angel—one of the Christmas angels." Suddenly, she felt a rush of anger. It was too much. "I thought you said you were an alien. Now you're claiming to be an angel."

He quirked an eyebrow at her and a dimple appeared in his right cheek. "Don't angels descend from heaven? And I certainly have descended from heaven to visit your world. Gabriel is my human name. My true name is Sabal." He said it with a sibilant hiss.

"Well, listen up, Mr. Alien Gabriel Sabal. I want to be alone. So leave me be, or I'll start screaming. Beam your sexy butt out of here."

Smiling, he sat down next to her. She could feel the heat radiating off his body even through her thick winter coat. His voice fascinated her. It vibrated with warmth and a smooth seductiveness.

"I don't think you want to be alone, Sarah. Not really. And I find you incredibly attractive. I would

like to see you skate nude. I would like to watch your nipples pucker with the cold and then suck them until they are warm again. I would like to stand naked beside you as the snowflakes fall around us and then wrap you in my arms and melt the snow that clings to your body with the heat of my aroused flesh. I would like to lay you down in a snow bank and spread your legs so the flakes fall upon your hot woman flesh, then slide my cock into you when you are moist and wet from their melting."

She swallowed, unable to believe he'd dared to say such words to her in this public place, unable to control the wild, erotic images that surged through her mind. It was as if his voice held some enchanting power. As he spoke each compelling sentence, a picture formed with devastating force before her startled inner gaze. She saw herself nude upon the ice again, saw her breasts, saw her nipples turn taut with the cold, saw him come up to her and lift one breast in his strong hand. His lips settled around her nipple, his hot breath blew on her chilled flesh, and he suckled while a flush of heat suffused her whole body.

His clothes vanished as the snow swirled around them, clinging to her naked flesh. His skin was bronzed, the muscles of his chest well defined, his legs long and lean. He was a golden god standing in the midst of a pure white fall of snow. He took her in his strong arms and his skin burned against hers, melting the thin layer of crystal flakes so that nothing lay between them.

And then they slipped across the ice, laughing as the flakes caressed their bare flesh, and he pulled her down into a snow bank. She lay on her back, not feeling the cold, and spread her legs while a thousand tiny pinpricks of ice landed on her throbbing hot flesh. The snowflakes melted, and she felt the icy water flow into her, and then the hard, demanding length of his cock.

"Wha—What?" she gasped as she came out of the vision.

He sat next to her fully clothed, a gentle smile on his face. His hand caressed her knee. "My people have the gift of telepathy. We can send our thoughts and desires to others. It is a form of intimacy much deeper than the physical intimacy you call sex. With the aid of the vision you can see how much I want you, how tenderly I will love you."

She wanted to get up and run, but her frozen feet would not move. Her body still lay hidden from him under her clothes, but her nipples ached from the imagined caress of his lips and her pussy was on fire with the remembered image of him entering her. Her whole body shook slightly. She felt like a bell that had been stuck with a hammer as powerful vibrations rang through her.

If he could do this with only his mind, what would that strong body do to her if she let it?

"In my world, sex is seen as pure pleasure, and the pursuit of that pleasure has become an art form. I would like to share that pleasure with you." His voice

was a warm, sensual invitation.

"Why me?" Somehow she managed to choke out the words.

"I saw you one day in a bookstore, so alone, standing and reading, lost in another world. And I knew you did not belong here among these people."

"Not true." She shuddered. She'd thought the same thing so often, but she did not want to admit it to him. "Earth is my home. I do belong here."

"Of all the people of Earth, you were the only one to give me a gift."

She remembered the dollar bill she'd stuffed into his tin cup. "That wasn't a gift, more like a bribe to get rid of you."

He flashed a grin at her, his blue eyes full of mischief. "You gave it to me, so I believe technically, as they like to say here in your society, it is a gift. You see, it is the custom of my people that the male cannot approach the female to mate until she offers him some gift. But the male is allowed to do whatever he can to encourage the giving of the gift."

She half turned on the bench to face him. "It is the custom of my people to get to know one another before exchanging sexual intimacies." A blush spread over her cheeks. "What you've done—invading my mind—it's like rape."

A troubled look passed across his face. "Such a harsh word, my sweet Sarah. I never intended to offend you. I only want to show you how beautiful you appear in my eyes, and how much I desire you."

Sarah fought to hold on to her anger in the face of

his surprise. Innocence radiated from his face. His hand on her knee tightened but there was nothing threatening about his grip. Distress turned his eyes an even deeper blue.

She tried to explain. "I did not ask to see those images. I did not grant you permission to enter my mind."

Even as she spoke, her heart challenged her with not facing her own truth. A part of her had welcomed the dreams, assented to the comfort of his presence, reveled in the pure eroticism of the images.

He shook his head, denying her last accusation. "I did not enter your mind, dear Sarah, although I would love to. Sharing of thought and emotion during sex is the ultimate moment of lovemaking among my people. As orgasm comes, the two minds merge into one. We are several steps away from that ecstatic moment."

Bending closer, he moved his arm around her. She slid further down the bench, until she balanced on the end. It was useless. He slid after her. His thigh touched hers, the heat from his body reaching through their clothes to warm her flesh.

His voice murmured in her ear, each word a ragged whisper of desire in her ear. "I dream of the night when I will bury myself deep inside your body, and let my thoughts penetrate even deeper inside your mind. But I would never enter your mind without permission. All I have done is to send you images of how desirable I find you."

"That is not done on Earth." She tried to sound stern but her anger was melting like the snow in his vision, vanishing in the warm, radiant atmosphere of love that continued to flow from his body. Despite the explicit and terrifyingly erotic images he'd sent her, her fear faded away. His touch was reassuring, like the touch of a long-lost friend. She felt welcome by his side. Her body shivered with ever-growing pleasure under his captivating gaze, and a molten core of hot joy spread outward from her aroused center as she realized that he wanted only to please her, to show her almost unbearable heights of sexual arousal.

"How is it done on Earth?" he asked.

"Two people get to know each other first," she told him.

He gave her a wicked grin. "There is no better way to get to know each other than to lie naked together, my skin against your skin, my arms around you, my lips tasting you as you taste me."

She wanted to be offended by his boldness, but his evident sincerity stopped her. "On Earth, we talk a lot first."

"Strange, indeed." He frowned. "When I kiss your flesh, I will taste you, taste all the unique richness of you, and savor your essence. When I enter you, I will know your most secret depths and experience your feelings as you open yourself up to another. What words can possibly compare with the knowledge I will gain about you by doing these things?"

His frank, open look overwhelmed her. She struggled for breath to speak. "Nonetheless, that is

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the custom of our people.”

“It’s a custom you might want to rethink.”

She lifted her head and shot him a defiant look. He was on Earth, not wherever the hell he came from.

Gabriel met her stare with apparent calm. The woman continued to show her courage. He found her feisty spirit quite arousing. He wondered if a woman of his own people would display so much spunk in similar circumstances.

Frowning, he considered the backward customs of her planet. After the tragic mishap that had stranded her distant ancestors on Earth, they’d evolved in some quite bizarre directions. No wonder this world was riddled with strife and unhappiness.

He thought of his home world. There they knew that love was a precious vibration that only grew each time it was nurtured and shared. Sarah was so lonely because her body craved that incredible sensation.

He must do what was necessary to bring their dance to culmination.

“Very well.” He stood to his feet and held out his hand. “I am on Earth. I will obey your customs. I will court you with some charming words before I enter your body for the first time. If—” he smiled down at her, “you agree that when you come to my world you will obey my customs.”

It seemed a harmless enough request. Besides, the

man was a kook, had to be. None of this could possibly be real. Later she would figure out how he had sent such powerful images into her mind.

She got to her feet, fully intending to jump out on the ice and skate away from him as fast as she could. Then a golden moon rose up into the night sky and the passionate glow of his love reached out and surrounded her.

She stopped, stunned. She was imagining this, imagining that a warm aura of love surrounded her like a safe cocoon, projecting her desires on this man. Too much solitude, too many books had driven her crazy. Pam was right. She needed to change.

"There's a restaurant across the street where we can have a cup of hot chocolate," she heard herself say.

"Hot chocolate." His eyes glowed with passion. "How clever of you humans. First one delicious taste—and then another."

Chapter Three

Sarah rubbed her hands together to warm them as she and Gabriel settled into a booth at the Old Fashioned Restaurant across the street from the high school and skating rink. In the summer, the Old Fashioned was famous for its ice cream sundaes and old-style rich chocolate malts. But in the winter, it served up a variety of delicious hot drinks, including apple cider and hot chocolate.

"So," she said after the waitress took their orders, "what brings you to Earth?"

His magnificent body filled the seat across from her in the booth. He leaned back and glanced around the restaurant with interest. He'd taken off his black coat and scarf to reveal a red plaid hunting shirt, open at the neck. A glint of gold above the first button told her that his chest hair matched the color of his thick, silken locks. Her fingers twitched with a desire to reach out and touch his abundant hair, to feel if it was as satiny soft as it looked. Instead, she picked up her water glass.

"My original purpose in coming here was to do research on how your species copes with its sexuality."

She choked on the sip of water she was taking and set the glass down in front of her. A sense of unreality settled over her. Here she was, sitting in a restaurant, talking to an alien as if it were an everyday occurrence.

Was she really starting to believe he was an alien? How else could she explain the visions in her mind?

"You look quite human. Are you wearing a disguise?"

"Not at all." He brushed back a lock of his luxurious hair with one tanned hand and flashed his dimple at her. "This is my true form. I am every bit as human as you are—probably more human, in fact. You see, I am a member of the Parent Race that fathered the sub-species you call the human race."

"I see." Sarah gave her head a little shake, unable to believe they were having this conversation. It all seemed so ordinary on one level, and so extraordinary on another. She should be running out of the Old Fashioned screaming in terror, but the warm energy he radiated held her in place, fascinated. A part of her wondered if it was some sort of mind control. The rest of her didn't want to leave his side, ever. She felt safe in his presence.

"Your race is descended from a group of explorers who were shipwrecked on your planet eons ago. Unable to even send a message to the home world for help, they were forced to adapt to this world to

survive."

"I see," she repeated. *Brilliant conversation, Sarah. I'll bet he's impressed with the human race so far.*

"The terror they faced daily on Earth forced them to mute their telepathic abilities—at least, that is my theory. Whatever the reason, it is clearly evident that the telepathic ability of humans has degenerated over time."

"Wait just a minute." She sat up straighter in the booth. "You're saying we humans are an inferior branch of your species?"

"Yes."

She sniffed and lifted her chin in the air. "It doesn't make any sense that you want me, then. Why on Earth would an advanced alien being such as you want to mate with some poor slob who has descended from a degenerate species?"

A vision of her nude body whirling on the ice in the moonlight flashed through her mind. An aura of pure white light shimmered over her naked flesh. Intuition told her he was showing her the energy she radiated.

"Don't be offended, Sarah." He leaned over the table toward her. "The degeneration your race has suffered for the past millennium can easily be reversed. It is mostly a matter of teaching you how to use some of the mental and sexual skills your people have lost during your exile on this hostile world. In the meantime, you remain a special woman, with a pure depth to your soul that is not often found on this

world—or anywhere. Apart from your dormant telepathic abilities, you are as beautiful and as desirable as any woman of my home world.”

The waitress reappeared with two cups of steaming hot chocolate. She set them in front of them and slapped a check down on the table. “Your bill. Pay at the counter. Have a nice day.” She waddled away without a backward glance.

“Gracious Earth dining at its height,” Sarah said with an ironic smile. Somehow she wanted to show Gabriel the best her species had to offer, but so far she wasn’t doing too well.

He lifted the cup of hot liquid to his lips and took a sip. “Ummm.”

“You like it?” His reaction encouraged her.

“Sweet and rich, the way I imagine you will taste.” His mouth twisted upward in a wicked grin. His eyes burned into hers. “Drink your chocolate and let me lick it from your lips.”

She shivered with desire and glanced around to see if anyone was eavesdropping on their conversation. “Please.” She leaned closer to him. “I teach school here. I don’t know what it’s like on your world, but here it could cause a scandal if a schoolteacher was overheard discussing sexual matters in public.”

He wiggled one of his perfectly arched eyebrows. They were golden like his hair. His eyelashes were so thick she felt envious. “Teachers do have sex, don’t they?”

Her cheeks grew hot. “Yes. If they are in a committed relationship. But they don’t discuss it in

public."

"Are you in a committed relationship, Sarah?"

"No. I'm alone right now—at Christmas." Somehow she couldn't resist adding the last two words.

He leaned forward with a tender look on his face. For an alien struggling to understand Earth's culture, he was incredibly perceptive. She would have to try harder to hide her feelings. "It is hard for your people to be alone at Christmas?"

"Very hard. Christmas is a special time for families to get together here on Earth." She glanced over his head at the next booth, wanting to avoid eye contact. When he gazed into her eyes, he seemed to read her mind. It was unsettling. Besides, she didn't want to talk about her estrangement from her brother. That was only the tip of a much greater iceberg. After all, she'd been teaching for three years now. She should have friends in Rockford she could turn to for holiday comfort. She had Pam and Rose, of course, yet those relationships were casual at best. The truth was, she didn't seem to fit in anywhere.

"Why aren't you with your family?"

"Because my brother is a jerk." There, she'd said it. It didn't seem so horrible once the words were out. She bit down on her inner lip and faced Gabriel's inquiring stare. "My parents died three years ago, and ever since then he's made it more and more clear that he considers me an embarrassment."

"Why is that?" She could see concern on his face,

but no pity. She let out a ragged breath. If he showed her pity, she would jump up from the booth and run.

She traced a circle on the table with one finger. She was telling this stranger more about her innermost feelings than she'd ever shared with a friend. She didn't want to bare her soul to a man she barely knew.

The first step to intimacy, a voice whispered inside her.

Oh, great, now she was arguing with herself, taking his side. She glanced up at him and frowned. "I guess being an English teacher isn't good enough for my brother. He's a lawyer with a big firm. During the holidays he entertains a lot, and he doesn't want his ugly duckling sister standing in the corner."

He reached out and took her hand. "I know this story of the ugly duckling. It is an Earth legend, is it not? When it matures, the duckling turns into a beautiful swan."

Her insides turned molten at the touch of his fingers. "I'm no swan. I know that. I'm a big girl now and I can manage a Christmas on my own."

Feeling awkward, she lifted her cup with her free hand and took a soothing sip.

His fingers curled tighter around hers. "Then cease to worry about this brother of yours. There is no need to worry. I will spend Christmas making wild, passionate love to you."

She sputtered into her cup of hot chocolate and wiped the foam from her mouth. He smiled and she noticed how wide and generous his mouth was, the

lips firm and extremely kissable.

Joy bubbled up inside of Gabriel as he took in her bewildered look. He wanted her off-balance at this stage. The human mind was closed tight to anything outside the ordinary. His objective was to pry hers open inch by subtle inch. He thanked the Great Spirit that she'd suggested this ordinary conversation in an ordinary restaurant. Maybe these humans had a few worthwhile ideas after all. The everyday surroundings were a perfect backdrop for his gradual revelations of what he would expect of her.

He licked his lips as he thought of the incredible sexual experiences that waited for both of them as soon as he gained a bit more of her trust. He'd tasted several Earth women since his arrival, but ever since spotting her in the bookstore he'd stayed celibate and hoarded his energy for their first experience together.

He would use his own excess energy to begin the process of raising her vibration level. As her body adapted, she would start to experience orgasmic sensations that would border on cosmic bliss.

He pictured her cute toes curling as she came with mind-blowing force and smiled. He started to send her the mental image, then stopped. This was supposed to be an ordinary conversation. Best to try and keep it that way. If he sent her an image, it must be for a specific purpose, not simply for titillation.

Later he would titillate her until she begged for release.

Smiling, he turned his full attention back to her.

"We'll see about the wild, passionate love," Sarah said. "I'm sorry, but I don't want to be just another notch on some intergalactic belt."

"You are much more than that." His eyes glowed. "I did sleep with a few other Earth women when I first arrived. For the past few weeks, though, I have focused my research on one woman."

She picked up her cup and drained it. "Perhaps that is not wise. Whoever this woman is, she might refuse you."

"She won't. She's already given me a gift."

She scowled at him. "You seem to set a lot of importance on gift giving. Are you sure you're not from Earth? You fit right in at Christmas time. The holiday meant something more once, but it's all about giving and getting gifts these days."

His eyes glittered like sapphires. "I understand Christmas started with a gift—a wonderful gift. So gifts that come from the heart would still be appropriate. Among my people, gifts from the heart are the only gifts that matter. I wish to give you such a gift now."

"Oh, yeah, what's that?"

"I wish to teach you how to experience the full sexual capacity of the Parent Race."

Her throat went dry at the words. Her mind repeated them like a litany. Full sexual capacity. Full sexual capacity. Somehow his words had snuck in

under her defenses, opening her up to new concepts, concepts that begged for exploration.

An image shot through her mind of a world beneath a double sun. Crystal towers rose in the distance while couples strolled arm in arm through lush green parkland. The women wore gowns that shimmered with living light. One moment they were opaque, hiding their sensuous forms, the next transparent. The men wore codpieces and jewels at their waists and necks, but otherwise their magnificent bodies were bare.

The enchanting images weren't what shook her to her core, though. Along with the vision came feelings—Gabriel's feelings, she could only assume. The warm comfort of home soothed the raw edges of her aching loneliness. The crystal towers were a happy refuge, the green park a place for glorious play. And the people...open and warm, they shared their love, their dreams, and their visions, with each other.

As if from a distance, she heard Gabriel's voice. "Your race experiences only a dim shadow of the rich depths of the full sexual experience. For instance, among my people it is customary for a man to court a woman by sending her his erotic thoughts about her. Such thoughts are meant to enhance her anticipation of the mating and give her immense pleasure. But you seem unaware of this custom."

As he spoke, he leaned forward again, his eyes widening.

I will possess you in ways you have never known.

The words sang in her head. A second image leaped into her mind, this one definitely set on Earth: She crouched on her hands and knees on a bed of crushed red velvet, her buttocks raised in the air. Gabriel knelt behind her, as naked as she was. His hands caressed her rounded cheeks and urged her thighs apart to reveal the rosy flesh between them. She saw moisture glistening on the lips of her labia and knew she was already aroused and wet.

The vision washed over her like a great wave, sweeping her inside it. The rich texture of the crushed red velvet caressed her hands and knees. His hands fingered her inner lips. Each touch sent a small explosion of electricity coursing through her. She gasped as his finger slid deeper, probing her silken sheath. Then two fingers entered her while his thumb curled around to press against the hardening nub of her clitoris. His long fingers slid in and out of her and she clenched her wet flesh around them, feeling an agony of desire.

More? Do you want more? His words whispered in her mind.

"Yes." She spoke the word aloud. She was back in the booth again, gazing into the incredible blue depths of his eyes. She saw herself in his dark pupils, saw the vision reform.

As if in a dream she watched as she lifted her buttocks higher, wanting his fingers to sink deeper in to her.

He withdrew his hand and reached for something.

With a low moan, she saw that he held a dildo.

It is a mold made from my body, exactly like me. He slid the tip into her and wiggled it, sending waves of fire rushing through her body.

No. You. I want you inside me.

Not yet. Patience, my sweet. He shoved the dildo into her and she stifled a cry as it filled the aching, empty spaces of her inner flesh. Bending over, he kissed her swollen, glistening lips where they curved around the edge of the dildo.

I want you to dream a deeper dream now. Our intimacy is growing. I want you to dream of this inside you, to dream of me inside you, filling you in just this way.

His tongue licked around her inner lips and the outer tip of the dildo bobbed up and down as her pussy constricted and released around it. She moaned and squirmed, trying to squeeze her legs together to increase the fantastic sensations pulsing inside her, but he wouldn't let her. He held them apart, exposing her feminine secrets to his hot gaze, as he drew the dildo out one inch and thrust it into her again.

Please, she begged, please...

"Please what?"

The vision vanished into nothingness. He sat across from her in the booth of the Old Fashioned Restaurant sipping his hot chocolate.

Sweat broke out on her forehead. "I can't believe you can do that, or that it's all in my mind. It feels so real."

He smiled, a slow, confident smile. "Wait until you

experience the real thing."

She clutched at the check with shaky hands. "I'm not sure I'm ready to feel the real thing—or to experience the 'full sexual capacity', as you call it. I'm only a degenerate human, after all."

"Full sexual capacity is nothing to be frightened of. It is your birthright, the birthright of every living being. Without it, life would be barren. It is no wonder your people feel so alone so much of the time and cling to a false sense of unity with these fascinating, yet pathetic holidays of yours."

"What do you know about it?" she snapped.

"I visited here last Christmas, too. I watched how you all pretend to have a good time while really wondering what, if anything, can ever take away the essential loneliness and despair you feel."

His words struck too close to home. They hurt her. She pushed herself out of the booth and fumbled in her purse, throwing a five-dollar bill down on the table. "There, that will take care of the check—in case aliens don't carry money. Please don't send any more of your images into my head."

He stared up at her in surprise. "I am courting you, Sarah. We've had our intimate conversation as you requested. Now it is time to start growing closer according to the customs of my people."

"No thanks. I'll stick to Earth customs."

"I am courting you," he repeated with unexpected stubbornness. Warmth seemed to flow out of him, sucking her back toward the booth. Her knees trembled and she wanted nothing more than to sit

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down beside him again.

"Then welcome to your first breakup," she snarled, and rushed out of the restaurant.

Chapter Four

Sarah dipped the ladle into the punch bowl and poured herself a glass. She hoped it was spiked. The faculty Christmas party was an annual ordeal that cried out for a little hard liquor to ease the pain.

She glanced around in search of Dan Tucker, the tenth grade algebra teacher. Last year he had hit on her after a few visits too many to the BYOB bar in the corner. She wanted to avoid him at all costs.

In fact, she wished she didn't have to be there at all. Every year the event got worse. The female faculty members vied with each other in dressing up for the occasion, and the ass-kissing that went on was legendary. But Harold Roth, the high school's principal, had made it clear in his invitation that attendance was mandatory. The school board members were slated to put in an appearance and give their yearly pep talk, for one thing. Roth hoped to take advantage of the supposed good spirits of the season to talk them into more funding in the next budget.

"Wow, girl, you look classy!" Pam appeared out of the crowd, holding two glasses of punch. "Where did you get that dress?"

Sarah glanced down at the emerald green satin that encased her. She'd found it in the far corner of a thrift shop and couldn't resist the low price for what was surely a designer dress. Pam didn't need to know that, though.

"Just something I picked up the last time I went shopping."

Pam whistled. "Pretty daring for you. Strapless and form-fitting."

Sarah laughed and tossed her head, enjoying the delicious sensation as her curls brushed against her bare shoulders. Their touch heightened her awareness of her body in a way that was new to her. Usually, she just scrunched her hair up in an untidy bun. Tonight, she'd decided to wear it long and loose, pinned up at the sides with silver combs.

Something in Pam's stunned look made her wonder why she'd decided on the change. Somehow buying a sexy dress and letting her hair down had seemed natural until this moment when she stood squirming under her friend's wide-eyed stare. She recalled the dress she'd worn last year, a dull brown, shapeless thing with a high collar. Glancing down, she glimpsed her cleavage as if for the first time.

Why, her breasts were practically on public display. A hot flush spread across her skin, warming her. Last night she'd dreamed of skating naked on the

ice. Had Gabriel's images turned her into an exhibitionist?

She fought the urge to cover her breasts with her hands and spoke with a reckless bravura. "I've decided to be more outgoing."

Pam laughed. "Well, you've come out in a big way, so to speak. I hope you're not planning to do any deep breathing."

Sarah's eyes scanned the crowd. "No one here is interesting enough to cause me even a flutter. Don't worry."

"You're hard to please—" Pam began, but her accusation was interrupted by the arrival of her husband, Gary. He took one of the drinks out of her hand with a smile and nodded at Sarah.

"You're looking great tonight."

"Isn't she?" Pam looked as pleased as if the green gown had been her idea. "All she needs is a beau."

"No, no!" Sarah waved a hand and backed away. "No matchmaking tonight." She still suspected Pam was the one who had pointed Dan at her at last year's party.

"If you insist." Pam made a face at her.

Gary wrapped a possessive arm around his wife's shoulders. "Pam wants to see all her friends as happy as we are."

Coming from him, it sounded like a rebuke. Sarah stiffened and glanced around for an escape route.

Fate seemed to be on her side for once. Another couple walked up, hand in hand. Leaving Pam and her husband to chat with them, Sarah mumbled an

excuse and headed over for the buffet. If nothing else, she could get a good free meal out of this party. The table was so full she could almost hear the wood groaning under the weight. Sign-up sheets had been posted in the teachers' lounge for weeks and everyone had jotted down what dish they intended to bring. She'd baked a pan of homemade lasagna, her only claim to fame in the kitchen. Someone else had brought sliced roast beef and ham from the deli. Pam had supplied her usual meatballs in a sweet and sour sauce. Right now what Sarah wanted, though, was a plate piled high with fat-laden appetizers. Should she go for the tiny wieners wrapped in a flaky crust or the melted Brie with the apricot topping?

"It all looks delicious, doesn't it?"

Sarah glanced up to see Harold Roth, standing to her right. Her heart jumped in her chest and she nearly dropped the plate she'd picked up because Gabriel stood at his side. He looked like a dream in dark slacks and a crisp white shirt and tailored jacket.

Fumbling her plate in her stiff fingers, she set it down again and took a deep breath.

Oh, dear! That was a mistake. She felt her breasts slide free as the smooth material covering them moved to make way for the expansion of her rib cage. Her hardening nipples hovered at the edge of exposure. Standing stock still, she let her breath out slowly and glared at the alien.

Roth's fascinated gaze was fixed on her breasts. Great, her principal was about to get a hard-on for

her. That was all she needed.

She scowled again at Gabriel. This was his fault. Roth looked up finally and noticed the direction of her stare. He glanced from her to Gabriel. "Do you know Mr. Goodman?"

"Mr. Goodman?" Her eyes widened at the name he'd chosen. The man was an impostor, and a brazen one at that. She tugged on the bodice of her dress, pulling it up.

Gabriel smiled at her. "Yes, we've met. But I don't think I ever mentioned my full name. Gabriel Goodman."

Roth looked smug. "Mr. Goodman is a legislative aid to Senator Potter, our distinguished representative in the U.S. Senate. I've been talking with him about the need for increased funding for the local schools in the state."

Gabriel's blue eyes shone with amusement. He winked at Sarah as if they were co-conspirators. "A fascinating topic. Mr. Roth is a wealth of information."

"I'll just bet he is," Sarah said, edging away from the table. Whatever game Gabriel was up to now, she wanted no part of it. Her heartbeat sped up at the memory of the sensuous images he'd sent into her mind the last time they'd met. If he started doing that here, where her staid co-workers surrounded her, she would die of embarrassment.

Gabriel noticed her attempt at a retreat and moved to block it. "I hear you teach English."

"Sarah is an excellent teacher," Roth said, beaming

at both of them. "She can tell you all about the challenges a modern teacher labors under. Due to our severe classroom shortage in the district, she must move from one classroom to another all day long."

"Is that so?" Gabriel's eyes filled with concern. "Senator Potter will want to hear about something like that."

"Yes, indeed." Roth rubbed his hands together, looking pleased. "Sarah, please fill Mr. Goodman in on the challenges we teachers face every day."

Gabriel slid his hand under her elbow. Despite her reluctance, pleasurable warmth shot up her arm at his touch. "Please do," he murmured, steering her toward the back of the room. As soon as he had her away from the crowd, he released her elbow and took hold of her hand instead. "It is a pleasure to see you again."

She met his gaze with a defiant glance. "Somehow I suspect you knew I would be here. So what are you—an alien or a legislative assistant?"

He laughed. "At the moment, I am both. Our people have recruited some powerful friends high up in your government—friends who know that any contact with the parent race can only benefit your kind. Senator Potter is kind enough to provide me with a cover while I conduct my research on your world."

The mention of his research made her bristle. "Oh, yes, how could I forget? You're investigating our pitiful Earthling sexuality. Of course, our

incompetence in that area is the result of our being degenerates."

His fingers caressed hers. "I see you more as a lost race, struggling in the mud when your eyes should be on the stars. All you need is someone who can awaken you to your great heritage."

She blinked at the kindness in his tone. "Whatever. We don't need the pity of an alien. We manage to do all right for ourselves."

He leaned toward her, his eyes intense as they stared into hers. "My mission is simple. All I want to do is teach you the full depths of your sexual nature. You are as capable as any woman of my kind, well able to reach the heights of ecstatic bliss once you are shown the way. When my people realize this, they will be more willing to help restore humanity to its glorious heritage."

She frowned at him. "So—let me see if I understand this—you're suggesting that by sleeping with you I will be doing the entire human race a favor."

"When I awaken your full sexuality, I will prove that it is possible. My people will see that your race only requires proper instruction to regain your lost telepathic abilities."

She nodded. Boy, did this guy have a line, or what? "So the entire golden future of the human race hinges on my getting into bed with you."

"Of course not." His warm grip tightened around her fingers. He raised her hand and kissed it, the mere brush of his lips sending sparks shooting up her arm.

A hot wave of desire crashed through her, then pooled in her middle. "There are many women on your planet I could sleep with, many whom I could teach to achieve full sexuality. If you refuse, I will do so. No, I want to sleep with you because you are the one I want. That is why I am courting you, even now when you continue to resist me."

She stiffened, afraid another vivid sexual image was about to crash into her mind, overwhelming her. Instead, he slipped his arm through hers and tugged her through a rear door and out into the corridor of the high school.

"Where are we going?" she demanded, unwilling to leave the protection of the crowd. Part of her wanted to dig in her heels and resist. The other part wanted to stay with him, to feel the touch of those skillful fingers on her bare flesh. He was mad, insane ...and fascinating. She'd never met anyone like him.

He continued walking, pressing her arm to his side. She knew she should pull free and bolt back into the safety of the party room. She shook her head, tired of the inner debate. Her life was dull, boring. The truth was, she was intrigued by the effect he had on her and dying to know what might come next.

He turned a corner and wrapped an arm around her waist. "I only want to get you off somewhere alone so we can talk." He drew her up against him. She smelled the crisp, clean scent of his enticing cologne, felt the heat of his body through his clothes. His chest pressed against her breasts, forcing her flesh

upward and half out of the satiny container that held her.

She glanced down in alarm. One deep breath and she would be completely exposed to his fierce, possessive gaze.

Looking amused, he backed off half a step and lowered his head to kiss the top of the quivering white flesh that mounded up as if waiting for the touch of his lips. His tongue traced a circle there, then dipped into the deep hollow between her breasts.

Oh, God! His skilled tongue swept over her curves, almost up to the hardening tips. She shivered and tried to pull away. This man knew how to press her hot buttons far too well. Alien or not, he seemed entirely capable of reading her mind.

Gabriel gripped both her arms, holding her in place, and kissed the hollow at the base of her throat. His silky blond hair brushed against her cheek.

"I adore you," he whispered.

Sarah's knees went weak. She grabbed his arms for support, and experienced a rush of pleasure when her hands circled hard muscle under his jacket. She liked her men fit and strong. He pulled her close again and kissed her on the lips, his tongue demanding entrance and then indulging in a long, lingering exploration of her mouth. The gentle thrusting of his tongue carried a promise of the deeper depths of sexuality awaiting their mutual exploration.

When he lifted his head, she sighed, wanting more. Heat radiated in waves off her face and bosom, and she suspected her skin was flushed. She hoped no one

else at the party ventured out into the corridor anytime soon to see her, hot and panting, in the hall.

"You are like a flower ready to open, Sarah. I could teach you about the powers of sexual joy that lie sleeping in your depths. I could awaken your full potential. Isn't that what a teacher does on your world? Give me your trust and I will become your teacher."

The growing heat between her legs throbbed at his words. Images from the visions he'd sent her crowded her mind. What if she walked away and refused to give him the chance? Would she spend the rest of her life wondering if the reality would have lived up to those incredible pictures in her head? The sensations that had swept her body had left her drained, wanting more, straining toward some unknown culmination. What would the reality do to her?

She parted her lips, barely breathing. He watched her closely, his blue gaze warm and open. She should be terrified, should stop to think about why she was acting in unexpected ways under the influence of an alien. Instead, she stroked his forearm with her fingers, enjoying the feel of muscle underneath his jacket. His powers were terrifying, yet he didn't scare her. A sense of warm safety filled her whenever he was near.

"What do you have in mind?"

He kissed her forehead. "I could take you home to my apartment."

A distant warning bell rang in her mind. She shook her head. She never acted like this, never. It was almost as if he emitted some sort of hormone that drugged her. Her limbs felt heavy, weighted down with desire. Her eyelids half-closed. She tilted her head toward the shadows further down the hall. "There's a closet down there. Sometimes the kids make out in it. There's a lock on the door."

I'll allow a little exploration, she told herself. And if anything happens, other people are just a scream away.

His tempting mouth formed a smile. He leered at her, his eyes sparkling. "I thought it was the custom on Earth to come out of the closet, not go into it. But I'd gladly go into any closet with you."

Chapter Five

Gabriel led Sarah down the hall to the storage closet. Her high heels clicked on the hard linoleum. The closet had a wooden door with a frosted glass panel set in the upper half. 'STORAGE' was stenciled on the glass in black letters.

They slipped inside.

"The lock is on the outside," Gabriel pointed out. His eyes danced with suppressed laughter.

"Oops, slight problem." She was past caring. No one was going to come down here tonight. She turned her back on him. Her eyes searched the dim interior for someplace comfortable. The walls were lined with shelves stacked with a variety of items—everything from cleaning supplies to obsolete textbooks. The floor was the same hard linoleum as the hallway.

His hot breath brushed against the back of her neck and his hands caressed her bare shoulders. His fingers raked through her hair, finding her silver combs and removing them. She heard the soft clink as he laid them on a shelf.

Then his nimble fingers were tugging at the zipper at the back of her dress, yanking it down the length of her spine and over the curve of her buttocks.

She quivered as the fabric parted. The dress came loose in front and fell away from her breasts. She wore only the skimpiest strapless bra of black lace underneath.

Holding her breath, she waited for his next move. He was the teacher; she was the pupil. His silky hair brushed against her bare back as his head lowered. She almost jumped out of her skin when the hot tip of his tongue touched the dimple at the bottom of her spine.

"Steady," he murmured. "Let me explore you, my darling." His tongue flicked over her quivering skin, setting off an inner vibration that shot all the way to her feminine core. Her skin seemed to come alive, shivering under his caress, sensitive to the slightest movement of air as he shifted behind her.

She bit her lips as he licked upward over her backbone with long, slow strokes. When he reached her bra strap, he unhooked it. The bra fell to the floor.

Sarah gasped as he kissed the back of her neck. She wanted to turn around, to feel his hands and mouth on her breasts, but he remained behind her, his hands on her hips where her gown pooled, holding her motionless.

She was grateful for the darkness, grateful he couldn't see the sexual flush mounting on her breasts. Dear God, he had barely touched her and she was melting with desire.

His hands slipped over her waist to her stomach, stroked the firm, smooth flesh of her abdomen. One finger circled her belly button before dipping lower under the satin fabric that still clung to her thighs.

She wiggled, wanting to be free of the dress. He pulled her close and she felt the hard evidence of his desire pressing against her. His hand pushed under her panties and brushed the curly red hair that marked her secret slit.

"Please." She grabbed his arms, wanting to pull his hands higher. Her nipples were rock-hard and aching, crying out for the release his touch would bring.

He laughed and pulled free of her grip without effort. He tugged at her dress and it fell away from her hips and pooled on the floor. His fingers found her panties and hose and pulled them down, too.

"No, let me." Shivering, glad her back was still to him, she slipped off her high heels and bent over to pull off the panties and hose.

"Put your heels back on." His voice was a low, masculine rumble in the closet. "The floor's cold."

While she slipped her heels back on her feet, she heard the sound of a zipper behind her and the rustle of his clothing coming off. Her heart pounded against her rib cage and she clenched her hands at her sides, wanting to turn around and see if his body was as magnificent in real life as the vision he'd shown her. But when she tried, his hands caught her hips again, stopping the motion.

"No," he whispered. "I am the teacher. You must

do exactly as I say.”

Gabriel’s eyes surveyed the bare skin of her back, pale and satiny smooth in the dim light of the closet. He could see much better in the dark than she could, but he wasn’t about to tell her that at this moment.

His heart rejoiced at her willingness to submit to him. Her body trembled slightly under his hands, but she remained motionless, obediently facing the back of the closet, waiting for his next move.

He stroked her spine. It was time to move beyond tantalizing images. They had served their purpose, awakening her desire and subtly raising the sexual vibration in her body each time she replayed them in her mind. Judging by her willingness to submit now, she had done so many times.

Her skin shivered under his fingertips. Her extreme sensitivity pleased him. His cock hardened at the thought of penetrating her for the first time. He’d gained her trust with a slow and gentle approach. It was time to switch tactics and awaken her to a whole other side of sensuality.

He would take her hard and fast, penetrate every inch of her unexplored sheath, fill her so full that her pussy would be an aching reminder of their union for days to come.

His fingertips danced up her spine and stroked the back of her neck, the gentle slope of her shoulders. They traveled back down over her shoulder blades

and traced the outline of her ribs and the smooth curve of her waist and hips. Her skin grew hot under his exploring touch, and her aura expanded as the sexual energy flowed through her with increased intensity.

He rested his hands on her hips and closed his eyes, the better to see her with his inner psychic senses. The sky-blue of her aura spoke of her serious nature, the underlying tones of pink and rose revealed her compassionate heart and the outer glow of deep, pulsing red promised the sexuality he hoped to awaken.

What a sight she would be on his home world, her body covered by the teasing, shimmering garments that would conceal her nudity, yet glimmer into transparency when a male sent erotic vibrations her way. He longed to see her so, naked in the sunlight, her garments vanishing into smoke at the touch of his desire, her aura pulsing around her.

His cock strained upward at the thought. He let go of her hips and flexed his fingertips. *Time to venture into new territory.*

Sara bit her lower lip as his hands lifted from her hips. Her breathing sounded loud in the small closet as she stared at the dim shelves in front of her. Her whole body was ablaze, waiting for his touch, not knowing when or where it would come. It was like

being blindfolded, but all the more erotic because she stood willingly like some love slave, letting his hands explore her at his pleasure. A part of her watched in disbelief. She'd never behaved in such a wanton way before. Maybe it was the sensual images that had assaulted her mind, and more than those mental pictures, really. When she watched the images, it was as if she were there, feeling every glorious sensation. In some incredible sense, they were lovers already. Only her body craved the reality, ached for the fulfillment his courting had promised.

Her thoughts in turmoil, she realized his hands had moved to explore the round swell of her buttocks, dipping into the inner curve. Her face grew hot with her increasing embarrassment. She wanted to run away, but there was nowhere to run. Besides, she could hardly go staggering out of the closet and into the hall stark naked except for her high heels.

She drew in a lungful of air and felt her breasts lift. The nipples were taut, aching for his touch—any touch. Her fingers twitched and she started to lift her hands.

As if guessing her intention, he caught both her hands in his and drew them down to her sides again.

"No, my sweet." He held her hands at her sides.

Her breasts shook with her ragged breathing. If he didn't touch her nipples or her slit soon, she would go mad with desire. As the molten fire in her core grew hotter, she squirmed and pressed her legs together, seeking some measure of relief.

"Sweet sensual Sarah." He sounded amused.

"You're like a young animal, eager to run free. Be patient a little moment longer, my sweet."

Warm, moist lips pressed against her shoulder at the same instant that a hand pushed between her legs from behind, forcing her to assume a wider stance.

Cool air touched the outer lips of her labia. Instantly, her pussy flooded with moisture. Her head came up, and she drew in a sharp breath. The blood beat through her veins. Her breasts and pussy swelled. With her legs parted, the scent of her arousal filled the closet. She spread them wider, inviting his touch, wondering if her knees would give way.

Fire shot through her as one of his fingers traced the inner folds of her labia. His other hand massaged her breast. She braced her trembling legs against the hot pulses of desire each delicate touch created. Yet just as the pleasurable sensations reached an almost unbearable peak, his hand withdrew from her private flesh.

"Please," she begged. "Don't stop."

"I've only just begun." His warm whisper tickled her ear. His arms went around her and pulled her against his hard erection while his finger touched her mouth. She smelled the rich odor of her body's desire on his fingertip.

"Suck it," he commanded.

Closing her eyes, not believing that she would do such a thing, she took his finger into her mouth and sucked her juices off it. They tasted salty. The flush on her face and breasts deepened, and she was grateful

for the darkness of the closet.

He pushed himself against her, moving his body so that his erection probed between her legs. The head caressed her slit, which was now slick with moisture and then withdrew.

"Do you want me?" he whispered, his breath hot in her ear.

Her throat was so dry she was afraid her voice would fail her. She nodded her head.

He turned her around at last. The desire raging through her body made her clumsy with need. She half stumbled as she turned, her high heels making an urgent tapping on the hard floor. His strong, capable hands grabbed her hips, supporting her, then moved upward to cup her breasts.

She let out a long sigh of relief and pleasure as his thumbs touched her taut nipples. Little ripples of electricity ran through her body. She moaned as desire washed over her in waves. She was quivering with sexual tension, on the verge of an explosion that aroused and frightened her at the same time.

Dim light from the hallway shone through the frosted glass, revealing the outline of his head and the blond shimmer of his silky hair. His mouth descended and covered hers, his tongue licking her intimate taste off her lips.

"Salty yet sweet," he murmured, his mouth still pressed against hers, his breath blowing into her.

She lifted her hands. God, she craved him. Warm skin and firm muscles met her exploring touch. Her fingers roved over the well-defined hills and valleys

of his chest muscles and moved on to his flat abdomen. Feeling bold, she let her hand dip lower and encountered a hard shaft of silken flesh.

He lifted her hands away and curved her arms around his neck. "Hang on tight," he whispered, "and wrap your legs around me."

With no further warning, he linked his hands under her buttocks, then lifted, his powerful muscles barely straining as she came off her feet. Seemingly without effort, he hoisted her.

Acting almost on instinct, she wrapped her long legs around his waist. A dreamlike feeling came over her, a sense of abandonment. She knew he was about to do something to her, something she could barely imagine, yet the erotic desire that filled her quieted all sense of fear.

"I want you, Sarah." He wasn't even breathing hard, although he was supporting her weight with his arms.

"I want you, too." She wondered if he could hear the terrible pounding of her heart as he held her poised on the brink of discovery. She clutched his neck and held on to his body with her legs, glad to feel the firm support of his strong hands as he positioned her in the air. It was only when he began to lower her inch by inch that she realized how wide she'd had to spread her legs to wrap them around him, how exposed and vulnerable she was.

The head of his cock touched her wet entrance. As his grip tightened on her body, she began to tremble.

Until now, the whole experience had seemed like an erotic dream, but the pressure of his cock probing her opening brought her back to the reality of what was about to happen.

The hard head of his shaft penetrated her slick sheath. She drew in a sharp breath as his fullness pressed into her. God, he was big. She'd only slept with two other men before; both of them college experiments, the first little more than an excuse to lose her pesky virginity. His cock must be twice the size of theirs. Her pussy ached as he thrust another inch deeper into her, stretching her tender tissues with his hard flesh.

"Oh, oh, oh!" She was breathing in short gasps now, crying out with pain and desire as he lowered her on his shaft, his strong hands forcing her body downward. How long was he? How much deeper could he go inside her body? She fought to wiggle her hips as the sensuous length of him slid deeper into her.

With a sudden movement of his pelvis, he thrust upward. She stifled a cry as the full length of his cock rammed into her, impaling her.

"Oh, God!" She jerked with the intense pleasure of his penetration and her high heels flew off her feet, falling to the floor with a clatter. Her bare heels dug into the small of his back as she braced herself. His male organ swelled inside her as her own weight pressed her tender flesh down around him. Her insides were full of aroused male, and she feared the slightest movement would send her over the edge,

screaming. Yet she didn't dare make a loud sound. What if the school board members and her fellow teachers heard?

She was drowning in the heat of his body, clinging to him for dear life while her pussy pulsed with unforgettable sensations of pleasure.

Gabriel held her tight with both arms and began a soft bouncing motion, bending his knees and straightening up again. For a brief second she admired the tremendous strength it must take for him to move with her weight impaled on his cock. His controlled movement lifted her slightly before the force of gravity brought her down again on his shaft. Once more, he penetrated her depths with a rush of sensation that burned like wildfire from her core out to the furthest nerve endings of her fingers and toes.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and fisted her hands in his hair, clinging to him as he rocked her, lifting her and letting her sink onto his shaft, each penetration impossibly deep. She moaned and bit her lips to keep from screaming as the head of his cock struck against the tender tissues of her womb. His shaft stretched her to her feminine limits, kept her right on the edge of overwhelming sensation. No man had ever entered her this deeply. She marveled that she felt no fear, only bliss. She was afloat on a sea of sexual delight, aware that his tender love surrounded her and held her secure as he pounded his shaft into her sheath.

Lifting her head, she found his impossibly blue

eyes watching her. His gaze pulled her into the depths of his soul while his cock ravished every inch of her intimate flesh. She drew on his strength, sensed the pleasure she was giving him as his hard shaft thrust in and out of her silken depths, tasted his longing to possess her. His hips started to move in a faster rhythm, pounding against her, his muscles flexing under her, his desire for her pouring into her. His soul seemed to call out to hers, summoning her to open herself and give him every inch of her body.

Her pussy flooded with moisture as she responded to his desire. The fire in her loins spread up her chest and down her legs. Every part of her stiffened, and she clutched him in desperation as powerful waves of sensation pounded through her in answer to the beat to his thrusts. Her head dropped backward as the overwhelming orgasm swept through her and her consciousness dissolved in bliss.

Only as the waves began to subside did she realize that she still clung to him with her arms and legs while he supported her weight, that she was still impaled on his rigid shaft. With a gentle smile, he lifted her upward and pulled himself out of her, then set her down on her feet.

She continued to cling to him, barely able to stand, her pussy's moisture and his spilled seed running down her legs.

"Was that the full package?" she asked when she could breathe again.

He nuzzled her ear with his lips. "No, that was a little bit of foreplay, just for you. Call it a taste of

things to come."

Taking her hand, he guided it to his cock. It was still as hard as a rock, although slippery with their juices.

"Lick it clean for me," he commanded.

A sensual daze bedazzled her mind as she sank to her knees in front of him and took his shaft into her mouth. Her tongue began to work, licking her moisture and his cum off the hard, pulsing flesh. Its fierce heat aroused her, as did the salty taste of their sex. She opened her mouth wider and took it deeper inside, sucking with wanton pleasure.

"Enough," he said and pulled her to her feet. A white smile flashed in the dimness of the closet. "You need to return to your party before you're missed. But I wouldn't want to send a lady back mussed up in any way."

As he spoke, he sank to a kneeling position on the floor and grabbed her high heels from where they'd fallen.

"Here, put these back on," he said, slipping them on her feet. As soon as they were on, he pressed her legs apart with his hands. When he'd forced her into a wide stance, he positioned his head between her legs and began licking her inner thighs with his skilled tongue. She quivered and clenched her hands into fists as his tongue touched the outer edges of her swollen labia where his semen and her moisture still clung. Shivers of pleasure rippled over her skin as the tip of his tongue dove deep into her smooth inner

flesh. He licked in spirals inside her, and her shivers changed to shudders of pure pleasure.

Teasing her now, he withdrew his tongue, swooped it around her labia, and thrust it once more into her intimate flesh.

"Don't stop. That feels like heaven," she gasped as the tip of his tongue flicked over the hard nub of her clit, then dipped into her, then flicked out again. Her legs threatened to melt and she feared she was about to collapse on him. Tottering on the heels, she reached out to grab hold of a shelf on one side of her.

He pressed his hot mouth against her inner lips and sucked, thrusting his tongue deeper into her. His thumb moved to cover her clit, rubbing and releasing in a circular motion that sent fire surging through her core. Her body stiffened as waves of overpowering sensation radiated out of her loins. Her legs trembled and she had a sudden vision of herself standing spread eagled and stark naked except for her high heels, with Gabriel between her legs, eating her pussy. If the door to the closet opened now, she would be a goner.

The thought of exposure sent her over the edge. The hot ball of fire in her belly exploded, and she stiffened and shuddered as a glorious second orgasm ripped through her body.

"There, all cleaned up." Gabriel rose to his feet and bent over to pick up her panties and bra. He handed them to her and smiled. "Time to get dressed and go back." Even as he spoke, he started to pull on his own briefs and pants.

Sarah leaned against the back shelves, not even sure her legs would support her, and watched him get dressed. Did he expect her to walk back into the party and drink punch and eat appetizers after having the two most powerful orgasms of her life?

Already finished dressing, he reached out and turned the handle of the closet door. "I have to go now, Sarah."

To her surprise, tears sprang into her eyes. "Don't leave. I've just made love like I've never made love in my life, but I feel like I don't even know you."

She blushed as the revealing words spilled out. She'd never before opened up to any man as she had to him—emotionally or physically. She'd just shared her body with him. Now she longed to know something about the soul of the man who'd loved her with such passion.

Already it was hard to believe the hard length of his shaft had penetrated her only moments ago. He looked so cool and calm with his shirt buttoned and his jacket open, without even a wrinkle to show what had passed between them, while she stood naked except for her heels, her thighs still damp from their mutual pleasure.

Gabriel stopped, his hand resting on the handle of the door. She looked afraid that he was about to leave her forever. As if there was any way he could leave her

now after tasting the delights of her womanly depths. His cock twitched and he was grateful for the dark so she wouldn't see the bulge between his legs. Great Spirit, when he'd lifted her she'd felt light as a feather, ethereal and fragile, and the thought of plunging his length into her exposed pussy had almost daunted him. But there was nothing breakable about this woman. She'd let him impale her, opened herself to his fierce penetration.

Even now her breathing remained uneven from the orgasm he'd given her with his tongue. He licked his lips and tasted her inner flesh again. The memory of the heat of her pussy on his face made his cock pulse. She was only a step away, still naked and ready. He'd push her down to the floor and spread her legs wide and enjoy that delectable feast one more time, until her pussy flooded with moisture. Then he'd mount her and sink into her.

Taking a deep breath, he reined in his sensual impulses. No, he needed to lead her to the ultimate ecstasy step by step. Tonight had been a good beginning, and the taste of her body on his lips told him the prize would be worth the game.

He'd done enough. He mustn't frighten her by revealing the true depths of his passion, yet he was tempted. His woman stood watching him with wide eyes, shivering with unfulfilled longing despite the two earth-shattering orgasms he'd given her.

A pleased smile curved his lips. Her desire for him was a wonderful sign of future delights to come.

His eyes focused on the white mounds of her

breasts, the rosy tips barely visible in the dim closet. Her nipples were rigid. He remembered how he'd held her hands, preventing her from touching herself. He'd barely caressed those taut nipples with his thumbs. The stiff points of flesh seemed to beg him for their fair share of attention.

Relenting, he released the handle and walked over to where she stood, half slumped against the shelves. He smelled the exciting, elusive scent of her body's arousal as he hovered over her and bent to press a gentle kiss to her lips. "We've only begun to get to know one another, my love."

He cupped her right breast in his hand and lifted it. She gasped and arched her back to press her breast forward as his mouth lowered and sucked one nipple. He took his time, enjoying the sound of her soft whimpers as he licked and teased the swollen nipple, the erotic tapping of her heels as she quivered with passion and shifted her weight. He lifted his head, and his keen gaze searched her face. "I want you, too, my sweet, more than you can know, enough to teach you my ways with patience."

Sarah's heart melted with the tender look he gave her as he planted another warm, moist kiss on her forehead. The heat of his lips seemed to sink into her brain. Light flooded her mind and a sensation of fullness made her pussy throb in remembrance of the

moment when he'd possessed her. But this was a mental sensation, not a physical one, and it was his essence that was pouring into her now. She tasted his laughter and drank in his strength. The fierce fire of his purpose scorched her and the compassion in his depths cooled the flames.

A million sensations, all of them a revelation of his soul, pulsed through her and vanished. It was like being brushed by the wings of an angel. Her lips parted and she stared at him, transformed. She knew nothing about him and she knew everything. She knew the strength in his spirit and the kindness in his heart. Somehow, in an instant, he'd exposed himself to her in a way she could barely understand.

"Intimate sharing is the heart of full sexual expression," he told her, kissing her one more time. "My body has penetrated yours. Now our souls must penetrate each other."

Then he turned and disappeared out the door.

Watching him go, Sarah realized she loved him. And she had no idea if she would ever see him again.

Chapter Six

Somehow Sarah managed to return to the faculty Christmas party and stumble through it, although she was sure her fellow teachers must have wondered at her distraction. Who could engage in small talk when the memory of being held in those strong arms and plunged down on that massive cock kept returning to set her soul aflame with desire?

Instead, she mumbled early goodbyes and fled home to her solitary bed. Sleep eluded her as she tossed and turned and obsessed on the passionate lovemaking session she and Gabriel had shared. She was no virgin; she'd slept with men before. But none who was so sure, so confident in every move. None who soothed and comforted her, and yet possessed her with alpha-male mastery. Her breasts still ached for the touch of his lips on her nipples, while her insides throbbed with the memory of his bold thrusts.

She lay in the bed, savoring her erotic memories while her hands strayed down to her private parts. He'd licked her outer flesh clean, but if she dipped

her finger deep inside herself and drew it out, she could smell his compelling masculine scent again. The odor made her tremble with desire. The man had to emit hormones that sent her off the scale; that was the only explanation for her wanton behavior in his presence; that, and the orgasms that had rocked her body to its depths.

When a winter's dawn came and she finally got up, she had to force herself to take a shower and wash away his scent. She drove to school feeling glad that this was the last day before the winter vacation began. Teaching was difficult when her mind kept wandering off into lust-filled memories of Gabriel's magical touch. More than once she snapped out of a daze to find herself standing in front of the chalkboard without a single clue what she'd been telling the class.

Finally, the long day ended. She drove home through the bleak winter twilight, contemplating a lonely dinner and an evening with her TV. When she unlocked the door and entered her apartment, the loud ringing of the telephone greeted her.

Hardly daring to hope, she rushed over to it and snatched up the receiver.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Sarah." His rich, masculine voice sent shivers down the backbone he'd licked the night before. She clutched the phone to her ear, drinking in the sound.

"Gabriel! How did you get my number?"

"I could claim that I used an alien mind probe, but

actually I looked you up in the phone book."

"Oh!" She blushed, feeling foolish.

Not noticing her pause, he continued speaking. "I'd like to be extremely bold, if I may, and invite you over to my place for dinner—and a very intimate evening to follow."

His voice deepened as he said the last few words, his tone promising more passionate pleasures.

With a start, she realized that her nipples had already hardened at the mere thought of seeing him. A burning sensation flared to life between her legs. Was it possible he was sending hormonal signals over the telephone? Not likely. Maybe it was some alien vibration that wiped all common sense from her mind.

Whatever it was, it was heavenly.

"What time do you want me there?" she asked. She winced at the eagerness in her voice. So much for playing coy.

"Seven—and be sure to come hungry—in every way."

At first she thought seven was rather late for a dinner, but as she agonized in front of her closet over what to wear, she soon realized it was barely enough time to get ready for their meeting. First, there was the question of what she'd look good in with her clothes on, and then there was the secondary but equally important consideration of how they'd look while she took them off. Or he took them off her. At last she selected a black lace bra and panties, gray

slacks and a soft green wool sweater. Thoughts of his hands undressing her sent her into a dazed reverie, so that by the time she'd finally showered and dressed and driven to his apartment, it was ten minutes past seven.

Fashionably late, she told herself, ringing the bell. He lived in a conservative neighborhood in a four-story brick building. His apartment occupied the whole fourth floor, and she was glad to discover there was an elevator so she wouldn't have to arrive at his door breathless and sweaty. It was bad enough that her pussy, throbbing in anticipation, had already soaked her underwear with her musky scent. She'd been wet all night and all day now. She wondered if he would be able to smell her arousal, like a bitch in heat.

"Welcome," he said, opening the door at her first ring. Sarah's heart skipped a beat at the sight of his magnificent body. He wore black slacks and a tight gray sweater that hugged his muscles. His white-gold hair clung to his neck, damp from his shower.

Peering curiously around her, Sarah entered the apartment. Driving over, she'd wondered what to expect in this 'alien habitat.' To the casual glance, it appeared like any other male-occupied apartment she'd ever seen. There was a big-screen TV, and a comfortable couch and lounge chair. Bose speakers scattered around the room showed he was an aficionado of high-quality sound. A glass cabinet next to the TV held the VCR, DVD player and the amplifier. There was the usual male clutter, too.

Magazines and books littered the coffee table, a half-drunk coffee cup sat on a side table.

She doubted, though, that most men had a giant pod sitting in the middle of their living room rug.

"What's that?" she demanded, pointing. It was a bit larger than a coffin, a similarity she didn't care to dwell on. Its shape was more oval than rectangular, thankfully. Its surface was white and shiny and its sides were curved.

He grinned at her, his eyes sparkling. "Part of our evening's lesson in sexual fulfillment. Since you humans find your greatest amusement in watching the TV, I thought it appropriate to place it in front of the set."

She swallowed a sudden surge of trepidation. Her sex hormones were in overdrive, dulling her judgment. What had she been thinking, rushing over to the lair of an alien? She'd be lucky if she didn't end up as the main attraction in some biological experiment aboard a flying saucer.

As had happened before, he seemed to read her thoughts. He walked over to the pod and set his palms on the smooth surface. The cylinder emitted a purring sound and the top slid open. Looking inside, she saw that the walls and bottom were both cushioned with some soft-looking material. Panels in the inner walls radiated their own soft glow.

In fact, it looked rather like a nest — a love nest.

"If you expect me to get in there —" she began.

A broad grin split his face. He seemed amused by

her discomfort.

"Don't be silly. We have to eat first." He took her elbow and steered her out of the room. The next room turned out to be the dining room. A round table was covered in white linen and set with fine china and crystal. A cranberry-red candle sat in the center, spilling a glow of soft light over the settings.

Sarah lifted her nose and sniffed the spicy odor that filled the air. A rumble deep in her stomach reminded her that her usual dinner hour was long past. "Smells great! What is it?"

"Thai takeout from a local restaurant. I thought you might enjoy something a bit—different—from what you're used to, to set the theme for the evening." He wiggled his eyebrows and grinned.

Her own lips twitched. He might be an alien, but he seemed to have a sense of humor about their differences. She found it enchanting. Of course, she found everything about Gabriel enchanting.

With a gallant bow, he pulled out her chair. "Please be seated while I explain the rules for the evening."

"Rules?" It was her turn to lift an eyebrow as she sat in the chair.

His dimple appeared as he beamed down at her. "You've probably heard the expression, 'when in Rome...' Since you are a guest in my home, I thought we would follow the customs of my planet for this meal."

She eyed the table setting. Nothing appeared too strange there. The plates were white with a golden border, the kind found at any mall. The silverware

was the usual — a salad fork and a regular fork, a knife and spoon. A set of chopsticks lay across the plate. A napkin of crisp white linen, beautifully folded in a fan shape, sat at the top of the plate. Her water glass was full with a wedge of lemon floating in the ice water, and a wine glass stood ready.

She gazed up at him with a questioning look, sure something was going to be different yet unable to find a clue what to expect.

Gabriel moved to sit in the chair opposite hers and grinned at her with a look of pleased anticipation on his face. The candlelight deepened the gold in his hair and made fires glow in his deep blue eyes. "You look nervous. There's nothing to worry about."

She folded her hands in her lap and tried to ignore the butterflies in her stomach. "I'm curious about your customs, that's all."

"It's simple enough. On my world we view sharing food as a form of intimacy. After all, eating is one of life's great pleasures. So two people eating together are sharing pleasure. And my people feel one pleasure is only enhanced by another."

Wondering where he was headed with that line of thought, she nodded.

"The physical pleasure of tasting food deserves to be complemented by yet another physical pleasure, you see. One that will serve to deepen the level of intimacy established by eating together."

Her heartbeat quickened, and she licked suddenly dry lips. She'd come over here expecting that he'd

want to sleep with her again, and that was surely what he was hinting at. Besides, the heat pooling in the center of her body told her she wanted him. If he was to be dessert, all the better.

"My people tend to ritualize many of their customs. It's what happens when you have a culture that is hundreds of thousands of years old. When we dine together, we alternate our physical delights. We will share a course of the meal and then another kind of...ah...physical experience, and then a course. Do you understand?"

"Certainly." She pasted what she hoped was a bright, sophisticated smile on her face.

"One other tiny detail." One long finger traced the rim of his water glass. "When we dine together, we do so in the nude, and it is the custom for diners to undress each other."

"Wait a moment—" She jumped out of her chair, not sure if she intended to flee to his bathroom to catch her breath or head straight for the door. She'd expected an evening of hot sex, but this brazen beginning staggered even her.

Moving with the grace of a wild animal, he rose and blocked her path out of the room. She was forced to stop or collide with him. As she stood in front of him, her breasts heaving with agitation, he scanned her body from her feet upwards. Hot blood burned her cheeks as his gaze fastened on the rounded mounds beneath her green sweater.

"We were nude together in the storage closet," he murmured, his voice warm with passion. "But the

light was far too dim in there to see you clearly. I have been looking forward to this evening with some anticipation."

Her heart knocked against her ribs. She was afraid he could hear its rebellious beating in the silence of the room. His look seemed to beg her for her trust as his fingers brushed her cheek. "Relax. Among my people a dinner such as this is part of the courtship ritual. I am still courting you, Sarah."

His pupils widened as if he wanted to drink her in. She stared into the blackness and saw an image dancing on the shiny surface. As before, the picture exploded into her consciousness, overwhelming her: their two nude bodies tangled together on a bed covered in red velvet, his cock plunged into her up to the hilt.

She blinked and the image vanished, but not before her body responded to the suggestive picture. Her nipples stiffened and two taut peaks showed under the soft fabric of her sweater.

"Ah!" His pleasure was plain as he watched her response. Without another word, he grabbed the lower edge of her sweater and lifted upward. Her will seemed to melt into his as she lifted her arms and let him pull the sweater over her head. He tossed it away and reached behind her to unhook her black bra. She clenched her hands at her sides to control the urge to cover herself as the material fell away and her breasts were revealed to his burning gaze. A red flush of sexual desire was already spreading over the white

flesh and her rosy nipples stood at rigid attention.

A small cry of protest sprang to her lips as he ignored her aching nipples and instead unbuttoned the button at the top of her pants and released the zipper, and then pulled them down. The gray slacks pooled at her feet and she stepped out of them, kicking off her boots at the same time. He grinned at the sight of her black lace panties and yanked them down over her hips too, not even pausing to touch the throbbing flesh between her legs.

He surveyed his handiwork with evident satisfaction and inclined his head toward the couch in the living room. "Sit down and I'll pull off your socks for you."

The thought of what he might do if he got her on the couch made her hesitate. "That's not necessary. I can do it."

"Very well. But I want you to turn around and bend over to remove them." His voice brooked no argument.

Feeling dazed, she obeyed his command. She turned her back to him, bent over and lifted one knee to reach her foot, trying not to think of the luscious rear view she was offering him.

When both socks were removed, she turned around to find him waiting with a smoldering stare. "Now you must undress me," he said.

Her hands trembled as she grasped the bottom edge of his sweater and pulled. He lifted his arms to help her and shook his blond hair back into place as the sweater slid over his head. His muscular

shoulders and chest gleamed golden in the soft light of the room. She licked her lips and concentrated on unbuckling his belt, unbuttoning his pants and pulling the zipper. Her shaking hands could barely manage those simple tasks and when his pants fell to the floor, she discovered he was wearing only a jock strap.

He widened his stance so she could pull it down with ease. She gripped the edges and sank to the floor, not wanting to look upward as his male flesh sprang free. Kneeling in front of him, she pulled off his shoes and socks.

"How about an appetizer?" he asked.

She lifted her head and saw his swollen penis in front of her, the head wet with a spurt of semen.

"Only a taste now, nothing more," he warned her.

She licked her lips and bent toward him, swirling her tongue around the tip of his cock. He tasted salty and male, somehow. She opened her mouth, ready to suck him in, but he stepped away.

"It's appetizer time, Sarah. Dinner is waiting."

Shaking with desire, she got to her feet and backed a step away.

He stood with his hands on his hips, legs spread, proudly displaying his manhood to her. Her breath caught in her throat as she measured the length of that already erect rod with her glance. It was hard to believe her body had taken that whole length when he'd impaled her the night before.

"Time to eat." With a small smile of amusement, he

motioned her to her chair again. She watched his attractive rear as he vanished into the kitchen and emerged again with two salad plates.

"Hot Bamboo Shoot Salad, it's a special spicy Thai salad. You may want to go slow and drink a lot of water between bites," he advised, pouring her a glass of wine from the bottle chilling on the table.

"Should I use my salad fork or the chopsticks?" She avoided his gaze as she spoke. It was bizarre to sit nude in a candlelit dining room with her pussy on fire and her nipples stiff and discuss the silverware.

"Whichever you prefer."

"Well, in the spirit of the evening, I'll try something different." She picked up the chopsticks and maneuvered them around the bamboo shoots.

He was right. The salad was hot and spicy despite its cool, white appearance. He appeared to relish it, wielding his chopsticks with expert ease.

"I take it your people enjoy spicy food."

"The hotter the better." He winked at her.

God, she looked delicious. Her face was flushed with her sexual arousal and her auburn hair flamed in the candlelight. Each time she moved her chopsticks, her breasts jiggled in a thoroughly pleasurable way. His cock ached with frustration, but he enjoyed the waiting. It was part of the pleasure. It was part of the pleasure too to watch her squirm in her seat, hardly able to contain her own desire. Her nipples had

remained rigid throughout the salad course, two stiff peaks that proclaimed her desire for him. A rosy flush had turned the pale skin of her upper chest almost red.

She was ready. He'd prepared an evening of sensual delight for her, and if all went well he would penetrate her soul tonight as he had penetrated her body the night before. He pictured her lying under him in the pod where he would savor her ultimate surrender, her thighs soaked with the juices of their lovemaking, her eyes heavy-lidded with sensual satisfaction as she yielded and opened her heart to him. How sweet that moment would be, the moment when her soul unfolded before his psychic senses like a rose opening to the warmth of the sun.

The sharing of their souls would be a moment of ultimate bliss, far beyond any sensation of the body. Not that he planned to neglect her body, though. Oh, no. He looked across the table at her, a naked goddess in the candlelight and smiled. Body and soul, both would yield to his masterful exploration.

He saw that the salad had vanished from her plate. Good. The interlude between salad and main course was about to begin.

Sarah wiped her lips with her napkin, trying to hide the slight tremor in her hands as she remembered what he'd said earlier. Something physical would

happen between courses.

Moving with the natural grace of an athlete, Gabriel got up and went to the buffet where he opened a drawer and took out a tiny box wrapped in white tissue paper with golden stars.

"For you," he said, approaching and holding out the box in his hand. "A small gift."

She eyed it with undisguised interest, but politeness made her refuse. "I—I can't accept a gift. I didn't bring you anything."

"It doesn't matter. In my culture, the male is expected to court the female with gifts."

Sarah chuckled. "It's not that different here on Earth."

"Besides," his voice lowered to an intimate whisper, "I need you to open this gift so you can begin to enjoy the pleasure I have planned for you between courses."

Full of curiosity, she took the box from him with a murmured word of thanks and tore away the delicate tissue paper. Opening the lid, she saw three dark blue oval beads strung together on a nylon string that ended in a looped pull.

"They're called paradise beads," he told her, "because that is where they will take you. Please allow me to insert my gift."

Insert? She swallowed as her throat went dry with panic. Instinct told her where the beads must go. With realization came passion, erasing the panic. She looked up into his luminous eyes.

She started to shake her head no, but he gripped

her hand and pulled her to her feet. She stumbled forward a little and her breasts brushed against his arm, sending hot waves of fire clear down to her toes. Smiling, he drew her up against the heat of his flesh and lowered his mouth on hers. She tasted the fire of spice in his mouth, felt the flame of desire flare between her legs as his hard cock pressed against her stomach.

Releasing her, he took her elbow and led her down the hall and into his bedroom. She was not surprised to see a big double bed with a red velvet coverlet. With a start she realized she was holding the box with the string of blue beads clenched in one hand.

"Give it to me." He took the box from her hand and gestured to the bed. "If you'll lie down and spread your legs, it will be my pleasure to put your gift where it belongs."

"No," she said and could not believe it when her rebellious legs took her over to the bed. Her inner channel was pulsing with desire, and she knew that if she ran now she would spend a lifetime wondering how it would have felt to have him slip those three dark blue beads inside her and tug on that loop.

Shivering, she lay on her back.

"Draw up your legs and then bend your knees. I want you to expose yourself fully to me," Gabriel said once again in the voice he used for commands.

An erotic fire burned through her veins as she wondered about the power of that voice. Was he using some sort of mind control on her? Yet even as

she wondered she drew up her legs and bent her knees to each side, fully exposing her secret slit to his admiring gaze.

"Beautiful," he whispered. "Beautiful. Already glistening with your dew." He held the string of beads up in the air so she could see them, dangling and glittering in the light. He knelt on the bed between her legs and parted her slick folds with his fingers. She gasped as the cool air of the room touched her hot channel.

"What a beautiful picture you make, my sweet," Gabriel said.

His eyes surveyed her with intense satisfaction. From his vantage point kneeling between her legs, he could see the two mounds of her breasts topped by her rigid nipples and beyond that her face, flushed with desire. Her auburn hair fanned out around her, a brighter flame against the dark scarlet of the bed.

Bending closer, he examined her slit. The rosy pink flesh glowed in the soft light of his bedroom, damp with her dew. Her musky aroma filled the air. The lips of her inner labia pulsed slightly with her extreme arousal.

He held the beads in his right hand, warming them with his own flesh, preparing them for her body, while the fingers of his left hand parted her inner folds once more and exposed her feminine channel to his eager gaze. The dark rosy flesh was gorged with

blood, slick with her sexual juices. She smelled of hot nights and wanton flesh. He wanted to thrust his cock into her instead of the beads, and it took all of his self-control to slip the first bead between his thumb and forefinger and push it into her waiting crevice.

She trembled and bucked as he pushed the bead into her, her reaction more violent than it had been the night before when he'd impaled her with the full length of his phallus. His eyes gleamed as he watched her pussy swell with a sudden rush of blood, turning her sexual parts a deep red. She was literally on fire with desire, exactly as he wanted her.

Pushing a little harder, he slipped the second bead inside her. A soft whimper escaped from her lips and she arched her back, pointing her stiff nipples into the air. Her hands dug into the velvet coverlet.

"My breasts, touch my breasts," she begged.

He smiled, pleased that she knew she must not touch her nipples without his permission.

"Patience, my sweet. Just one more." He thrust the third bead deep inside her, pushing it down her hot channel with his finger. He could feel her vagina pulsing as it sought more of the elusive sensations the beads gave her as they rolled inside her.

He withdrew his finger and adjusted the small loop at the entrance to her opening. Smiling, he gave it the slightest of tugs.

She came up off the bed again, her back arched like a bow as the beads moved inside her, her fingernails digging deep into the mattress. He bent low over her

and kissed her open inner flesh. His hands grabbed her soft mounds and squeezed each nipple once, hard.

"Time for the next course," he said, rolling off the bed and helping her to her feet.

Sarah bit her lip to keep from whimpering as she stood up. Her whole body was on fire, a blaze that only increased each time she moved. The sensations that coursed through her flesh whenever the beads shifted inside her were subtle, but incredibly powerful nonetheless. It was as if her whole body was now a fine-tuned instrument, ready to respond to the tiniest vibration inside her.

She shook with embarrassment, sure she was about to have an orgasm despite the fact that Gabriel had barely touched her. Her legs trembled as she made her way back into the dining room, aware that her breasts and abdomen were rosy with her sexual flush.

As she sat, another wave of pure pleasure shot through her. Gabriel had disappeared into the kitchen again. Now he emerged with a bowl piled high with Thai fried rice.

"My favorite," he said, setting it before her. "I hope you like it too."

He served it to her with scrambled egg on top – the way the natives eat it, he explained – and showed her how to squeeze a lime over the rich Jasmine rice for a tart explosion of flavor in her mouth.

It was hard to eat sitting perfectly still, yet the slightest movement of her body brought another

explosion of subtle sensations in her innermost feminine parts. Harder still was the fact that she wanted to squirm under his intent gaze. No matter how impassive she tried to keep her face, she knew that he knew that a fire was raging inside her. He had only to watch the flush deepening over her body to see the effect his gift was having.

Even so, she was surprised to find she was hungry. She dug into the fried rice and decided it was time she took a little initiative.

"Tell me about your home world," she murmured around a mouthful.

"We are an ancient race, quite rigid and set in our ways as I have told you." He took a slow sip of his wine and cast an admiring glance at her from across the table. "We had an exuberant youth, spent exploring the galaxy—it was then that some of our people became stranded on your world and fathered your species. Eventually, we grew tired of roaming the stars and returned to our various planets—we had settled many by then—to spend our time in exploring the inner universe of thought and desire."

"Thought and desire," she echoed in a faint voice. She shifted under the intensity of his look and the three beads inside her rolled. A near-orgasmic rush of heat spread over her skin. Sweat broke out on her forehead. Gasping, she reached for her ice water and took a deep drink.

"Yes, we'd come to realize that in wandering the stars we were searching for something we could only

find within. We concentrated on developing our mental powers, expanding our consciousness, until we became able to share images—as I have shared my erotic imaginings with you—and even intimate feelings with each other. It was then that our loneliness finally ended.”

“Loneliness.” She blinked and bit down on her lip. She knew that word well, knew what it was to be lonely to the depths of her being. She lifted her head to gaze into the deep blue intensity of his stare, wondering if he spoke the truth, if his people had indeed learned how to share both thought and emotion. He certainly did not lack for boldness in assaulting the citadel of her solitary nature. Refusing to accept her attempts at rebuffing him, he’d found the way to entice her into his apartment and soon, she knew, into his bed.

She reached for another bite with her chopsticks and realized her plate was empty. Across from her, Gabriel laid his down with a sexy smile.

“Again we reach the interval between courses,” he said with obvious pleasure. “I have another gift for you.”

As he got up and walked to the buffet again, she forced herself to relax and admire the smooth movement of the muscles in his strong legs, the rounded swell of his cute butt, and how his cock remained erect and ready. Did he ache for her the way she ached for him? She squeezed the muscles of her channel on the balls he’d put inside her and choked back a moan of desire as liquid heat

dampened her pussy and inner thighs.

He came toward her, his cock swinging boldly between his legs. Everything about this man was bold. She straightened in her chair, bringing her shoulders back to lift her breasts, exposing the flush that covered her body. Let him see what he did to her.

His eyes traveled over her, his smile making plain how much he enjoyed her nudity. Once again he held a small box, wrapped in gold tissue with silver stars. "Every woman deserves jewelry." His voice caressed her ear as he pressed it into her trembling hand.

Tearing away the paper, she lifted the lid. At first she thought she was looking at two small silver rings. Then she realized that the two tiny balls at the top of the rings would separate to grip whatever might be inserted between them and that the larger silver ball at the bottom of each ring was a weight.

"They're nipple rings." His hot breath teased her ear as he leaned close. "I noticed last night that your nipples yearned for more attention. And the same condition seems evident today. May I put them on?"

She found it impossible to answer. Taking her silence for assent, he lifted one of the rings from the box and cupped her right breast in his hand. A small whimper of delight escaped her lips as he flicked his thumb over her already stiff nipple as if testing its rigidity, then pressed her swollen flesh between the two balls.

The clamps dug in to her engorged nipple. As he released her breast, the weight at the lower end

pulled the ring down with a gentle yet erotic pressure. She slid back in her chair in surprise and the balls inside her shifted, sending bolts of sexual sensation sizzling up her spine. He gave the ring pinching her breast the gentlest of tugs and she cried out, clenching her inner core around the beads inside her. For a second she was sure she was going to experience an orgasm sitting at his dining room table. As it was, her inner thighs were wet with her moisture and she dreaded the thought of rising. The fabric that covered the chair seat had to be soaked in her sexual juices.

"One more, my sweet," he coaxed, cupping her other breast in his hand. She closed both eyes and concentrated on the sweet sensation of his touch as his deft fingers teased her nipple to maximum arousal and then pinched the tender flesh between the two balls of the nipple ring.

"You are beautiful. Do you want to see?" Taking her elbow, he urged her up from the chair and turned her toward the far wall where a gold-framed mirror hung, flanked by two glowing candles. She stared into the glass, not recognizing herself in this auburn-haired hussy who stood naked and breathing hard. Her skin was rosy, flushed with a full arousal. Her thighs were pressed tightly together as if she guarded some treasure within, and her uplifted breasts looked swollen. Her engorged nipples were almost crimson in color, in sharp contrast to the two silver rings that glittered there.

Gabriel stood beside her and she watched his

image in the mirror as he slipped his fingers between her legs and tugged once on the loop that dangled from her damp pussy.

"Oh, Gabriel!" She threw her head back, unable to watch. The sight of him touching her that way was unbearably erotic. Her body shook with pleasure from the sensations ripping through her.

When she was able to breathe again, she dared another look in the mirror and stood still, her legs parted, waiting for a second tug. Meeting her eyes in the mirror, Gabriel shook his head.

"Time for the next course, my sweet."

He turned her back to her chair and she glanced down to see a damp stain on the fabric. She hadn't thought it possible to feel any hotter, but a fierce rush of embarrassment surged through her.

"Don't worry." His hand caressed her hair, brushing a stray lock behind one ear. His lips traced the line of her jaw before he released her. "The seat covers are washable. And I like my women drenched in their own dew when I take them."

She could barely breathe. Her nipples ached with the weight of the balls and her secret parts pulsed to the pounding of her heart. She was naked and on fire and she had no idea who this man was. Had she gone crazy?

He vanished into the kitchen for a third time and returned with two dishes of ice cream.

"Coconut ice cream," he explained, handing her one. "There's nothing quite like it. Enjoy."

Indeed, it was rich and creamy, with little flakes of coconut scattered throughout. She ate it in a daze, watching him watching her. She'd never realized until now that her breasts trembled ever so slightly with every breath she took, but the weight of the rings on her nipples shifted and tugged with each inhalation and exhalation.

She swallowed the final bite of ice cream with relief, certain he would take her now that the meal was done. If she didn't experience a full-blown orgasm soon, she was going to explode with frustration.

"Time for the real dessert." He smiled at her, his face glowing with anticipation. The look of happiness there reassured her. He couldn't be planning anything too terrible and look so joyful—like someone who was about to unite with a long-lost love.

Not that he loved her. Despite his gifts and his honeyed words, she knew he was playing with her, an alien on vacation perhaps, sampling the natives. Yet the sheer splendor of the erotic experience he was offering her kept her here, submitting to his whims.

"What would that be?" she asked.

"To find your answer, you have to get in my pod." He stood and held out his hand. As if hypnotized, she stared at the massive erection between his legs. It promised that the relief for the flame raging inside her was at hand.

She slipped her hand into his once again, surprised at how secure she felt in his presence. They walked into the living room, and he touched the pod with the

palm of his hand, opening it. With a soft humming sound, the top slit and the sides retracted into the bottom, leaving the cushioned space exposed.

Entering was as simple as crawling into a bed. Sarah sprawled on the cushioned surface and luxuriated in the pod's encompassing warmth. A silky fabric soothed her skin, and soft pillows cushioned her head. The bedding sank under Gabriel's weight, and the lid started to close above them. As the doors curved up around her and sealed shut again, a warm golden light filled the interior of the pod. She expected to panic at that point, yet she suffered no sudden rush of claustrophobia. Instead, the sides of the pod continued to glow with the comforting golden light while the ceiling above them turned a soft blue that gave the impression of an infinite sky.

Lying on her back, she stretched out her body in a seductive pose as Gabriel bent over her. His mouth claimed hers in a long, possessive kiss that ravaged her with need while his fingers plucked at her nipple rings. Little bursts of flame sang through her body. She arched her back and the balls inside her moved. Her hand groped for his penis, desperate for him to enter her and extinguish the raging fire of her desire.

"Stay calm, dear heart." He leaned on one arm and reached for something above her head. She heard a panel click. When his hand entered her field of vision again he held a thin headband of gold, padded at the ends. "Let me slip this on your head so it touches

your temples."

Her heart started to pound at this sudden reminder that he was indeed an alien. Yet she lay still as he slipped it on her head and adjusted the padded ends over her temples. When he was satisfied, he reached above her again and retrieved a similar band for himself.

She watched in silence as he made the final adjustments to his.

"The bands will help us begin the process of sharing our thoughts and feelings," he explained with a reassuring smile. "I have no doubt that your race still retains the telepathic abilities of your ancestors. They only need to be stirred to life. I'm going to turn the devices on now. It will be a new experience, but there is no need to worry. I won't allow anything to happen here that might hurt you."

Wide-eyed, she nodded. He touched another panel above her head and the lights lowered. The blue sky above them turned darker and glowed with the silver twinkle of a sea of stars. A distant, soft music filled her ears, the melody haunting in its sweetness. Gabriel stretched out beside her and took her in his arms.

So beautiful, so soft, skin like silk, hair like a living flame, warm mouth, eyes as green as the sea of the coast of Ky'tar.

The jumble of thoughts flashed through her mind. Somehow she knew where Ky'tar was, and the color of the sea on that distant world. Stunned, she realized she was seeing her body through Gabriel's eyes. She

gasped at the depth of his desire for her.

Kisses, wet and moist, her taste spicy and sweet, her hair wrapped in his fingers, her breasts pressed against his chest, his tongue moving in and out, probing, penetrating, his cock swelling with desire. Take and possess, brand her as his.

Her heart thudded somewhere between pleasure and alarm as the hot reality of Gabriel's mounting lust wept through her. Needing reassurance, she wrapped her arms around his strong neck and clung to him.

"Shh. Easy." His breath tickled her ear. He nibbled on the tender lobe, taking his time, moving slowly, giving her ample opportunity to feel each delightful sensation. She shivered as his teeth nipped at her, and at the same moment experienced his pleasure in teasing her flesh. He kissed her throat and she felt her pulse beat beneath his lips; he licked the hollow between her breasts with his tongue and she tasted the salty sweetness of her skin. His desire raged through her, his ever-increasing need for her, and the iron control he exercised to keep from forcing her legs open and plunging into her with wild abandon.

She panted with aching need, but it was his need for her; she spread her legs before he asked, as a longing to taste her inner juices on his tongue swept through her; she moaned at the searing heat of her private flesh as his tongue penetrated her slick slit, pushing aside the beads.

Then his fingers were on the loop, pulling the beads out, one by one, with exquisite slowness. Her

inner channel clenched as each one slipped out of her. She felt their dampness as they slipped between his fingers, smelled her aroused odor as he lifted them free of her body.

Gabriel positioned himself between her legs, his dark eyes looking into hers. She saw her hunger for him reflected there, knew he was experiencing her feelings through the mind link the golden bands had established between them, that he knew every intimate detail of the throbbing need of her body for him, just as she ached with the sensations of his desire to possess her.

Oh, God!

Oh, Spirit!

Their two thoughts were one as he thrust into her. She arched against his hardness and moaned with relief as hot, moist heat surrounded her. She was thrusting deeper with all her strength and she was lifting her body to meet that thrust, wanting all of him and more. She wrapped her legs around his waist and her arms around his shoulders, clinging to him as he ravished her, not knowing anymore where her sensations ended and his began, only that the world was vanishing in a blaze of overwhelming passion that rocked her body and her mind down to the very depths.

The orgasm was so intense she thought her heart would stop beating and burst from pure pleasure. She had two bodies now, and both were convulsing with uncontrollable rapture as they joined into one. Her female body flamed between her thighs and her male

penis pulsed with earth-shaking sensations as Gabriel shot his seed into her. And above it all and suffusing it all, she felt his tenderness and the joy her responsiveness gave him.

When her shuddering finally subsided, Gabriel kissed her long and tenderly, his lips caressing hers as he withdrew from her body. Sighing, she collapsed and let the cushioned surface enfold her. Gabriel reached up and slipped the headband off her temples.

"That's enough for one night," he told her.

"Are you kidding? That's enough for a lifetime." Her body was limp, drained. She wondered if she would ever move again.

He retrieved the strand of blue balls from where he'd tossed them aside, released the nipple clamps, and pressed the jewelry into her hand.

"There are my first gifts to you. Don't forget to take them with you."

A languid ease engulfed her, making her limbs heavy. The only thing she wanted to do now was to curl on her side and fall asleep, with his body curved around her.

He touched her arm with gentle fingers. His voice held a hint of his familiar ability to command. "It's time for you to go, my sweet."

Her eyes opened in surprise. "Aren't you going to ask me to stay the night?" Now that she'd experienced it, she liked the pod. It was like being in their own private universe.

He lifted his brows. "Of course not. We're not

married."

She almost laughed, then realized he was serious. "How can that possibly matter after what we've just done?"

"It matters a great deal. I am courting you. I've given you two gifts." He stopped, frowning, letting the silence between them lengthen.

Perhaps he expected something from her in return after all. She thought a moment. "It's almost Christmas. When can we get together again?"

He gave her a solemn look. "I have no plans for Christmas, Sarah, since I am a stranger on your planet without a family."

She shrugged aside the sorrow that threatened to grip her throat. "Having family isn't always a guarantee of a merry Christmas either. As it so happens, I'm alone for the holiday myself. How would you like to come to my place for dinner Christmas Eve?"

He lowered his head and kissed a nipple, his moist tongue soothing the ache left by the ring. "I'd be glad to accept your invitation. Dinner at your place."

She grinned at him. "And we'll dine by Earthling rules this time."

He shrugged, "If you insist, but from what I've learned of your culture, your romantic dinners are dull affairs."

A smile curved her lips. "Christmas is a different matter. You'll see."

Chapter Seven

Sarah didn't know where the outrageous idea had come from, perhaps from the fact that she wanted to get Gabriel a gift too. During a quick trip to a lingerie store, she found a red teddy trimmed in white lace that would work perfectly for the little surprise that had sprung unbidden into her mind.

The hardest part would be wrapping the present, of course. For that, she would need some help. She had to let down a bit of her private wall and confess her love affair to Pam, but to her pleased relief, her friend agreed to make a quick trip over to take care of wrapping the present without any argument. Fortunately, their two apartments were only a block away from each other.

Gabriel was scheduled to arrive at seven, so Sarah told Pam to come over at six-thirty. She'd already made a pan of her homemade lasagna and put it in the oven to keep warm.

She dressed in the teddy, enjoying the silky feel of the fabric as it settled over her skin. The top was cut

low and the panties were slit so Gabriel could enter her without even bothering to remove them. Fantasies of him doing just that made her flush with heat. She tied a green velvet ribbon in her hair and examined the effect in the mirror: a perfect Christmas package, red and white and green, and a sexy one at that.

The doorbell rang making her heart flutter at the thought he might be early, but it was Pam as promised.

"You look great, girl," she said.

Sarah blushed as her best friend eyed her long slender legs and the low cut of the teddy.

"Why are you getting all red?" Pam punched her in the arm. "You're a wonderful woman, and you deserve a good man. I hope he makes your Christmas a very merry one."

"He already has." Sarah led Pam into her living room. Gabriel had had his pod. She had a huge packing box, large enough for her to crawl inside. Originally, it had held a big screen TV. She'd begged it from a manager at the mall. Now it sat squarely on the floor just beyond the doorway to the living room. Anyone coming into the apartment through the hallway could not miss it. Behind it sat the couch, pushed to one side of the room to make space for a six-foot Austrian pine Christmas tree.

Sarah adjusted the lights in the living room to dim and flicked the switch to turn on the tree.

"Wow," Pam said, giving her a wink. "You've done a great job decorating that. It's one hell of a romantic tree."

Watching the lights twinkle and shine on the angel on the top, Sarah nodded her head. "Got the tree," she said. "All I need now is the present."

Pam laughed. "Go for it, girl."

Climbing carefully over the edge, she sat down inside the box while Pam lowered the lid. She'd already put colorful wrapping paper underneath. Pam only had to bring it up the sides and over the top, tape it down, and then attach the red, white and green bows, and Gabriel's Christmas present would be ready.

"What about air holes?" Pam demanded, concern in her voice.

"Don't worry. I can punch my way out of here if he doesn't show up." Sarah sat cross-legged in the dark box and prayed her legs wouldn't fall asleep while she was waiting.

Pam pulled the top open again and handed her a scissors. "Here. I'll enjoy my Christmas dinner a lot more if I know you have this."

"Okay. Happy?" Sarah laid the scissors down at her side.

"Yes." Pam closed the top again and a second later she heard the crackle of wrapping paper going over the top. "What if he sees the box in here and ignores it."

She giggled. "I don't think so."

"Well, you could always jump out and yell Merry Christmas."

Sarah felt the sides of the box vibrate as Pam

slapped a few of the bows she'd purchased into place.

"Use lots of bows!" she called. "I want it to look festive."

The ringing of the doorbell interrupted her. Her heart pounded against her ribs and the air in the small space seemed to vanish. Gabriel was here.

"Is that him? Oh, drat!" She heard dismay in Pam's voice. "I wanted to put on a few more bows."

"It's okay. Let him in and leave as soon as he's in the door. That way, you don't have to worry about me sitting here all night."

"And I get a chance to see this glorious hunk who has managed to awaken your sleeping fires."

Sarah frowned at Pam's words. In the distance, she could hear Pam's heels clattering over the hardwood floor as she hurried to answer the door. Her sleeping fires, indeed. Maybe it had been a long dry spell between her last lover and Gabriel...and maybe her private parts were already damp at the thought of him unwrapping the box and finding her inside ... but she was getting along fine before he showed up. Or was she? The memory of her deep loneliness returned. What would she do when Gabriel left for his home world, leaving her with memories that could never be topped by any mere human?

"Well, hello, handsome." The sound of Pam's voice carried from the hall. She sounded husky with sexual excitement. Gabriel seemed to have the same effect on every woman.

"Hello." Gabriel's masculine rumble sent shivers down her spine.

"I'm a friend of Sarah's."

"Any friend of Sarah's is a friend of mine."

Sarah smiled in the darkness inside the box, imagining Pam's delighted response to Gabriel's charm.

"Gosh, can I take you home?" Pam said with a giggle. "Seriously, I'm just leaving. But Sarah wanted me to tell you she's wrapped up a Christmas present for you. You'll find it in the living room."

Sarah heard the door shut and the sound of footsteps walking toward her. Her mouth went dry. Would he appreciate her effort, or think it was silly?

"Goodness, a present. For me?" His deep baritone sounded slightly muffled though the walls of the box, but the pleasure in his voice was unmistakable.

She debated answering him, then let out a small yelp of alarm as the box shook.

"Definitely something heavy inside," Gabriel commented.

Heavy indeed! She plopped her hands on her hips. He wasn't going to get inside her panties with that kind of talk.

"I hope Santa's brought me something that I really want," Gabriel said.

What's that? She almost said the words aloud but bit her lip instead.

"I could use a woman. I'm horny tonight and I want to make love. But I told Santa she couldn't be just any woman."

Sarah heard the sound of ripping paper. It came

from one side. Why wasn't he tearing the paper off the top of the box to get at her right away?

"She has to be very special."

Another rip as he tore paper off the other side of the box.

"Intelligent yet sweet. Adorable yet sexy. With the hottest, silkiest sheath this side of the Milky Way."

The paper ripped off the top of the box. Sarah gathered her legs under her, ready to pop up the moment he opened the flaps. She wasn't sure she had the hottest, silkiest sheath this side of the Milky Way, but she did know it was aching with desire, soaking the panties of her teddy.

"But what I really want, Santa," Gabriel said, "is someone to love."

Sarah froze in place. Love? Her heart caught in her throat. What did he mean, love?

The flaps lifted above her, letting in light. She looked up to see Gabriel bending over her, his golden hair shining like a halo from the light behind him.

Her alien angel.

He reached into the box and took hold of her arms, gently lifting her to her feet. He grabbed her waist and swung her up and out of the box with ease, his strength remarkable.

"I like the teddy," he whispered, drawing her into the warm circle of his arms. "In fact, I like the entire package."

His mouth settled over hers with practiced ease, his tongue already out and teasing her lips open. She let him enter her—thrilled to welcome him back into

her body—while her feminine flesh ached to feel another part of him inside her. She moaned and leaned against the solid wall of him. Instantly, she felt the pressure of his hard cock against her stomach.

Oh, yes, he liked her present all right.

His mouth ravished hers, pressing fierce demanding kisses upon her until her lips grew swollen with desire. When he lifted his head at last, his eyes sparkled with delight. "A Christmas tree!"

Sarah turned to the tree that dominated one corner of her living room. Its warm glow filled her with contentment. Why had she neglected the simple pleasures of Christmas? Having someone to share the joy made all the difference.

"I put it up this morning in honor of your coming." She smiled up at him. He stood in front of the tree looking at it in wonder. Did he realize she'd spent the morning hanging ornaments and lights and draping tinsel over every branch? Now it sparkled and glowed in the otherwise dark room.

He took a deep breath and sighed. "Ah, the smell is wonderful."

"I'm glad you like it."

Tearing his attention away from the tree, he shot her a sexy smile. "I love it. I want to make love to you in front of it."

A blush rose on her cheeks at his bold declaration. But it was silly to be coy when she was standing in front of him half-naked.

He reached out and traced the delicate lace that

edged the top of her teddy causing her flesh to quiver. He slipped his finger under one thin scarlet strap and eased it off her shoulder. The silken fabric slid even lower on her breast, exposing the edge of one rosy nipple.

"You look absolutely delicious. Can we have dessert first?"

She thought of the food in the oven. It would keep a bit longer. Or go untouched. Right now she didn't care. She burned for him.

His eyes stared into hers, the pupils dark with desire. "Will you give yourself to me in front of your Christmas tree, Sarah?"

Her swollen lips parted. "Yes."

He pulled her over to the corner. Her couch stood to one side where she'd shoved it out of the way to make room for the tree. He turned her around to face it. "Kneel on the couch, sweetheart."

Trembling she did as he commanded. She was facing the tree now, its lights twinkling.

"I want you to bend over and stick your butt up in the air doggie-style."

She bent over resting her weight on her elbows and lifting her buttocks in the air. His hands teased her legs further apart and then his fingers stoked the silken fabric that covered the entrance to her body.

"Ah!" He chuckled in delight as he discovered that the fabric was designed with an opening. She shivered as he spread the material apart and cold air touched her hot flesh. Without warning, his finger sank into her. She moaned and tightened her vagina

around it, longing to feel any part of him inside her.

"Is this part of my present too?" he asked.

"Yes!"

"What about these?" His hands came around her sides and cupped her breasts where they hung loose in front of her.

"Yes," she groaned as he squeezed the twin mounds and flicked a skillful finger over the taut peaks.

"I understand it's the custom on your planet to poke at a present before you unwrap it completely," he said, his voice playful. "May I poke at you?"

"Yes." The word was somewhere between a moan and a sob. Her pussy was throbbing with need. She heard the sound of his zipper opening and then the head of his penis touched her burning outer lips. He circled it over the slick surface, the motion arousing her almost beyond endurance. She wiggled her butt higher in the air, hoping her movements would tempt him to thrust his shaft inside her.

"I like the wiggle," he said. "The view from here is terrific."

More moisture drenched her already flooded channel at his words. She groaned and thrust her buttocks up at him. He shouted with delight at her open invitation and slapped her behind. It was only one gentle slap but it sent waves of ecstasy coursing through her. "It pleases me that you are offering yourself to me at last. I will always remember this moment, my sweet."

She squeezed her eyes shut, praying he would enter her and end her agony. She'd never behaved like this, never even dreamed of it.

His penis probed her damp outer lips again and then, to her infinite relief, he thrust into her.

Hot waves of pleasure pulsed through her pussy. He filled her as no man ever had. She rocked on her knees, lifting her butt upward to meet his thrust, wanting to feel the head of his shaft ram into her womb.

"Not so fast." He grabbed her hips and pulled her tight against him, his shaft sunk into her. "No moving unless I say so. You've given yourself to me. I've claimed your body. Now it's time to claim your mind."

She opened her eyes again and tried to focus on the Christmas tree. The brilliant lights seemed to swim before her vision. His mind touch, when it came, was familiar after the experience in the pod. His thoughts reached out and caressed hers.

My beloved. My own. Share my desire for you. Offer your desire to me.

Whimpering softly, she opened her mind and let him see the depth of her need for him. His own powerful masculine need crashed into her consciousness, sweeping her up into his urge to possess her utterly. It didn't matter. She was prepared to give herself to him without reservation.

Surrender to me.

His thoughts swam in her head. His hands urged her hips to move. Letting go of all conscious thought,

she began to rock as he thrust into her—each thrust coming as her butt lifted upward to receive him. The only sound in the room was the moist sucking sound of his cock sliding in and out of her soaked pussy and the continuous moan that issued from her throat.

On another level, their thoughts mingled. She tasted his pleasure in her slick sheath, his delight in how she opened to him completely. She ached to open to him even more, yet the fire kindled by his relentless thrusting was mounting beyond tolerable levels.

With a final cry, she shuddered into orgasm, felt a hot spurt within her at the same moment as he released his seed.

As her body quieted, he withdrew. He pulled her up into a sitting position on the couch and sat beside her, stroking her hair. Smiling in contentment, she noticed that his pants and briefs were pushed down around his calves. As the final spasm died away, he lifted her and turned her body so that she sat on his thighs, facing him.

She looked down to see his cock at rigid attention between her body and his.

"Gosh, it's cold in here," he said with a smile. "My cock feels chilly."

"I know how to warm it." Desire to please him made her tremble as she lifted herself and positioned her pussy inches above the head. "May I?"

"Yes!" His eyes flared as she lowered her body on his shaft.

"Oh, God." She wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed her breasts to his chest as he filled her again. She started to lift her hips, but his hands pressed down, stopping her.

"I like my Christmas present," he said.

"I'm glad."

"I intend to keep it."

She frowned at him, not understanding.

He flashed his devastating grin at her. "On my world, gifts are taken seriously. In fact, a man cannot court a woman there until she gives him a gift to indicate she is willing to accept his attentions."

The memory of handing him the dollar bill shot through her mind.

"Yes." He nodded, catching her thought. "I showed up with that sign on purpose, hoping you would give me some money, and you did. That freed me to start our courtship."

He slid the silken teddy off her breasts, exposing them. His fingers pinched her nipples and she stiffened with fierce pleasure. Although she didn't move, her pussy throbbed around his cock as blood engorged her feminine tissues.

The dark look in his eyes showed his pleasure at her response to his touch. His thoughts brushed against hers, lustful and tender at the same time.

"You accepted my advances, so the next step was to offer you my gifts. When you took them, you indicated we were free to proceed to the mental bonding. It was a truly memorable experience to bond with a human female."

She swallowed, not sure where this was leading but fearful their relationship was coming to a turning point. "I'm glad to hear our pitiful sexuality didn't disappoint you."

"On the contrary, sweetheart. You proved what I've long believed, that Earth women are equal to our own in rampant sexual desire." He bent and sucked one nipple. Unable to control the waves of passion shooting through her, she squirmed on his cock and cried out.

He silenced her cry with a fierce kiss, his tongue thrusting deep into her mouth.

Heat. Heat in her mouth. Heat in her silken sheath. Heat of her flesh pressed against his. His hot bitch.

There was no condemnation in his ribald thoughts, only frank acceptance of the sexual gift she offered him.

She trembled, her own thoughts a tumble of desire for his body and fear that he would leave her, returning her to a loneliness that now seemed unbearable.

He ended their kiss and pulled back, fixing her with his blue gaze.

"Of course, all that remained was the final gift," he continued as if an earth-shattering kiss hadn't interrupted his speech. "That gift is your offering of yourself to me. And you have done that tonight. As I said, I intend to take full possession."

She wiggled once more on his cock, hissing in pleasure as waves of heat rolled from her engorged

pussy up to her womb. "I think you've done that."

"Oh, no." His dark blue eyes regarded her with a serious look. "I haven't even begun to make love to you yet. Our people know more ways to pleasure each other than you can ever begin to imagine even now."

She could feel her juices running down his cock. Dear lord, if she didn't move on him soon her orgasm would come without moving. What more could he possibly do to her?

"Allow me to show you." His grin flashed. "I've used your dollar to purchase a ticket home."

Her eyes widened. The Christmas tree was beginning to shimmer in an alarming way. No, it wasn't the tree that was shimmering—it was the air around them. As a low hum started, his love poured into her mind.

"It's a matter transporter, sweetheart," he said. "I'm beaming you up to my ship and taking you on the ride of your life. Next stop, my bed!"

His mouth claimed hers and his hips thrust upward. She cried out with joy as they dissolved and vanished. She'd never spend another Christmas alone.

THE END

About the Author

Words are Jeanine Berry's passion, so it is no wonder she became a writer, and eventually began to write erotica.

Berry's creative writing ventures include several SF and fantasy works, both on her own and in collaboration with other writers. She's co-authored the best-selling *The Sex Gates* and its sequel, *Masters of the Sex Gates*, with Darrell Bain. She's also contributed a novella published in the anthology, *Twilight Crossings*. On her own, she is the author of three fantasy novels, *Dayspring Dawning*, *Dayspring Destiny*, and *The Secret Sky*.

She's written two other books for eXtasy, co-authored with Judy Russell. They are *Destiny Earth* and *Alien Seduction*. Together these books tell the story of a beautiful Ailunnean shapeshifter who comes to Earth to seek the lover promised to her in a vision.

A career journalist, Berry has worked for both newspapers and magazines.

When she's not working or busy writing, she goes golfing with her husband or devotes herself to spoiling her two adorable Australian Silky Terriers.

To learn about her current writing projects, you can visit her web site at <http://klik.to/Jeanineberry>