



Silvia
Violet

Submission
on
the RUN

Loose Id

Praise for the writing of Silvia Violet

Surrender in the Dark

Surrender in the Dark set me aflame. There is nothing that I enjoy more than reading about a dominant/submissive relationship that is mutually satisfying. Radek and Nia's relationship had this and more.

-- Talia Ricci, *Joyfully Reviewed*

One word: AWESOME! Ms Violet has done it again, and I am sure that her readers, both new and old, will enjoy *Surrender in the Dark*. I could not put it down and stayed up late to finish it.

-- Linda B., *The Romance Studio*

Definitely not for the faint hearted! Ms Violet has weaved a magnificent tale of sensuality and erotica. I'm just disappointed it had to end!!

-- Donna, *A Romance Review*

These two characters deliver masterful performances in and out of bed, and the passion literally explodes off the pages, as their erotic couplings grew more and more intense. What a wild and intense ride Ms. Violet delivers to the reader[.]

-- Dawn, *Love Romances*

This is a superb erotic romance. Darkly sensual, this story will have you engrossed from the beginning.

-- Wateena, *Coffee Time Romance*

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SUBMISSION ON THE RUN

Silvia Violet

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Silvia Violet

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Published by
Loose Id LLC
1802 N Carson Street, Suite 212-2924
Carson City NV 89701-1215
www.loose-id.com

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ISBN 978-1-59632-280-6

Available in Adobe PDF, HTML, MobiPocket, and MS Reader

Printed in the United States of America

Editor: Ansley Velarde
Cover Artist: Christine M. Griffin



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Chapter One

A week of travel had left Ivan exhausted and achingly hungry. The first class commercial ships he'd chosen for his journey had provided exceptional food, but a Lalatian's hunger for pain and fear was not something easily satisfied in flight. He dreamed of finding a Boetian woman willing to give him what he needed, fucking her into oblivion, and then sinking into a comfy bed.

Sleeping for at least a full cycle sounded perfect. But the king's guards who met Ivan at Boetia's single spaceport whisked him away to the palace to watch the princess participate in her annual race against potential suitors.

Crowds lined either side of the street leading to the palace gates, and more Boetians sat on limbs of the short trees that lined the avenue. Their bodies were far more flexible than Lalatians. Ivan understood that they were great climbers like the domesticated animals called cats that the humans had exported to the entire galaxy.

The Boetians gave Ivan looks ranging from curious to hostile as he soared by in the hover car driven by the guards. Off-worlders were reasonably common in Kedalion, the capital city, but Ivan doubted any of the inhabitants had ever seen a Lalatian. He was one of only a handful of his people who had ever ventured from their homeworld.

Ivan stared back. He didn't like being away from his Lalatia, but he'd be damned if he'd let these backward farmers see his discomfort. Besides, it would have been hard not to look at the strangers' green and blue skin and matching hair and eyes. The women's short tunics were well suited to the hot, sticky climate, but most of the women he saw looked nearly naked. His cock appreciated the sight.

He felt overdressed in his leather pants, black shirt, and boots. Most men wore only short kilts and short boots, and as hot as it was, he could see why.

As they drew nearer to the palace, the mix of people ran more toward the wealthy landowners and the Boetian aristocracy. Ivan could distinguish them from the commoners by their shorter hair and the elaborate tattoos around their arms. Each rank in society had its own representative design, which the Boetians tattooed around their arms when they reached physical maturity.

The car stopped at the palace gates, and one of the guards led Ivan up a set of stone steps leading to the balcony. Other than another pair of guards, there was only one man looking down on the crowds in the street. His crown and the serpent tattoos around his arms marked him as King Schoeneus.

The king turned toward Ivan as he walked across the balcony. "Good morning. You've arrived in time to see my daughter defeat yet another set of suitors."

Ivan smiled at the king. "I understand the princess has unsurpassed racing skill."

The king nodded. "Indeed she does. When the race is complete, I shall give you a proper greeting and introduce you to my advisors. For the time being, I would ask that you join me here. The competitors should be cresting the hill soon."

Ivan gave a slight bow and looked in the direction the king gestured. Boetians were as secretive as Lalatians, so he'd been able to learn only the barest facts about their culture before making his journey. A group of Boetian merchants had been on his last flight, and

he'd listened in as they discussed the princess and her race. "Is it customary on Boetia for young women to race with their suitors?"

The king laughed. "Nothing my daughter does is customary."

Ivan wasn't sure how to respond so he simply waited, hoping for further explanation.

"It would have been customary for my daughter to marry a man of my choosing when she reached her majority five years ago. But she refuses to marry any man who cannot best her in an athletic competition. I want her to choose a mate, but I also want her happy, so I've indulged her. I never thought she would hold out this long.

"When I refused her request to wrestle potential suitors, she devised the idea of an annual race. For the last five years, we've held a race every midsummer day. Any man from Boetia who wishes to compete may run against her. Every year she has beaten all competitors easily."

Ivan nodded. "I see." The princess sounded more and more interesting all the time. As he thought about her need to be bested, his hunger to dominate a woman flared to life. He would have to feed soon if he was going to keep himself under control. In the brief negotiations between the Lalatian Council and King Schoeneus, the king had promised that Ivan would be supplied with women who would be more than willing to feed all his hungers. He hoped to arrange for one of them to meet him in his suite as soon as the race ended.

He forced himself to ignore the needs of his body and concentrate on the road where the runners would appear. A few seconds later, a woman crested the hill. Her skin and hair were the same color as the sea that formed the southern border of Kedalion. And like the other competitors, she was utterly naked. His cock hardened uncomfortably as he watched her perfectly round breasts bounce with every stride. Her nipples were deep blue, like the sea under a night sky. She was so far ahead of the next competitor that Ivan had no doubt she would win.

His heart pounded as he watched her. The closer she came, the more details of her body he could see. She was hairless, except for the curly blue-green hair on her head, which hung just past her chin. It matched her skin perfectly, which meant she'd kept it natural, unlike some of the Boetian women he'd seen on his way to the palace. He knew her eyes would be the same absorbing color. She had well-defined muscles that showed her dedication to exercise. But she also had plenty of curves, ones he'd like to run his hands over after he'd tied her to his bed to await the stroke of his whip.

Gods, he had to get himself under control. He'd come to Boetia to discuss a visit from a larger group of Lalatians who would look for mates among the Boetian women. He would never win the king's consent if he couldn't control himself around the princess.

But no matter how inconvenient, he couldn't stop thinking how delicious it would be to hear the princess scream as his hand pounded her ass and then beg for more while he shoved his cock deep inside her. When she crossed the finish line, winning the race by a good distance, Ivan took a deep breath and prayed he could think clearly enough to form an intelligent sentence.

"She's done it again."

The king sounded as if he needed commiseration, but all Ivan could do was nod. Alcina was ascending the steps to the balcony, still gloriously naked.

A growl rumbled in his chest before he could stop it. Hadn't the king studied anything about Lalatians? Did he not realize his daughter was in trouble? The king knew his nature so he should know not to parade a beautiful, naked woman in front of a hungry Lalatian dominant. Especially not a woman who radiated a need to be conquered like the princess did.

Princess Alcina stared at him, bold and unflinching. He took a deep breath, drinking in her scent. She smelled of power, lust, curiosity and fear. She recognized his threat, even if her father did not. But Ivan sensed that she also wondered if he could best her.

He realized he needed to say something to break the tension sizzling between them. “Congratulations.” He worked to keep his hunger out of his voice, but he knew the word sounded rough and feral.

The princess inclined her head toward him, her blue eyes glimmering with a hint of mockery. She knew how much he wanted her. “Thank you.”

The King shook his head. “You’ve done it again.”

“Of course. None of them stood a chance.”

Schoeneus sighed. “Alcina, may I present Ivan, our guest from Lalatia.”

Her lips curled up in a mischievous smile. So she liked playing with fire, did she?

“Welcome.”

“Ivan, my daughter, Alcina.”

He forced himself to drag his eyes away from her hard nipples and the plump, bare lips of her pussy long enough to make a formal bow. “Your Highness.”

The king took Alcina’s hand and turned back to face the crowd lining the streets below. “I proclaim Alcina the winner.” His voice boomed down to his people. There were cheers from many of the women. No one dared to express dissension, but Ivan could see that many of the men were less than pleased with the willful princess.

The king raised his hand, and the crowd quieted. “Tonight, we will feast.”

Alcina hugged her father and walked toward the door leading into the palace, but she paused at the threshold and looked over her shoulder at Ivan. Her teasing glance signaled her willingness to explore the dangers he represented.

This woman was trouble, but Ivan wasn’t sure he could fight his urge to show her just how dangerous he could be. When she turned away, he pushed past her mental shield. He was taking an inexcusable liberty, but he had to know if she was truly a submissive. All Lalatians had the ability to sense the needs and emotions of others. This power allowed them

to discover whether a potential partner had a naturally submissive or dominant nature and to sense their partners' pain and needs during sex.

Ivan probed gently at Alcina's mind, and his pulse sped up when he discovered his instincts were right. Her mind and body begged for a man who could prove himself stronger and more dangerous than she was. He shuddered with longing. Gods, he ached for what she offered.

"King Schoeneus, I hope you will not think it rude, if I skip this feast. I am weary from days of travel and my body needs to be fed in the manner of Lalatians."

The king's eyes widened but he nodded. "Of course. How rude of me not to have seen to your comfort. My guard will show you to your quarters, and I will send one of my ladies to attend you."

"Thank you, Your Majesty."

"Our feast will last well into the night. Why don't you rest this evening? Tomorrow I will show you more of the palace and our capital."

Ivan made a shallow bow. "I look forward to it."

* * * * *

Later that night, Ivan lay in bed, unable to sleep, despite his weariness and the ways King Schoeneus had seen to his comfort. Boetians slept draped over hammocks with their limbs dangling over the edges, like cats dozing on tree limbs. But the wealthier among them had simple platform beds in their quarters that they only used for sexual escapades. Ivan had been given one of these and the mattress was of a particularly fine quality.

Mikala, the woman King Schoeneus had sent to him, had been delightful. He'd thoroughly worn her out, but he still wasn't satiated. He kept imagining how Alcina would have reacted to the brutal spanking, and the rough, primitive sex he'd given Mikala.

He squeezed his eyes shut and willed his body to calm down. He was supposed to stay on Boetia for thirty Boetian days. That was a long damn time to deny himself, especially considering the Boetians' comfort with nudity. He might simply snap, shove the princess against a wall, lift her barely there tunic, and fuck her good.

He kicked off the cool, cotton sheet that only irritated his aroused flesh and wrapped his hand around his swollen cock. As he stroked himself, he imagined Alcina kneeling at the end of the bed, ass stuck in the air, waiting to be punished for her arrogance.

He worked himself faster as he thought about her struggling as he held her down and spanked her. He imagined how her skin would darken to a deep turquoise where he struck her. Her cries would feed him until he couldn't wait to drive his cock into her tight cunt. She'd be slick and hot and ready for him. He growled as his balls tightened. His orgasm roared through his body, and jets of come covered his belly.

He collapsed against the soft pillows. Normally, he'd fall asleep instantly after an orgasm like that, especially considering it was his third of the evening. But his body felt alive and jumpy, rather than languorous. He got up, washed himself off, and decided to search for an evening snack.

Dinner had been sent to his quarters, and he'd shared it with his companion after their first round of explosive sex, but he'd worked up an appetite again. The king's guards had told him food was always available in the kitchens. He knew he could call a servant to bring him something, but there was no point in staying in his room when he wasn't going to fall asleep anytime soon.

After a few wrong turns in what seemed a never-ending maze of large, connected rooms and winding staircases, he found the kitchen. He was buttering a thick chunk of bread when a noise from what he assumed was a pantry drew his attention.

The door to the room was shut, but when he leaned against it, it opened a little. He peered through the crack, and the scene inside made his breathing accelerate. Alcina lay on

her back on a pallet of flour sacks. A man Ivan assumed was a servant, based on his tattoos and his long hair lay between her legs thrusting into her with all his might. The man's hands gripped her breasts, pinching and pulling at her nipples. His skin was light green, pale compared to Alcina's. Ivan guessed he was quite young.

Ivan's heart raced as he watched them fuck. His hunger returned, stronger than it had been that afternoon. He pushed the door open for a better view.

Alcina's eyes widened when her lover increased the force of his thrusts. She looked past the man's shoulder and saw Ivan in the doorway. Her gasp echoed in the small room. The young man turned around. He flinched when he saw Ivan and immediately pulled away from the princess.

"No."

"What?" The man's voice wavered. Alcina only smiled.

"I was enjoying watching you give the princess just what she needs. Continue."

"I-I don't think I can."

Ivan glanced down at the man's dying erection as he breathed in the lush taste of his fear along with the hot tang of Alcina's lust. She wanted to put on a show for Ivan. The waves of hunger rolling off her and the sinuous way she moved her hips told Ivan she was more turned on than she'd been when her companion was driving into her.

Ivan looked at her, his gaze making a slow sweep of her body. She let her legs fall open again and arched herself toward him. Gods, she needed a good, hard spanking. "Suck his cock, Princess."

She rolled to her knees and bent down until her head was in her lover's lap. She wrapped her hand around the base of his cock and drew it into her mouth. The man gasped, but he pumped his hips toward her face. She'd have him ready again in no time.

Ivan drank down the man's terror, longing to bring both him and Alcina delicious torment. He doubted they'd know it from pleasure before he was done with them, but he

forced his urges under control. His lungs constricted as he watched Alcina work the man's cock. She took her lover deep into her mouth, sucking hard while using one hand to tease his balls. The man moaned and his head fell back.

Ivan desperately wanted to be in the man's place. He knew the Princess would give him the same treatment if he ordered her to, but he wouldn't cross that line, not yet. "Enough."

Alcina pulled back. Her lover whimpered when her mouth left his cock.

Ivan smiled. The man's cock was long and thick and ready to service her again. "Get on your hands and knees, Princess."

Alcina smiled at Ivan, holding his gaze for several seconds. The waves of lust pouring from her mind told him she was close to coming just from his commanding tone. He doubted anyone had ever dared to order her around. He squeezed his hands into fists to keep from doing more than talking to her.

She assumed the position he'd commanded, sticking her ass out at him and wiggling it. The deeper turquoise skin of her engorged labia looked ripe and ready. He wanted to bury his face in her and bring her to the point of orgasm before whipping her ass until it was covered in welts. Then he would stick his hand into her short curls, and use it as an anchor while he fucked her mercilessly. He forced himself to take a step back from temptation.

He looked at the princess's lover who was staring wide-eyed at Alcina. He couldn't suppress a growl. "Fuck her as hard and fast as you can. I want to hear her scream."

Ivan could hear the man's heart pounding wildly. "Do it now."

The princess's lover nodded, positioning himself behind her. Ivan watched him spread her lips and slip two fingers inside her, moving them in and out slowly.

"She's more than ready. She needs your cock in there right now."

The man grasped his cock in his hand and aimed for her pussy. Ivan expected him to hesitate again, but once he positioned himself, he drove deep, seating himself fully. The man

gasped, but he recovered quickly, grasping Alcina's hips. He held her still and fucked her brutally.

Ivan bit his lip to keep a growl from escaping. Alcina's body ignited, her alarm growing as her lover became wilder and wilder. She thrived on it, seeming to need that edge to move toward her release.

The man grunted with each rough thrust. Ivan had no doubt he was on the verge of coming. "Don't you dare come until you've made her scream. Make her beg for it."

Her lover's pace increased again. Ivan licked his lips at the sound of the man's balls slapping against Alcina's wet flesh. The man lay over her back and reached beneath her with one hand. Ivan shifted position so he could see her lover pinch and twist one of her nipples. She whimpered.

"More. Give her what she needs."

The man got his balance so he could hold both nipples. He tugged on them hard, using them to give himself leverage to fuck her. Alcina cried out. "More. More now!"

"That's it. Hurt her. She wants it."

Alcina moaned. "Yesss! Please!"

At that moment Ivan knew what he would do first thing the next day. He would ask King Schoeneus's permission to challenge Alcina to another race. And he would win.

Ivan felt agony radiating from Alcina. He savored the sharp taste. Her lover's anxiety spiked again. The man couldn't hold back his climax any longer. But he was afraid to let go.

Then Alcina screamed. Her upper body collapsed to the ground as her hips spasmed.

Her lover gave a hoarse shout and froze. Ivan breathed deep, taking in the wild emotion of their orgasms. He hadn't gorged on pleasure and pain like this in a long time. It felt utterly wonderful.

A few seconds after their bodies stilled, Alcina looked over her shoulder at Ivan. "How did you know that was exactly what I needed?"

He gave her a cruel smile. "What you really need is a long, hard spanking."

"You wouldn't dare." She turned onto her back as her lover rose and began quietly dressing himself. No doubt, he hoped to slip out unnoticed.

"You can't begin to imagine the things I will do once you're mine."

She laughed. "I'll only be yours if you beat me in the midsummer races, and this year's have ended."

"We'll see about that."

Her lover, dressed in his kilt and boots, took a step toward the door. Ivan turned and glared at him. "I won't find you with the Princess again, unless I ask you to join us. Understood?"

He nodded. "Yes, sir." Then he stepped through the door and bolted.

"How dare you send him off?"

Alcina was standing now, less than an arm's length from Ivan.

He took a step toward her. "You know no other man can satisfy you now that you've had a taste of what I can do."

Ivan felt a rush of terror skate over her, and she stepped back. He walked forward, and she retreated until she backed into the wall.

He stretched out his arms on either side of her head, trapping her. "I will do what I must to have you. Once you are mine, you will submit to me, and me alone."

"No one controls me."

"For the last five years, you've been looking for a man strong enough to bring you to your knees." He leaned in so close their lips were almost touching. He could hear her heart racing. "You've finally found him." He pushed away from the wall and walked out, forcing himself not to turn back for one more look at her enticing body.

Chapter Two

When she could no longer hear Ivan's boots slapping against the stone floor, Alcina allowed herself to breathe again. Now she knew why her father's advisors had counseled him against allowing a Lalatian to visit their world. Lalatians were definitely dangerous. No man had ever dared speak to her like Ivan had.

She'd had plenty of lovers since her desire had awakened. They'd all been eager to please her. They'd worshipped her body and done exactly what she'd asked of them, but none of them had tried to dominate her. She was their princess, and they all feared her, at least a little.

Her wild ways confused men. She was an exotic creature with a sexy, feminine body but the strength of a man. None of her lovers quite knew what to make of her. She couldn't pretend to be something she wasn't, but she was tired of always being in control. She wanted a man who could make her beg for the pleasure she'd been freely given. Ivan had proven he could do just that.

The thought of his commanding tone made her pussy clench. Even though Kiko had fucked her to a mind-blowing climax, she was so hot for Ivan she could barely keep her hips still. She didn't think she could walk to her room without bringing herself off. She spread her

legs slightly and leaned into the wall. When she pinched her clit between her fingers, she gasped at the sharp pleasure.

She imagined Ivan ordering her to touch herself, watching her with his burning red eyes. He would reach for his cock, unable to keep from touching it while he watched her. She'd seen his erection pressing at the fly of his leather pants, begging to be freed. As her mind created an image of Ivan naked, she sank her teeth into her lower lip.

She slid two fingers inside herself. She was dripping wet from her hard ride and her need for Ivan. She worked her fingers in and out, curling them against the ridges on the front wall of her channel that served no purpose other than to bring a woman knee-buckling pleasure. The memory of the wild look on Ivan's face while he watched her suck Kiko's cock was enough to send her over. Waves of pleasure crashed over her body.

Ivan would be on their world for a month. She would have him. There was no question about that. She knew Lalatian dominants needed their lover's pain to survive. She'd fantasized for years about being restrained and spanked by a lover. And now she'd found a man who could satisfy these soul-deep longings.

But Ivan also frightened her. She would let him fuck her while she fed his need for a woman's submission, but she would not let him win her. She could give her body to a man like Ivan, but her life was her own. She had no intention of surrendering herself to any man.

* * * * *

After he'd returned to his room, Ivan's cock had needed one more explosion before he'd been able to sleep. Then he'd dreamed of Alcina. She'd taunted him, told him he could never best her. But he would. There was no other option. The more he thought about his reaction to her, the more convinced he became that she was meant to be his mate.

Before leaving for Boetia, he'd spent some time talking to Radek, the only Lalatian to ever mate with someone of a different race. Radek said he'd known he had to have his mate, Nia, from the first moment he saw her. His need had run deeper than lust from the very

beginning. Ivan wanted to fuck Alcina and teach her the intricate balance of pleasure and pain, but he wanted to touch her soul as well. He felt a peace he'd never dreamed of when he'd touched her mind.

The Lalatian government had sent representatives to the homeworlds of three of the other older races. These representatives had been chosen for their military experience and their powers of persuasion. Ivan had been reluctant to accept the position, and he'd never imagined he'd find a mate for himself. He hadn't even believed in the prophecy that encouraged his government to make this unprecedented contact with other races.

The mating of Lalatians with other older races was foretold by a prophecy supposedly given to a priestess of Zusa, the patron goddess of submissives. The priestess wrote that when a time of strife came to their galaxy, the older races would be forced to unite. Men and women would mate with members of other races to solidify this union. Together, the older races would defeat a young race who strived to control the entire galaxy.

Radek and Nia's mating was certainly a sign that the older races could intermarry and interbreed. And the humans fit the description of the younger race that would threaten them all, but Ivan was an empiricist. He'd never believed in prophecy. But what he felt for Alcina was as real as the mattress he lay on. Whether or not the prophecy was valid, he would find a way to explore their relationship and find out if they were destined for one another.

Nia was crown princess of her people and her duty to her people had nearly caused Radek to lose her. The last thing Ivan wanted was to cause strife with the Boetians or make trouble for Alcina. He didn't know how the king would react to the possibility of his daughter marrying a Lalatian. Perhaps he'd welcome someone who could discipline her. He couldn't help but smile at that thought.

Ivan prayed to Zusa that the king would let him have Alcina without a fight. But no matter what grief it caused his homeworld, he would have her. No one stood between a Lalatian and his mate.

He met Schoeneus in the king's office as they'd arranged the evening before.

"Ivan, I trust you slept well."

"Yes, Your Majesty. My quarters are most comfortable." He didn't think the king really wanted to know what had disturbed his sleep.

"Excellent. Shall we begin with a tour?"

Ivan took a deep breath. "I have an important matter to discuss with you first."

The king looked concerned. "Please continue."

"As you know, I've been sent to Boetia to acquaint myself with you and your people in the hopes that a larger party of Lalatians might search for mates among your people. What I did not expect was to meet a mate for myself on my first night here."

"How could you know such a thing so quickly?"

"A Lalatian reacts in a specific way to a potential mate. Our bodies are attuned to her or him the same way that animals signal each other with pheromones."

"And who do you believe is your mate? Mikala?"

"No, Your Majesty."

"Then who?"

"Princess Alcina."

The king gasped.

"You are eager to see her matched, Your Majesty."

"Yes, but I --"

"Never thought to mate her with an off-worlder."

"No, I did not. Our political situation is unstable at present. More so perhaps than I let on when negotiating with the Lalatian Council. If something happened to me, Alcina would rule in her brother's stead until he came of age."

"Princess Nia of the Gaelins will rule her world one day with a Lalatian as her consort."

The king nodded. "I am aware of their arrangement."

"My union with Alcina would serve to protect us all."

"According to a Lalatian prophecy. Why should I believe an obscure priestess of your people that you've ignored yourselves for hundreds of years?"

"Because you know the threat the humans represent."

The king shook his head. "I knew this was a possibility when I consented to this visit. But I never thought Alcina would mate with a dominant. She's much too aggressive, too independent."

"Submissives on Lalatia are not weak-willed. Far from it. Many of our strongest leaders have been submissives. Lalatian submissives crave surrender, but when their needs are satiated, they may exert their will over others in many aspects of their lives. I know many who are as stubborn as your daughter."

"You must defeat her in a race as any suitor would."

Ivan nodded. "Of course."

The king shook his head. "You may be her only chance at marriage. No man on this planet seems capable of taming her."

"I am confident in my abilities, Your Majesty. I would ask that another race be set in the next few days. I cannot wait a planetary year to claim her."

The king tapped his fingers on his desk. "How will you determine if you are in fact mates?"

"I need at least three days alone with her, away from distractions. During that time, if we experienced a merging of minds during sex we will know we are potential mates. Then we must perform a ritual. If Alcina is with child after the ritual, we will be mates for life. If she is not, I will free her from her promise to wed me."

"During these days, I assume you will feed from her to satisfy your Lalatian hungers."

“Yes, but only if she is willing. I would do nothing to her without her consent. Lalatians crave consensual domination, not rape.”

The king sighed. “What makes you think she would be willing?”

“If she is my intended mate, she will be pulled to me as strongly as I am pulled to her. She might resist at first, but she will quickly give in to what she craves.”

The king took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. “The race will be set for tomorrow.”

“Excellent, Your Majesty.”

“Don’t lose.”

Ivan smiled. “I will not.”

Normally, Ivan wouldn’t consider cheating, but he had no intention of leaving his and Alcina’s happiness to chance. If he and Alcina were intended mates, his losing would deny them both a chance at ultimate pleasure and happiness. And if he could forge a link with the Boetians, then the older races would be one step closer to uniting against the humans.

* * * * *

Alcina woke with a jolt, covered in sweat. She’d been dreaming about Ivan, but even now the dreams seemed too vivid not to be real. She looked in every shadowy corner of her room, but she saw no one. In the dream, Ivan had been spanking her, each stroke harder than the last, making her body a blaze of fiery anguish and desperate, liquid need. She’d simultaneously loved and hated it.

Long minutes after waking, her breath still wasn’t under control. She considered bringing herself off but decided against it. The lust coursing through her body would rev her up for the race and keep her going.

Dark pink clouds shimmered on the horizon. It was pointless to bother going back to sleep. She slipped into a purple tunic and headed toward the kitchens.

Ivan was already there, standing at the bar that was lined with cold breakfast selections. He'd piled his plate high with fruit, strips of salt-cured fish and hunks of crusty bread.

After Ivan had made his formal challenge the day before, Alcina had avoided him. She worried that the more time she spent in his almost overwhelming presence, the more concerned she'd be about her ability to defeat him.

She'd been right. The moment she saw his broad-shouldered frame, her confidence wavered. Her father had apparently convinced him to adopt Boetian dress. He'd looked like a dark, seductive dream in his Lalatian clothes, but she'd wondered how he'd kept from sweltering in his billowy black Lalatian shirt and tight leather pants. Now, shirtless, wearing nothing but a kilt and calf-length boots, his strength was even clearer.

His long, straight, honey-colored hair was in a queue. She couldn't take her eyes off the thick muscles of his shoulders. His arms bulged with muscles. He could probably lift her as if she weighed nothing. An image flashed into her mind: Ivan, on his knees behind a woman, as Kiko had been with her. His muscular thighs flexing as he thrust hard and deep. Her nipples hardened, and the shift of her tunic's fabric across them made her gasp.

Ivan turned at the sound. "Good morning, Princess."

"Good morning." The smirk on his face told her he knew her body had reacted to him. At least she'd succeeded in keeping her voice steady.

Ivan picked up a bleukino, a plump, round, blue-skinned fruit. "I understand it is traditional for the challenger to offer his opponent a gift before a race."

She nodded.

He held it out to her. "I searched the orchards this morning to find the perfect, succulent fruit. This one reminded me of your breasts. It was all I could do not to take a bite."

Alcina's hand shook as she accepted the fruit. As her hand brushed his, a spark shot through her body. She jerked her hand back.

Ivan's lips curled up in a knowing smile. "I'm looking forward to our race."

Alcina grabbed a plate and placed the bleukino, some fish, and a piece of bread on it. She decided to take it back to her room, knowing she couldn't spend another moment with Ivan. He was too unsettling. She had to stay focused or she would lose, and losing was not an option. Instinctively she knew Ivan had the power to consume her as no Boetian man could do. She shivered with a combination of dismay and longing.

She felt Ivan's gaze on her as she made her exit. The fabric of her tunic irritated her body everywhere it touched her. She wanted to strip it off, throw her plate down, start running, and never stop. But she had never backed down from a challenge in her life. Ivan might be powerful, but he couldn't be any faster than the Boetian men who'd trained for a year to run against her. She would win.

She slowed her pace when she realized she was nearly running. She grabbed the bleukino Ivan had given her when it threatened to roll off her plate. She couldn't resist taking a bite.

She groaned as the sweet juice trickled down her throat. Ivan had chosen well. The fruit was sweet and tangy at the same time, and the flesh was crisp. She usually preferred to eat them peeled, but the skin on this one was as sweet as the inside. She took another big bite.

"Shouldn't you be resting up for your race?"

The voice startled her. She turned to see Vasilis, a childhood friend and Boetian aristocrat, entering the great hall. She forced herself to smile and make her tone cheerful. "Good morning, Vasilis. I came down for some breakfast."

"Is it wise to eat so close to the start of your race? I would hate for you to get a cramp."

She took another bite of bleukino to hide her annoyed expression. Vasilis meant well, she was sure, but he was too overprotective for her tastes. He'd never approved of her races

or any of her athletic pursuits. "I'll be fine. I woke early so I would have plenty of time to digest."

He frowned. "You should never have agreed to this race, Alcina."

She took a deep breath and another bite of succulent fruit, needing the pause to temper her response. "How many times must I explain my feelings on the subject of marriage?"

"I've accepted that you will continue your unorthodox search for a husband but to race an off-worlder -- do you know what you risk?"

"My father sanctioned Ivan's search for a Boetian mate."

"Do you think that's wise, especially with the unrest on Boetia?"

She clenched her hands into tight fists. Vasilis had been satisfied with little that her father had done recently. If he was so damned interested in politics all of the sudden, why didn't he run for a spot on the Advisory Council? "I trust my father's judgment."

"But not his choice of a mate for you?"

"I trust my father to govern our people with the citizens' best interests at heart. I do not wish for him to dictate my personal life."

"Be that as it may, would you truly be happy mated to that ... foreigner?"

Alcina took another bite of her fruit and considered his question. "As hot as Ivan is, I would think any woman would be up for mating with him."

Vasilis scowled. "Be serious, Alcina. If you lose this race, you will be forced to marry this man. Lalatians feed on pain and fear. Could you truly accept such abuse?"

"I have no intention of losing."

"You're not invincible."

Alcina's heart pounded. She wasn't. One day she was going to lose a race. She took a long, slow breath and pushed that thought away. "Were I to lose, I am only bound to him for

three days. If he cannot prove that I am his mate in that time, then I am no longer obligated to him.”

“What if he can prove it?”

“He can’t. I belong to no one. I make my own destiny.” She glanced toward the courtyard. The sun was rising above the peaks to the east. “I appreciate your concern, but you must excuse me. I have to prepare for my race.”

Vasilis bowed low and left without speaking again. Alcina took a last luscious bite of bleukino. It really was the sweetest, juiciest one she’d ever tasted. She tossed the core into the waste chute by the stairs and hurried up to her chamber.

Chapter Three

Alcina stood at the starting line in front of the palace doors. She had arrived early, but a large crowd had already gathered. Butterflies fluttered in her stomach as she waited for Ivan to join her. At least she'd beaten him to the starting line. Now the crowd would be watching him approach, and she would get to have a good, long look at his naked body without everyone's attention on her.

Nudity was common and easily accepted among her people. The sight of a man's cock rarely aroused her by itself, but the thought of Ivan striding toward her, his muscular body on display, made her salivate. She had to know if his cock was as long and thick as it looked behind his leather pants. Goddess, she hoped so.

She felt restless and itchy, as if hands were sweeping across her flesh. Her pussy was wet and swollen, and her nipples were tight despite the warmth of the midsummer air. She tried to dismiss her excitement as the normal rush of adrenaline before a race, some of which often translated into sexual need. But she'd never felt this hot and wild in her life except when Ivan had ordered Kiko to fuck her in the pantry.

Was it simply Ivan? Did his very existence rev her up beyond reason? She shook her head, trying to regain her focus. She had to concentrate to win this race.

Ivan exited the palace and everyone turned toward him. Alcina sucked in her breath, unable to guard her expression in front of her subjects. His appearance was masterful when he was dressed, but nude he would need only to speak and every woman in the kingdom would rush to do his bidding. His cock was everything she'd imagined it to be, and it lay hard and ready against his belly. Was he feeling the same charge that she was? She wanted to sink to her knees and take his cock in her mouth so she could find out if he tasted as good as he looked.

Her cream soaked her pussy, wetting the insides of her thighs. Her breasts ached. She had to ball her fists to keep from touching herself. Ivan was truly amazing, but this level of wildness she felt was not normal. Prickly flames raced over her body from her head to her feet. She had to fight to stand still. What was wrong with her?

He smiled at her as if he could read her thoughts. But rather than infuriating her, his knowing look only made her hotter. She wanted to tell him every way she'd imagined fucking him so she could make him as horny as she was. He bowed to her, and she summoned the coordination to return the courtesy.

Her father's voice welcomed everyone to the special race. She tuned out his speech, trying to center herself, to calm the wildness in her body, but nothing helped. Voracious lust seethed within her. She could barely focus on the road in front of her as she did a few last stretches to ready her body for a long, hard run.

Something was definitely wrong with her. She should call off the race and let her father's healer examine her, but she refused to let Ivan think she was scared. Maybe whatever had unsettled her would pass once she'd started to run.

Her father concluded his speech, and the crowd cheered. The race was about to begin. The Games Master raised his hand, calling for silence. She and Ivan crouched, positioning themselves for take off.

The Games Master held his cymbals aloft. "Runners at the ready."

Alcina took a deep breath. The cymbals clashed, and she sprinted.

The faster she ran, the more intense her craving for sex grew. She felt as if someone were touching her everywhere but the place she needed it most. She longed to feel someone working her clit between his fingers and plucking her hard nipples until they burned. She could barely draw air into her lungs, but she pushed herself to keep going as she crested the hill and followed the path into the forest.

If she could just finish the race, she could run to her room and relieve the hot need in her pussy. Maybe she'd even take Ivan with her and make him fuck her until she could relax. When her mind formed a picture of his head between her legs, his tongue delving between her lower lips, she stumbled. She fell to her hands and knees and could not make herself get up.

She couldn't keep going until she made herself come. She reached between her legs and took her clit between her fingers. In seconds, her body shuddered with an orgasm that rocked her so hard she collapsed flat on the ground.

As the tremors slowed, her mind cleared. What the fuck had happened to her? She wanted Ivan badly, but no man could make her lose control to this extent.

"Are you all right, Princess?"

She jumped up when she realized Ivan was right behind her. "I'm fine. I just fell."

He took a deep breath and licked his lips. "I do love the taste of a breathtaking orgasm."

"Bastard." He'd probably been watching her the whole time. She'd been too gone with need to notice.

He smiled. "Shall we begin the race again?"

"Yes." She bolted as she said the word, needing desperately to get away from him.

She flew over the ground, easily outdistancing Ivan once again. But as she ran, swirling need curled in her belly. Goddess no, the hunger was coming back. She pushed herself as hard as she could, needing to finish the race while she could stay on her feet.

* * * * *

Ivan pushed himself harder. He'd coated Alcina's bleukino with aphrodisiac, and he knew it would kick in again soon. One orgasm would never satisfy a woman in its thrall. But Alcina was a hell of a runner, and he couldn't be certain she wouldn't finish the race before her need stopped her again.

But he came around a sharp curve in the path and saw her leaning against a tree, her sides expanding and contracting rapidly. Lust and alarm emanated from her. He moaned at the delicious taste.

He took a step toward her. She spun around, eyes wide. The skin of her face and chest was flushed to a deep turquoise. Her nipples were hard points. He could smell her unique scent, and it made him ravenous. He'd bet her cream had run all the way to her knees. "Would you like some help?"

Her fear spiked when she looked at him. She shook her head, but he took another step toward her.

She held out her hand. "No."

"Would you rather I keep running then?"

She bit her lip but said nothing.

He knelt before her, and she shuddered.

He grabbed her hips and shoved her against the tree. She gasped at his rough treatment but didn't protest.

He leaned forward and exhaled, blowing his warm breath against her plump pussy lips.

She moaned.

"Have you changed your mind?"

"Please."

"Please keep running?"

“Goddess, no.”

“Then what?” He exhaled again, his lips hovering no more than a millimeter above her skin.

She slid her hands across her belly, ready to touch herself, but he grabbed her wrists and pinned them against the tree. She arched her hips toward him. He leaned back, just out of contact.

“I’ll give you what you need, but you have to ask.”

She pumped her hips and snarled. Her bright blue eyes were wild, and her emotions battered him like a swirling storm.

He leaned forward and bit the smooth flesh of her belly. She shrieked, but her eyes focused on him once again.

“Tell me what you want.”

“Fuck me.”

“Not until I’ve won, but I will give you this.” He released her hands and held her hips again. She slid her hands into his hair and pulled him toward her. He gave her a long firm lick, and she moaned.

He pulled her clit into his mouth. She tore at his hair, but he didn’t care. Her taste intoxicated him, like the finest wine he’d ever tasted. He licked and sucked and nibbled. She writhed against him until she screamed out her orgasm, pumping her hips against his face.

He knew he should back away and let her go. The less satisfaction she got, the easier it would be to defeat her. But he had to have more. She’d come too quickly, and he wanted to savor her.

He pushed his tongue inside her, feeling the final spasms of her climax. She pushed at his shoulders. “No.”

His need for her made him push her. Her desire for him surrounded them like a cloud, and he wanted to drink in her delicious agony as he brought her off again. He swiped along the link of her clit.

“Please.” She pushed her hips toward him.

He continued to torment her. The agony it brought her oversensitized flesh tasted like smooth rich chocolate. She moaned, all attempts at protest forgotten. He stopped and pulled back, looking up at her.

* * * * *

Alcina stared down at Ivan, fighting to keep her hips still. She was stunned by the need that coursed through her body so soon after the blinding orgasm Ivan had given her. “What’s wrong with me?”

His lips curled up. He looked like a sex god who could tempt any mortal to do his bidding, “Nothing.”

He drew her clit into his mouth again. She sucked in her breath at the jolt of pleasure. *Focus. Focus*, she told herself. He knew something. She could tell by the look on his face. When had she first begun to feel so strange?

He drew circles around her clit with his tongue, and her knees buckled. She lost her ability to think for several long moments, before she caught the thread of memory she needed. “Oh Goddess, the bleukino.” The words tumbled out of her mouth before she could stop them.

He pulled away from her again. “Enjoyed it, did you?”

“What did you do to it? I’ve never tasted one so sweet.”

“I added something to open your senses and heighten your awareness.”

“An aphrodisiac.”

He nibbled at the skin above her pubic bone.

“You fucking cheated.”

His tongue swiped across her clit, and she swayed. He held her hips still and used his tongue and teeth to work her to a frenzy.

She fought to get out the words she wanted to say. “I’ll ... tell my ... father. He’ll ... disqualify you.”

“No, you won’t.” He whispered the words right against her flesh. She felt them vibrate in her core.

Anger coursed through her, but Ivan sucked her clit deeply, biting gently. She arched against him, focused only on reaching a climax again. He made demanding pulls against her clit while he thrust his fingers inside her, dragging them across the ridges on the front wall of her channel. Zinging jolts of pleasure radiated outward, and she exploded.

When her body stopped shuddering with the spasms of her orgasm, she sagged against the tree. She wanted to push Ivan away, to run from the intensity of feelings he drew from her, but she couldn’t move.

“You won’t tell your father, because you would never deny yourself the chance to come that hard again. No man on Boetia can pleasure you like I can.”

“Arrogant, aren’t you?” Her voice came out breathless, without the edge she’d meant the comment to have.

He laughed. “Yes, but Lalatian mates can bring each other pleasure more intense than what they feel with other lovers.”

“I am not your mate.”

He took a long, slow breath. “You are mine, and I will have you.”

“I *will* tell my father you cheated.”

“No. My agreement with your father is that I have you for three days after I win. If in that time, it is not clear to you that we are mates, I will relinquish my hold over you.”

“You’re not going to win.”

“Three days of pleasure. Three days of orgasm after orgasm. Of finally being with a man who knows how to dominate you.”

Heat coursed through her again. Wasn't his poison out of her body yet? Even after all the rumors she'd heard about what Lalatian dominants did to their partners, she wanted nothing more than three days spent in bed with him. Why not take the pleasure he offered? He'd never convince her they were bound by some ancient prophecy, but if he could give her more orgasms like these, she might want him, too. That thought scared her to death.

She decided to leave it to chance. “I won't mention that you cheated, but you have to finish the race to win me.” She ducked under his arm and sprinted down the path.

He followed, close on her heels. He'd been holding out before. If he'd run this fast the whole race, he never would have fallen so far behind her. She was tired, and she could feel his potion pulsing along her skin.

They came out of the forest, raced through several groves and neared the finish. Ivan surged ahead. Alcina told her legs to work harder, but she was too drained.

He crossed the finish several meters ahead. The crowd went wild. It appeared the men of Boetia were happy to embrace any man who could beat her, even an off-worlder.

Chapter Four

As soon as Alcina crossed the finish line, Ivan scooped her into his arms. His scheme with the aphrodisiac-laced bleukino had worked beautifully, but he didn't want her to start offering herself to any man or woman who approached her. He had to get her to her bedroom and help her work off the last of her hunger.

He shoved his way through the crowd that threatened to close in on them, scowling at everyone in his path. The king stood on the balcony as he had for the race before. Ivan was certain the king expected them to ascend the stairs and accept his congratulations on a race well run, but Ivan had no intention of letting Schoeneus see the princess in her current state.

He looked down at Alcina. Her eyes were closed, her facial muscles tight. He could smell lust and terror on her. He knew she was seconds away from breaking, forgetting where she was and begging him to relieve the need building in her cunt. Her hand snaked between her legs. "Not now," he said, his voice low.

When she ignored him, he pulled her hand away and shifted her up and over his shoulder. Her arms dangled down behind him, far away from the center of the need she wanted to quench.

A tall man with emerald green hair stepped in front of them, blocking their path. Ivan snarled. The man stood his ground. “You have no right to claim a Boetian princess, Lalatian.”

A low growl rumbled in Ivan’s chest. “Your king says otherwise. Princess Alcina is mine.”

“I will not stand by while you brutalize a member of our royal house.”

Ivan was hungry and horny and ready to fight to protect the woman in his arms. His chest tightened with anger. He knew that flames leapt in his red eyes. “Stand aside.”

The man stood his ground.

Ivan looked at the guards who stood by the palace doors. “Remove this man.”

They hesitated, but Prokopios, the Speaker of the Advisory Council, stepped forward and laid his hand on the man’s shoulder. “Vasilis, he has won her with the king’s consent. Let him pass.”

Vasilis pulled away from Prokopios, but the two guards took him by the arms and pulled him from the path. By the time Ivan reached the palace doors, Alcina’s hips were pumping against his shoulder and she was moaning.

Prokopios followed them into the Great Hall. “What is wrong with the princess?”

Ivan forced himself to speak in a calm voice. “She pushed herself too hard. She needs to rest. I’m taking her to her room.”

“I will summon her maid.”

“No. I will take her myself.”

“His Majesty wishes to meet with you.”

Ivan deliberately projected his growing anger at the speaker. Prokopios gasped. And the guards behind him unsheathed their swords.

“Stand down.” Alcina’s voice was weak, but her words were unmistakable.

“Your highness?”

“You heard the princess.” Ivan walked away, letting his long legs eat up the floor. He crossed the Great Hall, entered the kitchen, and took the back stairs to the second level where the family and guest quarters were located. Fortunately, Prokopios chose not to follow them.

When Ivan entered Alcina’s bedroom, he sat Alcina on her feet, but she sank immediately to her knees. Her hands shoved at his hips, pushing him back against the door. She wrapped one of her hands around his cock while using the other to touch herself. She leaned forward, lapping at his cock, making it harden so fast it hurt. She moaned in pleasure as she sucked his head into her mouth.

He shouldn’t let her continue. No Lalatian submissive would dare take his cock without permission, but his cock begged for more of her ministrations. She sucked him like she needed his come to survive. He’d planned to bring her off as many times as she needed to work his potion out of her system, saving his own release until they’d left the palace.

He’d wanted to savor the first time he exploded inside her, but his cock told him it wouldn’t wait. His mind protested again. He’d be damned if he’d let her control him. She was not the one who decided when and where he came.

He pushed at her shoulders. She fought to break his hold, but the throbbing lust his potion created had left her weak. He shoved harder and she fell to the carpeted floor.

“Please.” She opened her eyes and looked at him. “Please, I need your cock.”

“You’ll get it when I’m ready to give it to you.”

She tried to sit up.

“Don’t move.”

Both of her hands worked between her legs. Her lust beat at him like a hailstorm. She was seconds from coming. He stood over her, straddling her body and pumping his saliva-slick shaft with his hand. “Beg me and I’ll pour my come out on your body.”

Her eyes went wide, and her body stilled. “Please. Oh, Goddess. Please.”

Ivan inhaled deeply. Fear hung potent in the air. She didn't like him controlling her. "Come now."

"No!" She screamed and writhed under him, pulled over by his command despite herself.

His orgasm caught him by surprise. Watching the wild gyrations of her hips did him in. He shuddered as spasms wracked his whole body. Jet after jet of come sprayed her beautiful blue breasts and belly.

Damn! If she could make him come like this just by watching her, he could only imagine what she would do to him when his cock was buried inside her.

A crash behind them had Ivan spinning around, ready to defend himself and Alcina from the men who wanted to stop his claiming of her. But no man stood behind them, only a wide-eyed maid. The crash had been caused by a vase she'd knocked off a shelf.

"My maid. Rosa." Alcina said between ragged breaths.

Rosa curtsied. "I'm so sorry to have intruded. I thought perhaps the princess would like a hot bath after her run." Her voice was breathless, betraying her arousal.

Ivan studied Rosa's lush form with appreciation. The woman's cheeks were flushed and a quick scan detected a strong preference for submission. He toyed with the idea of asking her to join them but decided that pleasure could wait until he and Alcina had solidified their bond. Alcina needed no distractions from her need for him. "I will take care of what the princess needs."

Rosa looked toward her mistress. Alcina managed a weak smile. "I'll be fine."

Rosa raised her brow. "You are certain, my lady?"

"Despite how this looks, I am safe with Ivan."

Rosa gave Ivan an assessing glance. Her behavior was inappropriate for a palace servant's, but he enjoyed her appreciation anyway. When her gaze had swept him head to toe, she smiled. "Yes, I think you are."

Rosa collected the larger pieces of the broken vase. "I'll sweep this up after you've left." Without another word, she slipped out the door. Ivan heard the lock click and smiled. Rosa apparently understood her mistress's needs better than Alcina herself. The maid would see that they weren't disturbed.

The tunic Alcina had worn to breakfast lay on the end of her bed. Ivan grabbed it, knelt, and used it to wipe her breasts and belly clean. Then he pulled the tie from its loops. "Sit up."

Alcina moaned and shook her head. She'd closed her eyes and was already drifting toward sleep.

"I said sit up."

Her eyes fluttered open. She smiled at him, still drunk on passion. "I can't."

He grabbed her wrists and pulled her to a sitting position. She nearly fell back when he let go of her, but he got the silky tie around her body fast enough to hold her up. He wrapped her body with it several times, securing her arms to her sides. Her trepidation curled around him like a caress.

"What are you doing?" Her voice shook as she spoke.

"Making sure you obey me."

She sobered, her eyes focusing once again. "You cheated and won the race. That doesn't make me your slave."

"No, but you'll be begging to serve me before the next three days are up."

"Bastard."

Ivan sat down behind her and jerked her against him. "You'll pay for that."

He slid a hand between her thighs. Her legs parted easily despite her continued struggles to free herself.

When he touched her clit, she gasped and tried to pull away. He squeezed her clit between two fingers.

She shrieked. "Please. It's too much."

He groaned. "I know. I can taste it."

"What?"

"I can taste your suffering."

"How?"

"Lalatian dominants feed off pain and fear. It tastes better than the finest food you can imagine."

"I'd heard that, but I didn't think it was true. I thought you just --" He squeezed her again, and she sucked in her breath. "-- liked it rough."

He laughed. "Rough enough to make you scream. I'm going to make your body drink in torment and turn it to pleasure."

He pressed the heel of his hand against her clit and slid two fingers into her pussy, working them in circles and making her whimper.

"You can't do this to me."

"I can. I just won the right to."

"I can still tell my father what you did."

"No, you want this too much." He curled his fingers upward, rubbing against the ridges. He'd heard that pressure on this spot could make Boetian women come with a fierceness to rival even the strongest orgasms he'd given Lalatians.

"I wanted three days of pleasure. Not torture."

"You want a man who's not afraid to command you. A man who can fulfill your need to surrender."

"I will not be commanded."

"I won you, and you're going to take what I've got to give."

“No --” The last word came out as a strangled gasp as Ivan added a third finger and brushed them all against her hot spot. Shock waves of pleasure jolted her.

“Yes.” He thrust in and out with his fingers. The heel of his hand pressed firmly against her aching clit. She couldn’t stop her body from arching up against him. Every time he rubbed his palm across the tip of her clit, she got a jolt of pleasure so acute it hurt.

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Ivan’s breathing grew faster and more shallow. She felt his cock against her back, rock hard despite his recent climax. The bastard was getting off on the agony he was giving her.

She wanted to stop her reactions, to deny him what he needed, but she couldn’t. The aphrodisiac wasn’t all to blame. She would have given him anything he’d asked for the night before when her body had been free of his potion.

When Ivan had commanded Kiko to fuck her, it had been fun, a naughty game. Now, the tension between her and Ivan belied something far more serious. Alcina was happy to let Ivan have the upper hand in bed, but she wasn’t a submissive, no matter what delusions he had about their being mates. She’d show him, as soon as she had her body back under control. She’d make him understand that she liked to play kinky games, but only one person ruled her life and that was her.

He added a fourth finger, stretching her until it stung. He pulled them out slowly and shoved back in hard. She ceased to be able to think. Her terror mounted and she cursed herself for it, knowing she was only making Ivan relish her helplessness more. She twisted, desperate to free herself, but he’d tied her too tight. “Let me go.”

“Never.”

Her breath caught. Her heart hammered in her chest. What if he forced his brand of excruciating pleasure on her for eternity? She teetered on the brink of orgasm, scared to go over. Then he pulled his hand away, leaving her hanging.

“No!”

“I control when you come, and I’m going to make you wait.”

Anger flooded her, overriding her fear. She made a feral sound deep in her throat. “You fucking poisoned my body, making me so horny I couldn’t stand up. Don’t you dare leave me hanging.”

He seized a lock of her short hair and pulled her head back until she was looking at him. “Don’t ever tell me what I would or wouldn’t dare unless you want your ass spanked so hard you can’t sit for days.”

Alcina choked. Despite her dismay, lust swirled in her mind. She needed to come so badly, she could hardly think. “Fuck me, now,”

“That pleasure will come later, but if you submit to me, I’ll let you come.”

“You’ve tied me up. I don’t exactly have a choice.’

“Submission is a state of mind, not something I can force from you with bondage. I intend to teach you to submit in truth.”

Alcina shook her head, more terrified by that notion than by anything he’d done to her. “I can’t.” She could barely get the words out. Her heart hammered and a knot formed in her throat.

The idea of letting this man rule her was terrifying yet exciting in a way she couldn’t define. Her fantasies of a dominant man had focused on hard, punishing sex. Never had she thought she’d crave surrendering her very soul to a man.

“Please.” The word came out as a sob. She was mortified to feel tears running down her cheeks. She was terrified in a way she’d never been, and he must be loving it.

He lifted a hand and stroked her cheek. “Letting go is hard for you. Lalatian submissives are trained to surrender from the time they reach puberty. I will guide you, but I will also demand what I need from you.”

She sucked in her breath as he slid his hand down her body. He brushed her clit and she whimpered. More tears fell. "Acknowledge that I am your master for the next three days, and I will give you what you need."

She shook her head. "I can't."

"You can."

"Please."

He brushed her clit again, too lightly to give any real satisfaction. "Who does your body belong to?"

The word 'you' nearly escaped her. She bit her lip to stop it.

He pinched her clit between his fingers.

She cried out. "Don't do this to me!"

"Tell me."

Oh Goddess, help her. She couldn't resist anymore. She had to find release, and she had to see where this journey would take her. She'd never backed down from a challenge before. "Yours. Damn it. I'm yours."

"I'm yours, Master."

"What?"

He slipped his fingers inside her and gave her the pressure she craved on her clit. "Say it."

She couldn't think anymore with his fingers working inside her. "Master."

He shoved his finger in hard, and she screamed.

He used his other hand to work her clit, pulling and tugging, showing her no mercy as she thrashed under him.

Fiend's blood, she thought. He'd completely wrung her out with the last orgasm, but the one building was going to be even bigger. Fear built with it. She didn't want to go over.

She knew this climax signaled her surrender to him. She sobbed at the thought of losing control.

“Nooo!” She fell into a bottomless pit of agonizing pleasure. Her body spasmed around Ivan’s fingers, clenching him tightly. Her clit pulsed. Her breath caught. Her lungs burned until finally the tight grip of passion let her go. She collapsed back against Ivan, panting, desperate to bring air into her body again.

Chapter Five

Ivan tied the last knot on the rope swing he was constructing for Alcina. After her last demanding orgasm, she'd fallen into a deep sleep. The aphrodisiac he'd used was one that Lalatian trainers used on both dominants and submissives. He well remembered the coma-like sleep that always came after it cycled out of his body.

Alcina had remained unconscious on the ride to the remote lodge King Schoeneus had reserved for them. Ivan had insisted on borrowing one of the few available hover cars so she wouldn't be jolted as they crossed rocky terrain. Now she slept peacefully in the hammock on the porch while he constructed her bondage swing.

The king had chosen a place where nobles often took their mistresses for days of sexual escapades. Fortunately, some of these nobles understood the exquisite mixing of pain and pleasure so some rudimentary equipment was available to him.

Strategic eye bolts had been installed in the ceiling and floor, far more than were needed for hanging sleeping hammocks. Rather than a simple mattress, the bedroom had a bed with a slatted headboard. A spanking bench sat at the end of the bed, and a large collection of vibrant red, high quality rope lay beside it.

Ivan's cock hardened just thinking of Alcina bound in rope. The red would contrast beautifully with her skin. He'd used several lengths of it to form a swing that would support her body in a reclining position, allowing him access to all her orifices and her lovely nipples, but keeping her comfortable enough to stay there for hours.

But first, he would give the princess her first sexually charged spanking. He had no doubt she'd fantasized about having a man punish her ass. A woman with such a need for submission could hardly have kept such fantasies at bay, but he knew enough about Boetian culture to be sure none of her lovers had dared spank the princess.

He reached into his bag and pulled out his favorite crop. He stroked his cock with his free hand as he imagined using it on her. The sharp smack it made when connected with firm flesh was too delicious for words.

Ivan walked onto the porch when he heard Alcina stir. He considered taking her inside and positioning her so she'd wake tied to the spanking bench, but his conscience wouldn't let him. She needed to eat. It was mid afternoon, and she'd had nothing since breakfast.

She also needed a fuller understanding of Lalatian culture and what he expected from her before they began to play. Lalatians rarely interacted with members of other races, but his trainer had instilled in him that if and when he did, he must explain what was expected and gain his partner's consent. He'd done so with Mikala, the woman the king had sent him, and he knew he should do so with Alcina. As he'd told her earlier, true submission could not be forced.

The lodge was well stocked with food, and it even had a refrigeration unit, which he understood was rare for Boetia. He filled a platter with strips of preserved fish, bread, and spicy dip made from legumes. Then he poured wine into two goblets. By the time he was done, Alcina was awake. He could feel wild fear pulsing in her. He licked his lips, savoring the taste before he turned around.

She stood in the doorway. “Where have you taken me?” Her voice sounded haughty, like it had when he’d found her fucking a servant in the pantry, but he knew she was terrified.

He was so turned on by her anxiety, he struggled to form words. Maybe he wouldn’t be able to wait until after lunch to spank her after all. “Your father had a remote hunting lodge prepared for us. We are in the Dendrix mountains.”

He felt her apprehension growing. By Varin, she was beautiful. If he could tame her enough to fulfill his needs but not so much as to kill her spirit, she would make a perfect mate.

“Did you drug me again? How did we get here?”

“The potion I put on your fruit causes a deep sleep when the aphrodisiac quality wears off. You slept through the ride here.”

“I never agreed to leave the palace with you.”

“You agreed to be mine. I can take you wherever I’d like.”

Alcina scowled but didn’t say anything. She had told him she was his, even acknowledged him as her master. A spark ignited in her pussy. Still, she didn’t think she should be held accountable for words spoken in the grip of mind-blowing lust.

“You’re not thinking of going back on your word are you?”

She shook her head. “No, but I would like to point out that it was given under duress.”

His lips curled into a cruel smile. “I never promised to play fair. Sit with me and eat. I will explain my expectations over our meal.”

Her heart pounded as she considered her predicament. She was alone with him, miles from the closest village. What had her father been thinking? Perhaps Vasilis was right, and the king was losing his sense of good judgment.

She wanted to protest, but what good would it do? She was hungry, and ultimately Ivan would get what he wanted from her. Like it or not, her body craved his dominance. She might as well face his demands with a full belly.

Ivan had apparently not bothered to dress her for their journey. Foolish as it was, she wanted the small protection a tunic would provide her before sitting down to eat. "Where are my clothes?"

"You won't be needing them?"

"Surely Rosa packed clothing for me."

"She did, though I told her it was unnecessary. Your bag is in the bathroom, but I have removed the clothing. I want you naked, so that is how you will remain."

She took a deep breath, trying to slow the rising tide of anger. She had a feeling his goal was to get her worked up. He'd been way too thrilled at the idea of punishing her earlier. Of course her pussy didn't mind the thought of a little more punishment, but she refused to let Ivan manipulate her like this. Her people might think nothing of nudity, but Ivan was deliberately trying to make her vulnerable. "An honorable man would allow a woman clothing if she requested it."

He growled and fire leapt in his eyes. "Don't ever question my honor. If I were anything less than honorable, you'd have woken up strapped to the spanking bench. My whip would be laying welts across your ass while I gorged myself on your luscious agony."

She glanced into the bedroom and saw the bench. Her mouth went dry and heat shot through her belly, curling around her clit. One of her former lovers had owned such a bench, but he'd refused to let her try it out. He didn't want word to get out that he'd beaten the princess.

Since then, she'd often fantasized about being strapped down with her ass on display, anticipating both torture and pleasure. But now that she faced the reality, she wasn't so sure

she wanted her fantasies to come true. The idea of being utterly helpless made her chest tighten until she couldn't draw air into her lungs.

"We'll find out just how much you like it, after we've eaten." Ivan's voice was devoid of anger now, but Alcina couldn't stop herself from shivering.

Taking a deep breath, she entered the living area and knelt on one of the cushions by the low table where Ivan had laid out food. She filled a plate and sipped from a goblet of wine before speaking again. "What do you want from me?"

He took a deep breath. "On Lalatia, every person is born innately dominant or submissive. These characterizations refer to our hungers, both spiritual and sexual."

Alcina listened without comment, thoroughly fascinated by what he said. She'd learned what she could of Lalatia when her father decided to allow Ivan to visit, but little information was available. Ivan's people were even more insular than hers.

"Our spiritual hungers develop around our fifteenth year; at that time we are assigned to a trainer. Dominants learn how to feed safely, and submissives learn how to transform the pain and fear into pleasure so they can serve the dominants as their nature demands. During our training, we must all play the opposite role from that which nature has assigned us. It is believed that a dominant can better satisfy his partner if he has himself submitted."

"I can't imagine you playing the submissive."

Ivan smiled. "I did, for my trainer. Giving over control was the hardest thing I've ever done, but it taught me how to make my partner suffer without truly harming her or him."

Alcina took a deep breath and swallowed. "And you expect me to submit to you like a Lalatian would?"

"Yes."

Alarm tightened her chest. "And you're going to hurt me?"

"Yes, but I will not ask more of you than you can give."

"I --"

He held up his hand. "Lalatians can read the nature of others, even those of other species, a leftover skill from when we used to interact with other races more frequently. When I met you, I knew instantly that you were a natural submissive."

She shook her head frantically. "That's not true."

"Yes, Alcina. Your nature cannot lie. Don't tell me you haven't dreamed of a man who could control you. A man who wouldn't be afraid to tie you down and punish you for your transgressions, no matter who you were. You need a man willing to fuck you so hard you scream for mercy."

Alcina's pussy clenched. Wetness dampened the top of her thighs. "How do you know that?" The words spilled from her mouth before she could stop them.

Ivan's lips lifted in a predatory smile. "A submissive woman would dream of nothing else."

"We barely spoke when you first saw me. How do you read my nature?"

"A probe of the top layer of your mind is all I need to detect a person's tendencies."

Goddess, please tell me he can't read my thoughts.

His smile deepened. "All we can read are emotions."

She choked. "But you just --"

"Could easily guess what you were concerned about. I know what emotions you are feeling, even when you wish I did not. I can often guess your thoughts from your emotions, but I cannot pull the thoughts from your mind."

Alcina tried to breathe slow and deep but her lungs were too constricted.

Ivan looked pointedly at her now empty plate. "It's time."

Her heart felt like it would explode in her chest and butterflies fluttered in her stomach. "I need more time to adjust to what you've told me."

Ivan inhaled, pure pleasure on his face. “Your terror is delicious, but I want you to enjoy this as much as I do. I will not accept less than your surrender to me, but I will not push you beyond your limits.”

“I want to fuck you. I’ve wanted to from the moment I saw you watching me from the balcony, but our liaison cannot go deeper than sex. My position on Boetia will not allow for my becoming anyone’s servant, no matter how much I might enjoy it.”

“Go to the bench and lay over it on your stomach.”

Alcina could feel her pulse pounding in her pussy as blood filled her lips, plumping them, readying her to fuck. Her body had no reservations about what it wanted, but she had no experience in giving up control. She was used to telling her lovers what she expected of them, and they had allowed her to direct them on how to satisfy her.

She walked toward the bench, pushing her doubts aside. This could be her only chance to experience her fantasies. Surely she could survive anything for three days. Her body could anyway, but what about her heart? How much power did Ivan wield? Enough to make her fall in love with him? The thought scared her more than any threat of torture he might make.

Alcina lay across the long, padded bench, turning her head to one side, laying her cheek against the supple leather that covered it. Her limbs dangled over the sides, near the cuffs that would hold her in place. Her heart pounded, thumping against the soft fabric beneath her chest.

Ivan knelt behind her and started to buckle her right ankle. Pure panic seized her. She kicked out, knocking his hand away and scrambling forward, desperate to get off the bench. Ivan grabbed her leg and held tight, forcing her to stay put. “Alcina, what’s wrong? I bound you at the palace, and you accepted it.”

She fought to control her breathing so she could speak. “I don’t know. I’m scared. This is all too much at once.”

He laid his other hand on her lower back. “Relax. I’m going to be right here, and I’m going to make sure you enjoy everything I do to you.”

His hand rubbed big, warm circles on her back. She stilled. But her heart still raced with alarm at the thought of the restraints. “

“Breathe with me.” She listened to his deep, slow intake of breath. He pushed down on her back as he exhaled, and she waited to inhale when he did. Her breath caught for a moment, but she was able to let it out steadily. She wanted to feel Ivan’s hot hand striking her ass, but she couldn’t let go of the terror of giving up responsibility for herself.

“I want this, but please let me hold myself in position. I can’t bear the cuffs, not yet.”

“Drop your hands so your arms dangle freely. Grab onto the cuffs if you need leverage.”

She did as he said, letting her arms hang over the bench’s sides.

“Relax and trust me.” He trailed his hand down her back and across her ass. When he brushed her swollen labia, she gasped at the lascivious yearning he inspired.

“Your mind may be uncertain, but your body knows exactly what it wants.”

She bit her lip, trying to stifle a moan.

“I feel your lust. It’s nearly as strong as your fear. Now I’m going to add pain to the mix to make myself the perfect feast. Are you ready?”

She moaned. Her hips bucked against the table, trying to get pressure on her clit. “I will warm you up slowly, but if I push you too far, say ‘Kedalion,’ and I will stop. Do you understand?”

She nodded.

“The proper answer is ‘Yes, Master.’”

The firm command in his voice made Alcina shiver. “Yes, Master.”

His hand cracked against her ass. She shrieked. Her body tensed.

He slapped her other cheek. She twisted and jerked, nearly pushing off the bench in her need to escape.

“Relax.”

She couldn’t. He gave her two more blows in rapid succession. She tried to curl in on herself, rolling her spine as much as she could without letting go of the cuffs.

Ivan caressed her hot flesh. “Tensing up makes it hurt worse. Exhale as I strike you. Let the pain flow through you.”

Alcina bit her lip and squeezed her eyes shut, trying to process his instructions.

He slipped his fingers between her legs and slid them inside her. He curled them forward, dragging them slowly across her ridges. *In and out. In and out.* He kept working her until pleasure overruled her dismay.

His free hand smacked her ass. She yelped, tensing again.

“Exhale with the pain. Scream if you need to, but keep your body loose.”

Another blow. Her leg muscles tensed, hard as rocks. The exposure, the inability to escape, was too much for her. How could she want something and want to run from it at the same time? Tears began to run down her cheeks.

Then Ivan was there, kneeling by her head. He brushed the tears away. “You want to serve me, don’t you?”

She nodded, too frenzied with emotion to try and deny it.

“I can feel it all, Alcina. Your desperation, your agony, your terror, your desire.”

She moaned. “Do you trust me not to take you further than you can go?”

Her mind reeled. She closed her eyes again to steady her mental focus. Ivan could have kept going. He could have used the cuffs, despite her protest. He’d even given her a way to stop him if he went too far. “I do.”

He stood and unbuckled his kilt, letting it fall to the floor. Suddenly his hard cock was right in front of her mouth. "Suck me."

She lapped at the tip of his cock, then drew it into her mouth. He tasted as delicious as he had the day before. She circled his cockhead with her tongue, groaning in delight at the way he filled her mouth. Then she pulled back and licked the entire length like his shaft was a sweet she intended to savor.

She twisted against the bench, rubbing her nipples on the smooth leather as her hips bucked against the edge. One of her favorite fantasies involved a man fucking her mouth, going so deep she couldn't breathe before shooting his come so far down her throat she had no choice but to swallow every drop.

Chapter Six

Ivan speared his hand into Alcina's hair and pushed his cock deeper into her mouth. She moaned around his length. He tightened his grip on her forcing her to hold still while he fucked her mouth. He could feel her desire to obey him, and that sensation alone was nearly enough to throw him over the edge.

With another Lalatian, he would worry that their position would hurt her neck, but Alcina's bendable spine simply curved backward, allowing him to pull her up and onto his cock with no risk to her neck.

He pulled out most of the way. She whimpered, stretching her neck to reach for him. He slid back in, even deeper this time. Varin's balls, she was totally relaxed, taking his whole cock down her throat, licking and sucking with fevered intensity. He was giving her exactly what she'd needed. Her hips rubbed against the back edge of the bench, faster and faster, in time with his thrusts.

Her mind projected burning lust, still tinged with a hint of alarm. He drank it down as he pumped his cock into her mouth. Her moans and whimpers intensified. She had to be as close to climax as he was. The thought of her swallowing his come with his dick lodged in her throat was enough to bring him over, but he wanted her to come first.

He wanted her thoroughly relaxed. The waves of sensation she'd sent out when he'd spanked her ass had been more delicious than any anguish he'd ever tasted. Even the fiercest whipping he'd given a lover hadn't been that potent. He needed to make her suffer more.

"Come for me."

She moaned, grinding her hips against the bench.

"That's it. Let the cool leather give your hot pussy what it needs."

She cried out around his cock, her body undulating like a dancing snake. She sucked him hard as pleasure took her. He held himself back until she stilled. Then he fucked her mouth without mercy. His balls tightened and his come poured down her throat.

She swallowed it all, eyes closed in ecstasy. Her mind opened, pouring her pleasure into Ivan. She let him in deeply, not all the way into her darkest thoughts, but deep enough to know he'd fulfilled a secret fantasy. He smiled as he pulled his cock from her mouth.

She licked her lips and looked at him. Her blue eyes were darker than he'd ever seen them.

"Put your head down."

"Yes, Master." She giggled, drunk on pleasure, exactly as he wanted her.

He moved behind her. Giving her no warning, no time to think, he brought his hand down against her ass.

She cried out but her body didn't tense.

"That's it." He spanked her again, harder.

She gasped but stayed slumped on the bench, her body wrung out with pleasure.

He kept going, increasing the strength and speed of his blows. The smooth skin of her ass cheeks changed from blue to a deep purple. She squirmed and bucked, working her clit against the bench.

He tasted her delicious agony still tinged with fear, but her hunger was rising quickly once again. "I'm going to give you ten more strokes. Count them for me."

She twisted her head around to look at him, her eyes wide.

"Head down and count."

He smacked her ass.

Silence.

"Alcina. You will do as I say."

"One." The word was breathless and shaky. He licked his lips, loving how much she wanted to please him.

Another blow.

"Two."

Smack after smack filled the air along with her quiet counting. When he finished and Alcina spoke a shaky "ten," he stepped between her open legs. "Thank me."

"What?"

"Thank me for giving you the punishment you needed."

She turned to look at him again. Her mind was a storm of anger, terror, and need.

He slipped a finger inside her and brought it to his mouth. She watched him as he sucked her cream from his finger, lapping up every drop. "Your body is thanking me, but I want to hear you say it." He grasped his cock and positioned it at her entrance.

She arched her back, trying to pull him into her.

He put a hand on her back, holding her in place. "Thank me, and you can have what you want."

"Thank you."

He raised his brows.

"Master."

He drove into her, eliciting a sharp cry. By Varin, she was tight. It took a second brutal stroke to sheath himself completely. He felt her tense, pain radiating from her as his body slapped against her sore ass. But, she arched her back seeking more, and he gave it to her.

He worked her hard and fast. His balls ached. He wasn't going to last long. He'd been feeding from her for too long to have any control left. "Arch higher."

She obeyed, flexing her spine so deeply it looked torturous to him. He still wasn't used to what her body could do. He pushed his hand under her belly, finding her clit. He teased it as he rode her. She growled and thrashed against the bench. "Come for me."

She cried out, slamming her hips against his hand. He tugged her clit hard. She sucked in air, and her body convulsed as orgasmic shock waves traveled up her spine. The site of her flexible body trembling in climax was indescribably beautiful. He thrust again and again as her inner spasms milked him.

Wave after wave of agonizing pleasure flowed from her mind. Then the floodgates opened, and he fell into her thoughts. They mingled with his as if physically brushing his mind. He cried out as the full force of her hunger hit him.

He drove deep into her and came.

She cried out and went over again as he filled her with come. Acute pleasure burned through Ivan, and he collapsed across Alcina's back, barely able to pull air into his lungs.

Ivan had no idea how long they'd lain still when he became conscious again. But he felt Alcina shaking beneath him. He leaned over and unwrapped her fingers from the edges of the wrist cuffs. She'd held herself as surely as if she'd been bound, and in her panicked state, she was reluctant to let go. He pulled her into his arms, taking her across the room to the bed where he could cover her and curl his body around hers. "I'm right here."

Tears coursed down her face. "I don't know what happened. I thought I was dying. Then I thought you were and I --"

"Shhh! Everything is okay. Our minds merged when you came."

“What? Why?”

Ivan took a deep breath, dreading her reaction. “That’s how a Lalatian knows his partner is a potential life mate. I should have warned you, but even I wasn’t prepared for what it would feel like.”

She shook her head and tried to pull away from him. “I am not your life mate.”

Anger filled him. “Yes, you are.”

“If you’ve never merged with anyone before, how do you know that is what happened?”

“You went into sub trance for the first time.”

“What does that mean?”

“You relaxed and let your mind drift until you put yourself in a trancelike state where you were able to accept what I demanded of you. All Lalatian submissives experience such a state when they serve their lovers. Your sub trance orgasm triggered your mind to open to me. I felt exactly what you felt. It brought on my orgasm, and then you could read my thoughts. That is what happens when Lalatian lovers merge minds. I know what I felt. I just didn’t know it would be so powerful.”

Alcina shivered, and he pulled her more tightly against him, rubbing his hands up and down her arms. Her eyes were wild, her breathing shallow. “There has to be another explanation.”

“You are mine. The merge proves it.”

“How can I mate with you when my place is here, on Boetia?”

Her words stabbed at Ivan’s chest like a knife. He clenched his fists, angry at her reaction and his vulnerability. He had to calm down or he would push her too far too fast.

“You have two more days to accept what you are. Before we leave here, we will perform the mating ritual. When we return to the palace you will marry me.”

She glared at him, blue fire in her eyes.

“I’m going to go take a shower before I do something I’ll regret.”

Alcina watched him go, unable to tear her eyes away from his beautiful body. But as soon as his gorgeous ass disappeared into the bathroom, panic set in again.

She flexed and unflexed her fists. Fear squeezed her lungs until short wheezing breaths were all she could manage. She ripped the sheet from the mattress, wrapping it around herself as a makeshift tunic.

Refusing to consider the ramifications of her actions, she slipped out the door and ran. The rocky ground tore at her feet, but her mind didn’t register the pain. Her mind and body focused only on escape.

She could not bind herself to a man who ripped such agony from her and made her like it. Her family needed her. Boetia needed her. If she didn’t hold things together at the palace, who would? Her father had never been the same since her mother’s death. Without her there to control it, her whole world would crumble.

* * * * *

Ivan stepped out of the shower and toweled dry. He’d hoped the combination of time alone and icy cold water would calm his anger and his seemingly endless hunger for Alcina. It had done neither. His cock arched against his belly, hard as a steel pipe, and anger still burned in his gut. How dare Alcina deny the connection they’d formed?

When her raw feelings had poured into his mind, his need for her had threatened to squeeze his heart in two. She carried too much weight on her shoulders. She longed for someone to unburden her, but fear kept her from opening herself to him and letting him soothe her. He prayed that three days would be long enough for him to break down her barriers.

He hung up his towel and stepped through the doorway into the bedroom. Alcina no longer lay on the bed, and the sheet was missing. Rage pumped through his veins, but he forced himself to take a deep breath. When he found her, he'd take the sheet and lock it away with her clothes. He'd told her to remain naked. He'd be damned if she'd defy him.

He stomped into the living room. Alcina wasn't there, nor was she in the kitchen. His stomach knotted. Where the fuck was she? He ran out onto the porch. She wasn't there either.

Varin's balls, the woman had run from him. He stepped back inside, pulling on his kilt and boots. When he found her, he intended to give her the most severe punishment her body could bear. Before leaving the cabin, he grabbed a large coil of rope. If he had to, he would drag her back and keep her bound for the rest of their time at the lodge.

* * * * *

Ivan had been searching the hills around the lodge for hours. Hours during which his cock remained unfailingly hard. Anger pulsed through his body, his concern for Alcina's safety only increasing the rage. There were wild animals in the hills and who knew what kind of men lived in these remote villages. What would they do to Alcina if they found her alone?

Ivan had tracked Alcina out of the woods where the lodge lay hidden and down into the groves of trees bearing small dark fruit whose oil was a precious commodity. The narrow road snaked between grove after grove. Alcina could be anywhere in the rows of trees. They were a perfect camouflage for her since the leaves matched the color of her skin.

A few thousand years ago, Boetians dwelt in the trees. Their flexible spines allowed them to climb and swing through branches with ease. They slept draped over limbs, under the cool leaves. Alcina could easily hide among the branches of these small trees for hours.

A flash of movement caught Ivan's eye. He ran down a row of trees where he saw white fabric fluttering. As he approached, the cloth disappeared, and the branches of the tree shook.

When Ivan reached her hiding place, Alcina leapt toward the next tree. She took hold of a thick branch, swinging up, but Ivan grabbed her around the waist and tossed her to the ground.

She landed on her hands and knees. The air whooshed out of her body with a loud "oomph."

Ivan dropped on top of her, pinning her to the ground. She bucked and twisted, nearly throwing him off.

He tried to catch her wrists, but she scrambled forward, just out of his reach. She contorted her spine and jabbed back with her elbow, catching him in the side of the head.

The jolt shook him, and he fell back.

She twisted free, but he caught her ankle and dragged her along the ground.

She flipped onto her back, kicking at him with her free foot.

He caught her other ankle, but she curled her body up, lighting fast. She slammed her clenched fists down on his head, knocking him to the ground.

His forehead collided with a rock.

She jerked her feet free and leapt up.

Ignoring the throbbing in his head, he butted her in the stomach, knocking her to the ground once again.

She arched up, trying to shove him off. He pushed back with enough force to flatten her to the ground.

He caught her wrists and pinned them to the ground with one hand. Then he unhooked the coil of rope he'd attached to his belt and wrapped it around her wrists. She

twisted under him but every time she threatened to unseat him, he drove his hips back against hers, thrusting his rock hard cock against her pussy.

By the time he'd secured the rope, lust poured off of her in equal measure with her anger. His own anger slithered around him like a tangible thing. He closed his eyes and fought for control. His anger made him long to punish her in ways that would terrify an untrained submissive.

When he looked down at her, she gasped. Fear flashed in her eyes before she covered the emotion with a fierce glare. He inhaled the sharp scent of her terror. But tasty as it was, it barely took the edge off his raging hunger. He wanted to chain her to the wall and whip her until welts lined her back in an intricate pattern.

His primal instincts rode him hard, but he fought them back with the hard won control of a well-trained Lalatian. Alcina wasn't ready for the whip, but she was damn well ready to learn that she was his. No amount of running would change that.

Before speaking, he tethered her to the closest tree with the long end of the rope that bound her wrists. "You'd fuck me right here if I ordered it, wouldn't you? Right here on the hard ground, on the hillside, where anyone could find us."

She scowled but said nothing.

He could hear the rapid beat of her pulse. "That's how much you need me. No terror, no anger, is greater than your lust for me. You didn't even fight the bondage this time."

"Bastard." She jerked at the rope, but it held firm.

He sat back, shoved her legs wide, and leaned forward until his mouth hovered above her clit.

She drew in a sharp breath.

"You've been wet since you met me, haven't you? Never once did an hour go by that you didn't fantasize about my taking you." He gave her clit the barest flick and then blew hot breath across her pussy.

“Either fuck me or let me go.”

He circled the tight star of her asshole with his tongue. She gasped and tried to escape. “This is where my cock is going the next time you get it. Do you want me to fuck your ass right here on the ground?”

“Fiend’s blood, you can’t.”

He laughed. “Don’t tell me you’ve never been ass-fucked before?”

“No one would dare touch a princess there.”

He lifted his brows. “Really?”

She drew in a sharp breath as he swiped his tongue across her swollen pink flesh. “It’s considered a sign of dominance.”

“Yes, it is, and I’m going to have you begging for it.”

“Never.”

He laughed and sucked her clit into his mouth, making her shriek. He gave her cunt no mercy, licking, sucking, biting, until she was hanging on the edge of climax. “Beg my forgiveness for running away.”

“No.”

He flicked his tongue over the very tip of her clit again.

“Forgive me, Master.”

Her words made his cock jump. Anger still burned in his chest, but pleasure coursed through him as she shivered on the brink of release. He buried his face against her, lapping at her sweet cream. The tension drained from her thighs as she accepted what she needed. He let her go and slid a finger into her cunt, wetting it thoroughly with her cream. Then he pushed at her ass, pressing into her while he thrust two fingers from the other hand into her cunt.

She bucked against him, drawing his fingers into her body and moaning. He worked both hands. In and out. Faster and faster. She stiffened and screamed. Her pussy and her ass squeezed his fingers so hard it hurt. Damn, her ass was tight. Fucking her there was going to be pure bliss. Her screams would feed him as he drove his cock into the tight hole.

The thought almost made him come right there. He pulled himself back from the edge as he pulled his fingers from her body.

He used the sheet that had fallen from around her as they wrestled to wipe his hands and her thighs and pussy. Then he untied the rope from the tree and tossed her limp, pleasure-drunk body over his shoulder. She made a small sound of protest but said nothing else.

When they got back to the cabin, he tossed her on the mattress and tied the rope around one of the eyebolts in the wall at the head of the bed.

“Get some sleep. I’m still too angry to fuck you right now. You’ll get your punishment for escaping me after you wake.”

Her eyes went wide. Fear scented the air before anger brought redness to her cheeks. “I did what you said. I asked for forgiveness.”

He leaned down, letting her see the fire in his red eyes. “Before we came here, you agreed to submit to me for three days. You broke your word by running. I do not take that lightly.”

“I cannot mate with you. I have responsibilities to my family. You have to let me go.”

He growled. “Do not push me to do something we will both regret.” He turned to leave.

“You can’t leave me here.”

He forced himself to breathe slowly. He did not turn around.

“I can’t sleep on a mattress. I need to hang.”

“You will sleep where I tell you to.”

“I thought you wanted a mate, not a prisoner.”

He slammed the bedroom door on his way out, only the thinnest thread holding him back from exacting the torment he hungered for.

Chapter Seven

When Alcina woke the next morning, her body ached from lying flat for too long. She had tossed and turned for what seemed like hours before falling asleep. She'd tried hanging off the edge of the mattress, curling into a ball, and countless other positions. None of them felt comfortable. Finally, emotional and physical exhaustion took their toll, and she fell asleep.

She opened her eyes cautiously, unsure where Ivan had spent the night. Not with her, apparently. The rest of the mattress was empty. There was no indication that another body had lain beside her. She tugged on the rope binding her wrists but had no more luck loosening it than she had the night before.

She hoped Ivan would free her soon. She needed to relieve herself and stretch before her joints grew any stiffer. Her heart pounded at the thought of seeing him. She couldn't believe how easily he'd seduced her after he caught her.

Running had been a foolish panicked reaction, but the power he held over her was terrifying. No other man could have made her want him so easily despite her anger and fear. For Goddess' sake, she'd spread her legs and begged for his tongue after he'd tied her to a tree. Why did he have so much power over her?

Because he is your mate. A part of her wanted to give into the idea, to surrender to him, to relax for the first time in ten years. But that was the same foolish part of her that wished her mother would come back and make her father whole again. Alcina couldn't spend her life hoping for a miracle that would never happen. Nor could she rely on a man to solve her problems, no matter how strong or powerful he was.

There was no one to shoulder her burdens but her. And she would not give in to fantasies of being rescued. She'd hoped her three days with Ivan would serve as a vacation. She longed to revel in sensuality, but Ivan's pressure to accept his belief that they were mates had her more stressed than the effort of running a royal household.

How could she convince Ivan that she couldn't be his? She couldn't think logically when he was close to her. He made her body dissolve into a frenzy of lust.

The creak of the door swinging open interrupted her thoughts. As usual, her body heated instantly at the sight of Ivan. He wore a short leather kilt slung low on his hips. His hair was loose, and the morning sun made it shine with red and gold highlights. She wanted to lick the toned muscles of his beautiful chest before stripping his kilt off and taking his cock in her mouth. Reluctantly, she let her gaze drift up to his face. His eyes glowed, but the rising temperature in the room told her the flames were generated by lust not anger.

He approached her silently. She wouldn't have expected such a large off-worlder to glide across the room without making a sound. He sat a glass of purple liquid on the table by the mattress. She been so intent on staring at his body, she hadn't even noticed he was carrying anything.

He bent to untie her wrists. She rubbed them, flexing them back and forth once the ropes were gone. Only the slightest mark remained. The ropes were made of soft material. Ivan had taken care to tie her in such a way as to prevent damage.

He handed her the glass. "Drink this. Then relieve yourself and shower. When you're done, I have a surprise for you."

She couldn't help but remember that he'd told her the next time she got his cock it was going up her ass. Was an ass-fucking her special surprise? The mere thought made her wet.

She'd fantasized about anal sex for years. For a Boetian, it was a sign of submission to allow someone to penetrate your ass. No one would do such a thing to a princess. She had nearly ordered Kiko to do it. But she'd feared such a demand might scare him away, and she'd been enjoying him too much to take such a risk.

Now she finally had a chance to know how it felt to have a man take her in that forbidden way. Her heart raced and cream slid from her body. Knowing she needed a distraction, she looked down at the glass in her hand. "What is this?"

"It's a protein drink. It will keep you going until I'm done with you. Then we will have a real breakfast." She took a swallow, expecting it to taste medicinal, but it was fruity and delicious. "Thank you."

He flashed a wicked smile. "Go. I've been waiting all night to punish you properly. I won't wait much longer."

* * * * *

Alcina emerged from the bathroom after a long, hot shower. Her body throbbed with anticipation even as trepidation tightened her chest. The thought of Ivan's surprise made her skittish, but she'd stalled as long as she could.

Ivan stood in the corner of the room, checking the knots on an elaborate hammock he'd hung from bolts in the ceiling.

He turned to face her and pointed to the ground by his feet. "Kneel."

She walked to him and dropped to her knees without thought. *How did he make her obey easily?*

"Because your body knows what your mind will not accept. You are mine."

She gasped. "You said you couldn't read my thoughts."

“I’m good at guessing.”

She tried to slow her breathing. Her whole body smoldered. Did she really want this?

“Ask me for your punishment.”

Her pussy throbbed with need and her nipples hardened to stiff points. “Please, punish me.”

“Kiss my feet.”

She bent forward and placed a gentle kiss on the top of each foot. Then she stayed as she was, bent forward, forehead resting on the floor, ass high in the air. She expected him to move behind her and deliver another spanking.

He laid his hand on her head. “You are so lovely when you submit. Climb into the swing I’ve made for you.”

Warm comfort suffused her from head to toe. She shook as she tried to stand, and her legs threatened to buckle under her. Ivan lifted her into his rope creation, settling her on her back. The ropes cradled her so she remained in a semi-reclined position. Ivan tied her wrists and ankles to the crisscross of ropes. Panic rose as it had the day before, but she fought it successfully. She managed to relax her tense muscles, sinking into the rope.

Ivan reached into his duffle bag and pulled out a blindfold. He lifted it, ready to slip it over her head.

She jerked away, suddenly terrified. “Wait, please.”

“I’m going to take your body through a variety of sensations. Your agony and pleasure will both be heightened if I deprive you of the ability to know what is coming next.”

She drew in a shaky breath and forced her body to be still. Being tied down was difficult enough, but she would feel so damn helpless with a blindfold over her eyes. She wasn’t sure she could stand it. “You aren’t going to spank me?”

His lips curled up in an indecently sexy smile. "I have a wide variety of methods for punishing disobedient submissives. I promise we will both enjoy the ones I've selected. And when you've suffered enough, I'm going to fuck your ass."

Alcina shivered.

"It would please me if you would wear my blindfold."

She drew in a shaky breath. "I want to please you."

"Good." He fit the blindfold around her head, then trailed his hands over her face, down the sides of her neck and across her breasts, brushing her nipples with his palms. The warm contact helped her keep panic at bay. "I won't leave. I'll either be talking or touching you at all times while you are blindfolded."

"Thank you."

He stroked her belly, and she heard him inhale deeply. "Your fear is delicious."

He cupped her mound with one hand, and she tilted her hips, wanting more contact. "Mmmm. You're already hot and wet, and we haven't even started. I love your passion, Alcina."

His praise sent warm pleasure coursing through her. She wanted him to desire her, to feed from her, to hunger for her like she did for him.

She heard the snap of an elastic glove then a slick sucking sound, like someone rubbing a heavy coating of lotion into their hands. Then wet hands slithered across her belly. She sucked in her breath in an attempt to escape, but Ivan pressed his hands more firmly against her skin. At first the gel he rubbed on her felt cool, but within seconds it began to tingle. An icy fire raced across her belly. The sensation wasn't truly painful, but it wasn't comfortable either. It reminded her of the medicine her healer applied to her strained muscles after a long run or an intense session with her weights.

Ivan's hands slid upward, rubbing the gel into her breasts. He rolled her nipples between his fingers. The gel began to burn her sensitive nipples. A low whine escaped. Embarrassed by the sound, she bit her lip.

"Let it out. Cry for me."

She shook her head violently back and forth. Her body throbbed. Stinging heat tickled her breasts. She dug her nails into her palms to keep from struggling, and her chest tightened until she could barely breathe.

She heard Ivan apply more gel to his hands. Next he rubbed it on the tender flesh of her inner thighs. His hands rose higher. *Please Goddess, don't let him put it on my pussy.*

Her prayer went unanswered. His gel-slicked fingers caressed her labia and her clit. She broke, jerking at the ropes, trying to kick Ivan with her bound feet. She twisted and bucked, desperate to get away from his hands as he worked the fiery potion into her pussy.

The cool burn grew and grew, until she thought she would lose her mind. Ivan trapped her clit between his fingers, pulling and squeezing it. Pleasure shot through her misery. She arched into his touch, dying for him to give her relief.

He pulled his hand away. A loud metallic click made her freeze. What was he going to do to her? "Ivan?"

His hand closed around her leg. "I'm here."

"What are you going to do to me?"

"Show you a whole new range of sensation."

His answer did not comfort her. "I'm scared."

"Remember that I've been trained to sense a submissive's limits. I want you to trust me."

"But I --"

He placed a finger on her lips. He was no longer wearing gloves. "Trust me."

He bent forward and blew cold breath across her chest and belly, but the relief lasted only a second. Her nipples stung so badly the sensations were making her crazy. She wanted his hands on them, rubbing and bringing relief

As if he heard her wish, Ivan's fingers closed around one of her nipples, rolling it between his thumb and forefinger, tugging until it stretched impossibly far. She moaned and panted, arching her back to push her breast further into his hands.

His other hand brushed the side of her breast. She felt something cold and hard. He closed a clamp around her nipple, and the screeching pain made her scream.

The smooth metal squeezed her nipple unbearably. Wave after wave of agony wracked her body. Yet, excruciating as they were, the combined sensations of tingling heat and intense pressure shot straight to her clit, making it throb.

"Breathe slowly. Sink into the pain."

She wanted to obey, but she twisted and writhed, unconsciously trying to escape the pulsing agony in her nipples.

As Ivan readied her other nipple, she exhaled, trying to prepare herself. But nothing could prepare her for the intensity of the tight clamp. When he closed it, her entire body stiffened. She screamed even louder than she had the first time, thrashing and jerking at the ropes, making the swing shake wildly.

Ivan laid his hand on her belly. "Breathe and be still."

She tried, but nothing could quiet the anguish in her body. Pain and pleasure mixed until her rapid pulse pounded at her ears and she feared she would go insane as her hunger spiraled out of control.

A low hum startled her. Then Ivan rubbed the tip of her nipple with a vibrator. She gasped as raw pleasure shot through her body.

She couldn't form words. Pain. Hunger. Fire. Squeezing. Her body was under attack. She whined long and low, sounding like a trapped animal.

Ivan caressed the underside of her breast. “Stop fighting. Concentrate on the pleasure. Let it take you where you want to go.”

She tilted her hips up and down as if rubbing her clit against an invisible hand. Ivan transferred the vibrator to the other nipple as he flicked his fingers back and forth over the first one. She felt herself spiraling toward orgasm.

Then the vibrator fell away. Ivan’s hands brushed her breasts and released the clamps. Agony raced through her as every nerve ending in her nipples roared to life. “Nooo!”

His hand slid between her legs, his fingers sliding easily through her wetness. He thrust two fingers deep inside her while he teased her clit with his thumb.

Was the torture over? Was he going to let her come? Her heart pumped harder and harder. She thrust her hips against his hand, gripping the ropes for leverage. He added a third finger, then a fourth, stretching her wide. She was so close, just a little more and she would go over.

He pulled back.

She whimpered, disgusted with the pitiful sound. She could feel her heartbeat pulsing in her cunt. She needed to come, had to come.

She didn’t need to have him remove the blindfold to know he was smiling, mocking her need. But he hadn’t come either. Maybe she could push him by reminding him of that fact.

“You must be rock hard by now. Don’t you want to sink your thick cock inside me? Then we could both have what we need.”

She heard him inhale sharply, but he didn’t touch her. “That’s a nice thought, but I took the edge off my hunger before I came to you this morning. I knew it would be a long wait, but it was well worth it. Besides, if I get too horny, my hands are free. Unlike you, I can help myself to a fast climax.”

She growled. “Your hand won’t feel half as good as my slick cunt.”

He groaned. “By Varin, I love your dirty mouth. But it’s not your cunt I want this morning. My cock is going to stuff your tight ass before I’m done. The thrill of watching you suffer is all I need for now.”

She heard rustling like he was reaching for something in his bag. She shivered with alarm.

He touched her breast, plumping it. Oh Goddess, not more clamps. Instead, he lay a small cold pack against her nipple. She twisted and turned, but he kept the ice tight against her skin. “Bastard!”

“You needed to cool down a bit.”

She heard a crack as he released another cold pack. He pressed it against her other nipple. The cold was so intense it burned, but instead of cooling her body down, it made her cunt throb. How could he make her writhe and scream with nothing more than a simple cold pack?

Once her nipples were numb with cold, he slid the cold packs over her breasts. Then his mouth closed over her nipple, searing it with warmth. She jerked at her bonds, desperate to grab his hair and force him to stay there. He sucked and bit, tormenting her nipple. Goddess, she was going to come from nothing more than the brand of Ivan’s mouth on her nipple.

She spiraled upward, pleasure rushing through her like a storm-swelled river. He switched to the other side, warming her other nipple as his fingers tormented the first. She was so close. If he’d only touch her clit, she’d go over. Her breath rushed in and out in shallow pants. Then nothing.

Chapter Eight

He pulled his hands and mouth away and left her hanging. She imagined herself leaning over a precipice, arms outstretched, ready to fall. Then gravity ceased to work, leaving her suspended in an impossible position. She took a few long, shuddering breaths. She didn't want to give Ivan the pleasure of seeing her writhe for him. And she was not going to beg. No, she was not going to do that.

"You need to come so bad it hurts, don't you. I can taste your lust and pain all mixed together. It's headier than the finest wine or the darkest chocolate in the universe."

She heard a sound which must have been him licking his lips. "Only a mate could taste this good."

Panic beat at her mind, but Ivan cracked another cold pack and pressed it to her pussy. She failed to hold in her scream. The cold wracked her body in rushing spirals of sensation. Uncomfortable as it was, she tried to rub against the edge of the cold pack. With enough friction, she could come. Ivan pulled the pack away. "You will not come until my cock is buried in your ass."

Her body pulsed, hot and cold, desperate. Ivan leaned down. His hot breath tickled the ice-cold flesh of her pussy. Her hips bucked as if she thought a stream of air could give her the pressure she needed.

He remained close, but he held his breath. Seconds passed. Slowly, her body began to relax. Then the bastard licked her from asshole to clit in a long swipe. She writhed and screamed.

He blew a stream of warm air over her again. His hot mouth was inches from her clit. She rocked the rope swing, arching toward him.

He reached up and pulled the blindfold from her eyes. His movement made the tip of his cock brush her leg. She growled. "Fuck me."

He looked down at her and smiled. "Oh I will, when you admit what you need."

She jerked at the ropes, trying fruitlessly to free her hands. "I want your fucking cock in me now."

"Where?"

"What?"

"Where do you want it?"

"Stop playing with me."

"You're not being very obedient. Maybe you don't deserve my cock after all."

He stepped back and wrapped his hand around his dick, making long, slow strokes. She watched, mesmerized. Wishing it were her hand and tongue stroking him like that. "Admit it. The thought of my cock driving into your ass makes you shiver with need."

She shook her head.

"As my mate, every inch of your body is mine. Fucking your ass will demonstrate that in a way no words can."

"It won't work. You're too big."

“It will work, and you will love it.” He closed his eyes and let his head fall back as he continued to stroke himself. Groans of pleasure echoed in the room. Panic raced through her. He couldn’t come, not without her.

“Fuck me.”

“Tell me what you want.”

“I want you to fuck me. I don’t care where. I just need to come.”

“Tell me what you need.”

“I need ...” She paused and took a breath, fighting her panic, knowing she had no choice. She was not going to wait another second to get her orgasm. “... your cock up my ass.”

He gave her an evil smile. “Good, because you’re going to get it.”

He reached into his bag and pulled out a tube. He squeezed it into his hand and began lubing his cock with long, sure strokes. Alcina tried to take deep breaths, but she kept losing the rhythm and resorting to pants. Her nipples were as tight and hard as they’d ever been. Cream flowed out of her body, wetting the insides of her thighs and her ass cheeks.

Ivan squeezed more lube onto his finger and stepped between her legs. When his fingers brushed her asshole, she gasped. He pushed a finger inside. She opened to him without thinking about it. He was right. She needed his cock there, no matter how much it hurt.

He twisted his finger, pushing it deeper. She groaned. Then he pulled it out slowly. Arrows of pleasure speared her. “Fuck me now!”

He made a low growl. “Your eagerness pleases me, but I won’t take you until you’re ready for me.”

“I am ready!”

He laughed. “Not yet.” He drove two fingers inside.

Goddess, she felt full. His cock was really going to hurt. Why did that thought make her cunt pulse with need?

He brushed his thumb across her clit. Her hips rocked up, shaking her in the ropes. Then he flexed his fingers, opening them and stretching her more.

“Please,” she cried.

“Please stop or please fuck me?”

Sensation assaulted her body from all sides. His thumb strummed her clit, and his fingers pumped in and out, stretching her ass and sending wicked pleasure through her. The hunger Ivan had stirred and refused to satisfy clouded her mind. She didn’t know what she wanted anymore except relief. “I ... don’t ... know.”

He laughed and slid his finger from her body. His hands wrapped around her upper thighs, and he pulled her against him roughly.

She swayed in the ropes, her movement mocking the motion she wanted to feel as he pumped his cock inside her.

Then the tip of his cock pressed against her ass. “Push out.”

She obeyed without thought. Ivan’s cock pressed inside her slowly. Her ass burned. Panic snared her. He was too big. She couldn’t take him back there.

“Keep pushing.” She tried, but her body refused to cooperate.

He squeezed her clit. She gasped, shocked by the pleasure. She arched against his hand, trying to forget the thick rod in her ass.

“Push out.”

She did, and he slid in another inch or two.

“Fiend’s blood, that hurts.”

He smiled cruelly and licked his lips. “I know. It’s delicious.”

He pushed deeper, and she tried to escape, grabbing the ropes to give herself leverage.

His hands clamped down on her thighs, pulling her onto his wickedly thick shaft. “Scream if you want, but you’re going to take it all.” He thrust, pushing in further. She screamed.

“Yes! Give me pain and fear and lust. I want to drink your screams.” He surged forward until she felt his balls slap against her ass.

She never imagined she could feel so thoroughly possessed. She understood now why Boetians never let anyone of lower standing fuck their asses. She would do anything Ivan asked at that moment. With his massive cock shoved up her ass, she was his entirely.

* * * * *

Ivan fought to remain still. Alcina’s fiery anguish echoed from her mind. He’d pushed her to the limit of her pain threshold, but her driving lust never slowed. He groaned with pleasure at the knowledge that her pussy was still dripping wet after he’d shoved the full length of his dick up her ass.

He needed to stay still for several seconds to let her adjust. But his cock begged him to move, to fuck her ruthlessly until they both exploded, until her thoughts spilled into his in a blaze of torment and pleasure.

Alcina had ceased to breathe as she tried to adjust to the last inches of his invasion. But now her chest was rising and falling rapidly. She bucked against him and groaned. Anger flashed in her eyes. Ivan knew she wanted to come, and she wanted it now.

“Ready for a rough ride?”

Her eyes widened, she nodded.

He pulled out slowly then shoved back in. She bit her lip as if holding in a shriek. He took hold of the ropes supporting her ass, pulled out, and then used the ropes to drag her onto his cock. She shrieked, and he gulped down her shock.

He slid out again and began a regular rhythm of thrusts. He drove himself in as far as he could, giving her sore ass no mercy. She whimpered as he picked up the pace. Soon she was driving her hips against him, bucking and thrusting wildly.

He shifted his hands so one grasped her hips and the other teased one of her breasts, squeezing and plumping it, then flicking and pinching her swollen nipple. She growled and struggled, trying to twist from his grip. He pinched harder, making her yelp.

“Damn you, make me come.”

“Not yet, your agony is too sweet.”

“Fucking bastard.”

He raked his nails down her belly, making her hiss. Then he brushed her clit with his fingers. She arched up, but he pulled his hand away as he gave her ass a particularly brutal stroke.

She gasped, her protest cut off by the pain that radiated across her ass. He slid two fingers deep into her pussy and curled them, running them along the sensitive ridges in her body. She cried out.

Her mind opened further to him. He could tell that she was right on the edge of a massive orgasm. He kept pumping his cock into her ass, faster and faster. He stroked her cunt with his fingers, teasing her clit with his thumb. She screamed at the contact on her oversensitized flesh. He licked his lips as he tasted her luscious agony.

He pressed her clit with his thumb, brushing the length of it. She gasped and struggled under him. “Come for me.”

She made a strangled sound and stiffened. “Come with my cock in your ass and take me with you.”

She bucked, driving her clit against his thumb. Then her body spasmed wildly. Her mouth opened in a soundless scream. Her inner muscles squeezed his fingers and his cock

savagely. Pulse after pulse of her release rocked through him. Then her mind opened. Her pain and pleasure poured into him.

His breath caught. He threw back his head, ramming his cock into her to the balls, screaming as his come exploded in her ass.

Alcina wanted to scream, but she couldn't make a sound. She felt as if she'd been transported to a neverland where all that existed was a barrage of sensations stabbing at her mind. Ivan's orgasm roared through her body like a ship exploding through the jump nexus. His pleasure singed her insides, bringing her up and over a second time.

Ivan's thoughts came rushing into her, and shock waves ricocheted off the walls of her mind. The first time their minds had merged, she'd gotten surface thoughts from him: lust, sexual exhaustion, satiation. This time the joining took her deeper.

She was totally unprepared for what she learned. He was scared, too. Scared she'd never respond to him the way his mind and body responded to her. She felt his desperate longing to convince her that she would be unhappy for the rest of her life if she denied their potential. Yes, he ached to dominate her. He relished watching her writhe as he fucked her half to death, but she wasn't just another good fuck. In no more than a day he'd come to care for her so much it would physically hurt him to walk away.

His thoughts terrified her. How could she leave a man who'd touched her soul the way Ivan just had? Yet how could she stay with him when he demanded her surrender? She couldn't be his submissive and the de facto ruler of Boetia.

Ivan pulled out of her body and dropped to his knees. He collapsed over her, his head pillowed on her belly. She reveled in his warmth as their minds slid apart. She didn't want to move or speak or do anything to disturb the moment. Tears poured from her eyes as her heart twisted. Goddess, help her. She was in love with Ivan, a man who demanded more of her than she could possibly give.

Chapter Nine

Alcina arched her body backward, until her hands touched the floor. She let her knees and arms bend and straighten several times before pushing off the floor and standing again. She leaned forward, stretching every vertebrate in her back as if she could reach the far wall. Then she placed her hands on the floor and pushed her ass up in the air, arching her back and keeping her feet flat. She sighed as she held the position.

The swing Ivan had made for her had been as comfortable as she could wish, but he'd kept her tied in it for a long time. Boetian bodies needed regular stretching to keep their flexible joints healthy so she was taking time to care for herself while Ivan walked to the nearest village for supplies.

He hadn't mentioned what he needed, telling her only that it was a surprise. Her mind raced as she tried to contemplate what he would do to her next. She was touched that he trusted her enough to leave her on her own. Perhaps he'd seen how much she cared for him during their merge.

"Alcina, it is so good to see you are unharmed."

She nearly toppled over from shock. But she recovered and whirled around to face her intruder, assuming a fighting crouch. "Vasilis, what the hell are you doing here?"

“Rescuing you.”

“What gives you the impression that I need rescuing?”

“Alcina, do not tell me you actually want that odious off-worlder touching you.”

“Ivan is a fascinating man, and he has done nothing to me that I find distasteful, nor do I think he will.”

“Perhaps that is why the royal family has become so weak. You are all demented.”

Alcina’s heart sped up. “What did you say?”

“Your father cannot be allowed to remain king. He will be the ruination of Boetian society. His tolerance of a Lalatian bedding his daughter is a sign of his insanity.”

Ivan had returned her bag of clothes and Alcina reached for the tunic she’d laid on the bed, no longer wanting to be naked in Vasilis’s presence. “Tell me you do not mean to challenge my father. He took you into the palace and saw to your education when you were orphaned.”

“He’s gone astray, Alcina.”

Alcina pulled on her boots, praying Ivan had not removed the knife she usually stored in the right one. “He has done what is right for Boetia. Times are changing more rapidly than ever. The threat of a human invasion is very real. We must have allies to help us defend ourselves against the humans’ superior technology and sheer numbers.”

“We need no one else.”

“Vasilis, you cannot mean that. Have you considered --”

“I’ve considered everything. Our future. Our dignity. Obviously you have not, but you will come with me now. I will not leave our princess in the hands of a barbarian.”

“Vasilis, it’s time for you to leave.”

“Are you coming with me?”

“No.”

He fired a dart pistol so fast she barely registered it before she felt a sting below her collarbone.

The world began to darken, and she swayed. "Poison?" Her voice sounded far away.

"No. You can't marry me if you're dead."

Her stomach knotted with horror. She tried to protest, but the world went black.

* * * * *

Ivan entered the cabin, carrying a bag filled with the closet ingredients he could find to approximate his favorite creamy Lalatian dessert, one as fun to play with as it was to eat. He couldn't wait to lick it off Alcina's sensitive nipples. He left the bag on the kitchen counter and entered the bedroom, expecting to see Alcina draped over the ropes that had made the swing, taking a much needed rest.

He smiled as he remembered the beauty of her face as she'd come after the long buildup of need. He'd savored the shock waves that had rippled through her mind when climax took her. She'd never imagined such intense pleasure was possible.

The depth of the bond formed during their mutual release had shocked him, too. He knew Alcina had seen more of him than he would have intentionally revealed. But he'd felt her blossoming feelings for him too. Conflict warred in her between her duties to her family and her need to surrender to him, but he would find a way to make her see the significance of their bond. He would teach her to release her cares and responsibilities so he could take her deep into sub trance and make her fly.

His trainer had reinforced countless times that being a dominant was as much about taking care of the submissive as it was feeding from their pain. Ivan would never be satisfied knowing he'd given Alcina less than the greatest pleasures -- emotional and sexual -- that she could bear.

He needed to prove to her that surrendering to him did not mean giving up her role in ruling Boetia. He wanted to take her back to Lalatia, but if he had to live on Boetia in order to be her mate then he would do so. Radek had survived for years without Lalatian contact, and he hadn't even had a mate until recently. Once he'd found Nia, he'd continued to live among aliens, even spending half his year among hostile Gaelins. Surely Ivan was as strong.

He stepped into the bedroom, Alcina wasn't there. His heart pounded. "Alcina!" He pushed the bathroom door open, making it slam back against the wall.

Misery twisted his gut, clashing with feral anger. "Alcina, where the fuck are you?" He shouted as he ran onto the porch and began to circle the cabin. Maybe she'd stepped outside for some fresh air. Maybe he would see her sitting in a tree behind the cabin, enjoying the breeze.

But he saw nothing. His chest tightened until he couldn't breathe. He smashed his fist into the side of the cabin so hard he splintered the wood. How could she leave? He'd been in her head. He knew she wanted him, knew she would suffer if they parted. She might lack the Lalatian imperative to mate, but she craved his dominance and the pain he could give as truly as a Lalatian submissive. How dare she deny that need?

Anger boiled up, numbing his anguish. He circled the cabin and kicked the door open. He stuffed several lengths of rope, handcuffs, and ankle cuffs, into the smaller of his two bags. Then he added his gun and his knife in case he ran into some of Alcina's countrymen who'd strongly opposed his presence.

He would track her down and when he found her, he would show no mercy. He would use pain and pleasure to break her down until no resistance remained in her, until she was ready to wear his collar and leash and obey his every command. Fuck treating her softly because she wasn't Lalatian.

But as he imagined her utter submission, a part of him cringed at the thought of Alcina losing the wildness that made her who she was. How the fuck could he dominate a woman who refused to admit her nature? Nothing in his training had prepared him for this.

After hours of searching the terrain around the cabin, Ivan was no closer to finding Alcina. He'd found no trace of her scent, nor had any of his mental probes picked up even a hint of her thoughts. He discovered two sets of horse tracks heading in the direction she'd run the day before. Some bastard had helped her escape. He would find out who, and he would see that the man paid.

His trip to the village had taken half the afternoon. She could be miles away by now. He would have to go after her by car.

He entered the cabin and he packed the rest of his belongings and pulled out the code card for the hover car. He intended to start his search back at the palace. The king was honor bound to return Alcina to him. And Ivan would insist on making a formal challenge against the man who had helped her escape. The thought of another man touching her without Ivan's permission brought his most primitive nature to the surface. He wanted to rip the man apart with his teeth.

Before mating, most Lalatians have several lovers at any given time, sharing freely. But once mated, both the dominant and the submissive must agree before either of them take on other partners. Rarely did either half of a mated couple include other lovers without their mate present and participating.

As Ivan got closer to the palace, he began to see more and more people traveling in the opposite direction. He passed at least ten horsecarts piled with boxes that bulged or lay open, as if they were hastily packed. As more and more groups of people passed him, he grew concerned. When he reached the edge of the city, he hailed a family riding on a cart.

The man who held the reins tugged until his horse came to a halt. "Please sir, we only want safe passage to my brother's farm. We've no wish to disturb you ..."

Ivan took a deep breath, trying to appear less threatening. His anger at Alcina's betrayal doubtless still showed on his face. "I mean you no harm. I only wish to inquire why so many are traveling away from the city."

The woman who sat next to the driver leaned forward. "Goddess, it is him. You're the man who won the princess aren't you?"

Ivan nodded. "Yes, I am."

"Is she safe?"

"I hope so. She decided she did not like my company and fled."

"Bless His Majesty's soul, can you truly be unaware of what has happened?"

Impatience made Ivan want to snarl, but he managed to keep his voice level. "What has happened?"

The man answered. "The king left yesterday for a visit to our westernmost provinces. Rebels murdered him last night while he slept in his bed."

Ivan's heart skipped a beat. "Murdered?"

"Yes, sir. Cut his throat as it were."

"Have these rebels been caught?"

The man shook his head. "No, sir. They're massing an army. That was what we've heard. They want to return to the old ways when we had no contact with aliens, begging your pardon, sir."

"No offense taken. Where is the prince?"

The woman leaned forward again, anxiety plain on her face. "No one knows. He's fled the palace. And now you tell us the princess is missing. Have you any idea where she's gone?"

Ivan's stomach knotted and sharp pains stabbed his chest. Alcina hadn't run away. She'd been kidnapped. A near-paralyzing horror washed over him. He had to find her and

fast. But no matter how worried he was, these poor people didn't need any more bad news. "I'm sure she will be fine, wherever she has gone. Have the usurpers taken the palace?"

The man patted his companion's arm and gave her a comforting squeeze. "Not yet. The king's guards fought off an attack last night, but more of the bastards are on their way. We were told they would arrive in Kedalion in a few days."

"Thank you." Ivan reached into his bag and extracted a credit chip. He tossed it to the man. "I hope this helps you. Don't worry about the princess. I will find her."

He hit the button for acceleration and the hover car rocketed off toward the city gates. When he was within a mile of the palace, he stowed the car in an alley, programming it for the strongest security setting. He prayed it would be there when he returned.

Chaos reined in the streets as carriages, riders, and those on foot, rushed to get supplies and get out of town. More guards than he'd seen before stood at the palace entrance. He wondered how many troops the opposition had rallied. Why hadn't Alcina or Schoeneus warned him how serious the unrest on Boetia had grown? He would gladly have taken her and her brother off planet to keep them safe.

He approached the main entrance hoping his direct invitation from the king and his news about Alcina would grant him entrance. He was prepared, however, to fight the whole damn guard if he had to. His mate was in danger. Nothing would stop him from finding her.

One of the guards stepped forward as Ivan approached. "What have you done with the princess? We sent a rider to tell you to get her to safety."

"I must have missed him. I left her alone while I went to get supplies in the village. She wasn't at the cabin when I returned."

Another guard stepped forward. "You left her alone?"

"Perhaps if someone had told me how desperate the political situation was, then I wouldn't have. It never occurred to me that she might be attacked."

The first man unsheathed his sword.

Ivan growled. Adrenaline pumped through his body, and he knew flames showed in his eyes. “You don’t want to challenge me. Alcina is my mate. I will find her, and I will not allow you to stand in my way.”

Alcina’s maid, Rosa, rushed through the door. The second guard stepped in front of her, blocking her from Ivan’s view.

She tried to push the man out of the way. “Please, I must speak with Ambassador Ivan. I think I can help.”

Ivan growled again. “Let her pass.”

The guard did not move.

“Alcina trusts him, and so did her father. We are running out of time.

The first guard lowered his sword. “Find Speaker Prokopios. Take them to him.”

The second guard turned, saying nothing. Ivan held out his hand to indicate Rosa should follow ahead of him. After winding their way through a series of second floor rooms, they entered the king’s chamber. Speaker Prokopios and Zale, the Boetian High Commander, were studying a map of Boetia. Zale was a muscular man with the darkest green skin and hair Ivan had seen on a Boetian. He looked as formidable as he was rumored to be.

The Speaker’s eyes widened when he saw Ivan. “Goddess above, you didn’t bring the princess here did you?”

“No, she was taken from our cabin before I received word of the rebellion. I’ve come to learn more about the events that have transpired before I begin my search for her.”

“Holy Goddess, who has taken her?”

“I don’t know. I went into the village. When I came back, she was gone. The only clue I found were two sets of horse tracks.”

“Fool!” shouted Zale. “Only a fucking off-worlder would leave the princess unguarded.”

Ivan reached for his knife. “If you or anyone else had bothered to tell me Boetia was on the brink of war, I would never have left Alcina’s side.”

Ivan's adversary laid his hand on the hilt of his sword. "How do we know you aren't in league with these rebels? Are we simply to take the word of an off-worlder?"

Speaker Prokopios held up his hand. "Zale, we need to defeat Vasilis's damn rebels before you go embroiling us in a war with Lalatia."

Ivan's hands fisted automatically. "Vasilis started this? I hated the bastard on sight."

The Speaker turned to Ivan. "There are a few jump ships that have not yet left Boetian space. I advise you to find a berth on one and return to Lalatia. This is no time for courtship rituals.

Ivan grabbed the front of the Speaker's tunic and lifted the man until his toes barely scraped the floor. "Alcina is mine. Her soul and mine have touched. Nothing will separate us now. Do you understand?"

Prokopios nodded, and Ivan released him. The Speaker wobbled but ultimately held his stance.

"No one will attempt to dismiss me again. I will be told everything you know about the rebels and where they might be holding the princess."

Rosa stepped forward before any of the men could respond. "I have information that may help us locate the princess. The king --"

The speaker started to cut her off, but Ivan held up his hand. "What do you know, Rosa?"

"King Schoeneus had his healer insert locator chips in the prince and princess when unrest began to grow two years ago. Each chip is linked to a remote that shows the prince or princess's location. The king swore me to secrecy, and I was never told the location of the prince's remote, but I have Princess Alcina's with me."

The speaker reached for the small silver device Rosa pulled from her pocket, but the maid handed it to Ivan.

“I have never seen a positioner like those used on other worlds, but I am told that Alcina’s remote functions similarly.”

Ivan nodded. “I use positioners on a daily basis on Lalatia. I am certain I will be able to discover how this one works. Thank you.”

Rosa smiled. “The princess needs you.”

Prokopios spoke next. “If you know how to use the damn thing, then do it.”

Ivan made no verbal response, but he pressed the unit’s power button. A map showed onscreen. He punched a few buttons and coordinates appeared at the bottom of the screen. “The princess is at thirty degrees north and fifty degrees west.”

Zale drew his finger along the map. Ivan hit another button on the positioner remote. He typed in his present location as Kedalion, and hoped for the best. Directions came on screen, telling him the fastest route to Alcina’s location.

“She’s ten miles west of Acaia.”

“Yes, I found it.” Zale pointed to a spot on the map. “There’s a lodge there, similar to the one where you took the princess. It’s not been used for years. I would imagine that is where they are holding her.”

Ivan nodded. “What is the fastest route to reach her?”

Zale and Prokopios ignored him. Prokopios spoke to the guard who had remained in the room after bringing Ivan there. “Round up five men you trust to form a rescue party.”

Ivan growled. “Alcina is mine. I will be the one to find her.”

Prokopios nodded, and the guard reached for Ivan. Ivan whirled around. His fist made contact with the guard’s face. The man crumbled to the ground. He started to sit up, but Ivan placed his boot in the middle of the guard’s chest, forcing him to the ground. “I am going in alone. I need the best weapons you have and directions to a safe location where I can take Alcina after I find her.”

“The lodge will be heavily fortified. One man is not going to be enough to defeat Vasilis and his men, no matter how strong you think you are.”

“A lone man can sneak up on them, finesse his way in, and extract the prisoner. I’ve served in the Lalatian Planetary guard. Alcina’s will not be my first hostage rescue.” Of course, on Lalatia, he had the full range of technology available -- wrist units that ran off satellites, the most sophisticated positioners available, weapons that could drop a man without making a sound. But he would make do with what he had. Failure was not an option.

The Speaker looked at the other advisors and raised his brows. Zale spoke first. “Vasilis will expect us to come after her. He’ll be prepared for our methods, looking to the trees for places of concealment. They won’t be expecting a Lalatian.”

“My people have excellent night vision. I’ll go in at night and send word when I’ve gotten Alcina to safety.”

Prokopios frowned. “I have not given you permission to go after the princess.”

“I don’t need your permission. I am going after Alcina. Whether you choose to make her rescue more difficult by sending men after me is your choice.”

Zale laid a hand on the Speaker’s shoulder. “Let him go, Prokopios. If Ivan goes after Alcina, we can focus our attention on finding Nico. Ivan has as good a chance as any of us of freeing her.”

Ivan nodded, acknowledging Zale’s acceptance of his plan. “Tell me everything you know about Vasilis and his followers.”

Chapter Ten

Vasilis ran a finger down Alcina's cheek. She flinched away. The ropes bound her tightly to her chair, but she managed to curve her spine over the back of the chair to escape the chill of his touch.

She'd woken several hours earlier as she and Vasilis had neared the cabin. She surprised him with a savage bite to his arm, leapt from his horse and tried to escape. When Vasilis caught her, he'd punched her so hard, she'd blacked out again.

She'd woken again, tied to a chair constructed of a thick natural fabric stretched over a metal frame. The fabric supported her body, but she sank so low into the seat that it limited her range of movement. Ropes circled her chest and secured her wrists behind her. Guards had entered three times with water since she'd woken, but they refused to answer her questions or bring her food. Vasilis had not entered the room where she was held until now.

He frowned at her. "Stop fighting me. You're going to marry me and obey me as a wife should. The sooner you accept that, the easier your life will be."

"My father will never sanction this marriage."

Vasilis's lips curled into a cruel smile. "Your father is dead."

The words hit her like another punch. Her breath rushed out. "You're lying."

“No. One of my men crept into his room while he slept and cut his throat.”

Alcina’s eyes burned as she fought to hold back tears. “Even if you speak the truth, my brother rules Boetia, not you.”

“Soon he will be dead as well. Then I will marry you and become the ruler for a new Boetia, one that would never allow barbarian scum into our palace.”

“Ivan is more man than you’ll ever be.”

Vasilis grabbed a lock of Alcina’s hair and jerked her head to the side.

She gasped.

“Soon you will find out how much of a man I am.” His other hand slithered down her body and cupped her breast, squeezing hard.

“I’ve spent too many years watching you parade your lush body before me, hearing men, even mere servants, brag about how they’ve fucked you.” He pinched her nipple hard.

She hissed in pain. “Get away from me”

He tugged her hair again, stretching her neck. “I’m the one in charge now. His hand moved to her thigh, and he pushed her tunic up. She struggled as he pushed a finger inside her dry channel. “Stop!”

He thrust, abrading her tender flesh. “I bet you begged for that alien to hurt you. I know what a slut you really are. You’re going to learn to pleasure me and like it.”

She shook her head. “Never. I thought of you as a brother growing up. And now I know you’re just a sick bastard.”

He let go of her hair and slapped her face so hard her head banged against side of the chair. Then he shoved a second finger into her with a brutal thrust. “You are going to learn respect.”

“Lord Vasilis.”

“Fuck!” He pulled his hand from her and turned toward the door. “What?”

A guard stood in the doorway, his eyes wide. Alcina closed her legs. Vasilis smiled.
“Nice, isn’t she?”

The man nodded, looking nervous.

“I trust you will remember that she is mine.”

The stranger nodded again.

“I hope you have a good reason for interrupting us.”

“General Lorvan is here to see you, sir.”

“Thank you. Tell him I’ll be there in a moment.”

“Yes, sir.”

Alcina drew back as far as she could when Vasilis turned toward her again. “When I return, I’m going to sample more of you. I’ll expect better cooperation from you unless the barbarian has given you more of a taste for torture than I suspect.” Then he left the room and she was alone again.

Alcina’s heart raced. When had Vasilis become so evil? Her father had been nothing but kind to him. When Vasilis’s parents perished in a fire, King Schoeneus took him in as a royal fosterling and raised him like a son. What would make him turn his back on the love he’d been shown?

Alcina wanted to solve the mystery of Vasilis’s betrayal, but she had to focus on escape first. She had spent the better part of her hours alone trying to position her body so she could reach the knife in her boot. If she could just stretch a few more inches, she could get it and free herself. Now she had even more motivation. The thought of Vasilis touching her again made her physically ill.

She pushed her legs as far under the chair as they would go, arching her back to push them further. She stretched her neck over the back of the chair and reached down as far as she could.

Only inches separated her from freedom. She looped her feet around the chair's frame a different way. She arched her back deeply, rising off the seat as much as she was able. She grabbed the toe of her boot and walked her hand upward. Her back and arm screamed from the intense stretch, but her fingers brushed the tip of her knife. Close, so close.

* * * * *

Ivan lay on his belly on the hard ground. He'd taken cover in the brush and kept himself low. The guards surrounding the lodge would expect a Boetian rescue party to hide in the trees. Their bodies would grow cramped lying flat on the ground but he could stay in a prone position for hours with no ill effect. But he wished to Varin for a breeze, sweat dripped from his face and the humid air pressed against his body. He desperately missed the cool, crisp air of Lalatia.

A single light shone in the front-most room of the cabin that stood about twenty yards away. Two men stood inside. They spoke in low voices and despite the open window, Ivan could only catch a few words. Ivan had only seen Vasilis once before but he believed him to be the taller of the two men in the cabin.

Ivan could smell Alcina. He was sure she was inside the cabin, and the thought of Vasilis touching her made Ivan burn with rage. Alcina smelled of terror, but the sharp smell wasn't tinged with excitement and arousal. Tonight, her fear tasted bitter on his tongue.

His heart cried out for him to rush the lodge and take her, but his mind knew he stood a better chance of getting her back if he waited, studying the movements of the guards and trying to ascertain what the men inside were up to. If he rushed the rescue and failed, he would never forgive himself for his rash actions. So he waited, careful not to make a sound.

After what he estimated to be another hour, the shorter man departed on horseback, riding perilously close to Ivan's hiding spot. The horse snorted, as it drew near Ivan, but his rider simply urged him on.

Vasilis disappeared from sight, heading into the cabin's back room. Lights flickered as if Vasilis had lit candles. Alcina's alarm sharpened. Ivan readied himself to move as soon as patrolling guards passed by the cabin's front door. One guard was permanently posted at the door, but Ivan was confident he could take the man out.

He took a deep breath, willing the guards to appear. He didn't want to wait any longer.

Suddenly a scream rent the air. Ivan leapt into action. Guards be damned. Lalatians protecting their mate had been known to take out a whole squadron.

Ivan dropped the guard at the door with a single shot from the energy weapon he had smuggled on planet. He knew he'd have less than a minute before the roving guards discovered the body at the door.

Weapon out, he burst through the door and crossed the empty front room. Vasilis had his hand raised to strike Alcina. She was bound to a chair, hands behind her back. Blood trickled from her lip.

Ivan aimed for Vasilis's head.

Alcina's eyes widened. "Behind you!"

Ivan turned as two guards charged into the front room. He dropped them both with hits to the chest.

He turned back, catching Vasilis's foot as the man tried to kick Ivan's weapon arm. Jerking upward, Ivan flipped Vasilis to the ground.

Vasilis's flexible body curled into a ball. He rolled and came to his feet.

Ivan aimed for Vasilis's head and squeezed the trigger. Nothing happened. He'd had no way to charge the weapon since he left Lalatia, and the fucking gun was out of power. He threw it on the ground and pulled his knife out of his boot.

The two men circled each other. Ivan forced himself not to look at Alcina. He had to stay focused.

Footsteps and shouts echoed on the porch. Ivan looked over his shoulder. Three more men. Shit!

* * * * *

Alcina sliced through the last of the ropes and leapt into action. She threw her knife, hitting one of the men in the chest. She rounded on another with a high kick that knocked him back.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Ivan tangle with Vasilis and another man. But she couldn't worry about him; she had to concentrate on her own fight.

The man she'd kicked launched himself at her. She threw a punch. He ducked, and she hit nothing but air. His knee slammed into Alcina's abdomen, but she butted the man in the chest as he ran at her. He stumbled, stunned by the force of her hit.

She pushed her advantage, slamming her fist into his chin. He fell to his knees. One more punch, and he slumped to the ground.

Her hand throbbed, but she ignored it, turning to see if Ivan needed help. Vasilis was nowhere in sight. Ivan's boot connected with the other assailant's chin. The man crashed to the floor.

Ivan grabbed Alcina's arm and pulled her toward the door. She ran with him toward the cover of the woods. When the trees grew thicker, they slowed. He pulled her off the path into a clearing where he'd clearly set up camp.

She fought to catch her breath. "Where's Vasilis?"

"Gone. He ran while we fought the guards."

"We have to go after him." She turned to go, but Ivan restrained her with a hand on her arm.

"Protecting you is more important. I will track Vasilis down when I've gotten you to a safe house."

“You’re not going after him without me. I can take care of myself.”

Ivan pulled a cloth bandage from his pack and dabbed at the blood on her face. “You’re a damn fine fighter, but I will not risk Vasilis capturing you again. I saw the look on your face when I came into the room, you were terrified. For that alone I would kill him.”

“I was fine. I --”

“Alcina, you were scared to death and with good reason. He hurt you when you couldn’t defend yourself. When I think of what he might have done if I hadn’t found you, I want to rip his head from his shoulders.”

“I had my knife. I’d already cut through most of my restraints.”

“And you were planning to fight your way out of there single-handedly?”

She scowled. “You should go back to Lalatia. You don’t have to risk yourself for me or anyone else on Boetia. This isn’t your fight.”

Ivan grabbed her by the shoulders and pushed her against a tree. “You are my mate. Everything that affects you affects me. If I had my way, I’d never let you out of my sight again. There is no chance in hell that I would leave Boetia without you.”

“I’ve got to save my people from this nightmare. I don’t have time for mating rituals.”

“Don’t you dare dismiss our mating as unimportant. Our need for each other cannot be dismissed or put off indefinitely, but I have every intention of helping you save your people first.”

Hope blossomed in Alcina. Would Ivan really help her? Could it be true that for once she wouldn’t have to bear everything alone? She knew better than to count on it. It would be best to simply learn what he knew and decide how to proceed from there. “Is my father really dead?”

Ivan nodded.

The knot in her stomach tightened, and tears pricked at her eyes. She was nearly afraid to ask about her brother, but she had to know if he lived. “Where is my brother?”

“No one knows for certain. He fled the palace after your father’s death. Prokopios assumes he is hiding somewhere. I used the remote for your locator to find you, but Rosa didn’t know where to find Nico’s, and no one else has come forward with its location.”

“My father didn’t want anyone knowing where both devices were in case an enemy tortured them for the information. And he never told me where Nico’s was or even where Rosa had hidden my own.” She took a deep breath and swiped her hand across her eyes. “Occasionally my father really did understand how the world worked.”

She couldn’t hold back any longer. Hot tears fell faster and faster until she was sobbing. Ivan pulled her against him, holding her tight until the storm passed.

“We will find him. I swear to you.”

Alcina wiped her eyes and looked up at Ivan. Something jolted inside her when she saw the fierce passion in his red eyes. She was in love with him. There was no denying it. She suddenly longed to kneel before him and offer him everything he asked for. But now wasn’t the time. They had to find Nico. “Thank you.”

Ivan brushed an errant curl from her face. “You are my mate even if you will not admit it. I will never leave you. It would tear us both apart.”

“Ivan, I --”

He laid a finger against her lips. “Not now. Do you have any idea where your brother would go if he were scared and wanted to hide?”

“His former nurse, Renata, lives in a village about ten miles outside Kedalion. They are still close, and he visits her regularly. I doubt he would endanger her by asking her to hide him. However, he might hide near her home. One of his favorite childhood games was pretending to be an old world Boetian who lived among the trees. And the two of us have played hide and seek near Renata’s village many times.”

“It’s a good place to start. I’d better check in with the speaker to confirm the status of operations at the palace.”

“Check in? How?”

“Your father apparently held a stash of satellite phones in the event of a military emergency. After pestering from Zale, Prokopios deigned to give me one.”

Alcina smiled. “Prokopios can be a little high-handed.”

“Your first act as Regent should be to see someone else put in his place.”

“What did you say?”

“I said the speaker needs to go.”

“No, about me being Regent.”

“I was informed that if you and Nico survive this rebellion, you will be Regent until his sixteenth year.”

Alcina nodded.

“Then why does your position surprise you?”

“I thought you expected me to submit to you.”

“I do, and you will.”

Alcina frowned. Her heart beat fast. What was she missing? “A submissive can’t run a planet.”

“They can on Lalatia.”

“As Regent, I must appear strong to my people.”

“You will appear as you always have. When we are alone you will give yourself to me utterly, but that does not mean you will cease to be the woman you have always been. You will not grow weak. You will come to understand the power in surrender and only grow stronger.”

Alcina took a deep breath. Her head swam with fear, of surrender, of Vasilis, of facing life without her father, of never seeing her brother again. She leaned against a tree for support. “I need time to process these ideas. Call the Speaker.”

Ivan nodded and punched buttons on the phone.

Alcina stepped into the trees to relieve herself, something Vasilis had not been kind enough to let her do. When she returned, Ivan was putting the phone into his backpack.

“Did you reach the Speaker?”

“No, he’s left the palace with half of the Advisory Council. They determined that it was best to divide themselves in case Kedalion fell.”

Alcina felt the blood drain from her face. The thought of her beloved city overrun by Vasilis’s men made her sick.

“Don’t worry. Kedalion is well protected. Zale told me they’ve rallied a large contingent of troops, and Vasilis’s men are still far from the capital. They think they can save the city. Prokopios’s leaving is merely a precaution.”

Alcina let out the breath she’d been holding. “What about Nico?”

“They have still not located Nico’s remote.

“Then we should head to Renata’s village. I believe the surrounding area is the best place to start.”

“I have been instructed to take you to a safe house. A family nearby has volunteered to hide you.”

“No. A Regent does not run away. Once we find my brother and get him to safety. I’m going back to Kedalion.”

Ivan frowned. “I will keep you with me for now. I don’t like the idea of letting you out of my sight again. We will discuss further plans when your brother is safe.”

Alcina took the peasant clothing Ivan had brought for her and began to change. There was no point in continuing the argument before they found Nico.

Chapter Eleven

The next day, after twice hiding to avoid men they suspected were loyal to Vasilis, Ivan and Alcina entered the forest where they hoped to find her brother. Ivan looked tired and even paler than usual. Alcina knew his spirit hungered for her to feed him. She'd offered to do so while they traveled, but he'd refused, saying they could not risk being discovered when they were vulnerable. Now she worried he'd grown so weak he'd be unable to defend himself if they were attacked.

Alcina bent forward, stretching her spine. Ivan wrapped his hands around her hips and used his thumbs to massage her sore back muscles.

"Mmmm. Thanks."

"You're welcome. How do we begin our search?"

Alcina took a deep breath. "I've taken Nico to visit Renata a few times. We'll start in the areas where we played hide and seek when we were here. And we hope he sees us from his hiding place and knows he can trust us." Tears stung her eyes, but she refused to cry again. She would find her brother, and she would save her people. She'd find a way. She always did.

After two hours of searching the woods, Alcina wanted to sink to the ground in despair. She was about to call off the search when she spotted bread crumbs at the base of a tree. Looking more closely, she found a bleukino core and the pit of a sleudino.

“Nico?” She rustled one of the tree’s lower branches. “Nico, are you up there?”

There was no reply, but she knew she was close. She felt it in her gut.

She searched the tree canopy. Her brother’s bright green skin and hair would be well-camouflaged against the full summer leaves, but she hoped to catch a glimpse of him anyway.

“Nico, come down. It’s Alcina.”

Still no reply. Ivan had joined her at the base of the tree. She glanced over her shoulder. “I’m going up.”

“Be careful.”

When she reached the spot where the trunk split, she discovered that it was partially hollow. She peered into the hole and saw Nico, curled in a ball, tightly squeezed by the sides of the trunk. “Nico? Can you hear me? Are you all right?”

He looked up, his eyes bright. “Alcina, it’s really you? I heard you, but I was afraid it was a trap. I’d heard you’d been captured.”

“I was, but Ivan rescued me. He’s here with me now. We’ve come to take you to a safe place.”

“There’s none safer than this. Only you could have found me.” He inched his way up the trunk as he spoke.

“We’re going to get you to safety. Then Ivan and I are going after Vasilis.”

As they worked their way to the ground, Nico protested the plan. “I want to stay here. I refuse to put you or anyone else in danger.”

“Nico, I can’t leave you here alone. A retired officer has volunteered to house you. Vasilis will never think to look where we’re taking you.”

When Alcina and Nico reached the ground, Ivan said, “Before we leave, I should call Zale again and see if there are new developments. But if the situation remains unchanged, we will take you to safety.”

Nico frowned. “Who are you to tell me what to do?”

“He is the man who saved your sister’s life. He is fighting for our people despite their prejudice against off-worlders. You will do as Ivan says.”

Nico pouted but said no more. Alcina knew her brother wanted to aid in the fight as much as she did, but he was just too young.

“I’m going to check in with Zale before we head out.” Ivan stepped away from them and punched buttons on the phone. He talked too fast for Alcina to make out every word, but by the time he ended his call, she knew that the battle for Kedalion was finished. The loyal Boetian troops had successfully defended the capital, sending Vasilis’s dwindling forces running for the hills.

“Zale now thinks that we should all return to the palace and show the people that the royal family is still in control of Boetia. Do you agree, Princess?”

Alcina’s heart pounded. She did not want to risk her brother, but the people did need to see their young king alive and well. She would allow Nico to appear briefly then put him under guard while she continued making appearances as regent. “Yes, I agree.”

“So we’re going home?” Nico face brightened, making him look years younger than the sullen youth who’d emerged from the tree.

Alcina smiled and pulled him to her. “Home to Kedalion.”

* * * * *

Zale pushed his dark green hair back from his face. He looked as tired as Ivan felt. “We leave for Thelamion in the morning.”

Alcina nodded. "Ivan and I will join you at dawn for a final discussion of our battle plan."

"No, Princess, you must not put yourself in danger."

"That's Regent, thank you, and I am as capable of fighting as any of you." She looked around the room as if daring every man there to say otherwise.

Zale exhaled slowly. "More capable in many cases, I'm sure, but that is not the point. You and your brother are the glue holding our people together right now. Vasilis's followers are a small percentage of the population. If you were to die, the only ruler left would be a young boy; how many more might be seduced by Vasilis's views? The Boetian people may not like your unorthodox ways, but they trust you."

Alcina closed her eyes for a moment. "I see your point, but it is my right to challenge Vasilis personally since he orchestrated my father's death. I intend to exercise that right and prevent more of my men dying in a full-scale battle."

Zale tensed. "That is a right given to the men of Boetia."

"You speak of custom, not of law. Nowhere are women formally excluded from challenges."

Zale gave what looked like a reluctant nod. "As you say. But think what you risk. Your death could mean the downfall of your family's rule."

"If I win, I will prevent more bloodshed and save Boetia."

"Vasilis's forces were decimated in the attack. If we march on them before he can regroup, our forces will easily defeat them."

"But we risk the lives of our soldiers."

"We risk the lives of men who have volunteered to protect our world. They are willing to go after this bastard; in fact, they're itching to run him and his followers into the ground."

Alcina drew in a deep breath. "I will make the challenge."

Zale glared at her but nodded. "So be it. Ivan, will you remain with us as Alcina's bodyguard until this conflict has ended?"

"I would not consider leaving her side."

"You should both retire for the evening and get some rest."

Ivan put his arm around Alcina and guided her toward her room. He wanted to protest her decision, to tell her she was being stubborn and pig-headed, once again insisting that she take on all the responsibility for her world. She had advisors for a reason, damn it. And as arrogant as Zale might be, he was a good strategist. Ivan had to respect him as a military leader.

But Ivan knew that no matter what he said, Alcina would not listen. He considered ordering her to remain behind in the morning, but he'd told her she would still be the ruler of Boetia even if she submitted to him. He didn't want to jeopardize her trust.

He was too tired to argue now anyway. The simple act of putting one foot in front of the other was almost more than he could do. If he guessed right, Zale would continue preparation for a battle despite Alcina's conviction. They could reopen their argument in the morning.

Right now, Ivan had to feed. He'd starved his soul by refusing to feed from Alcina while they were on the road. Now he wanted to grab her, shove her up against the wall, and fuck her as roughly as he could. If he could stay awake long enough to carry out such a plan, that is.

The day had seemed endless as he, Alcina, and Nico had pushed themselves to travel as quickly as possible while keeping a low profile and watching for anyone who might be associated with Vasilis. When they'd reached the palace, Zale had arranged a gathering of key men in the government. Then they had attended a public gathering to show the newly rescued Nico to the people.

Bells had been sounded, and Boetian citizens had gathered in the street much as they had for Alcina's race. Nico and Alcina gave brief speeches from the palace balcony then attended a formal dinner with government officials. After dinner, Nico had retired with a contingent of guards, but Ivan and Alcina had attended yet another meeting during which Alcina had argued with every advisor present at least once.

After days without sex or spiritual food, Ivan desperately needed to hear Alcina scream in pleasure/pain. He longed to feel her cunt clench around his cock as he drove into her hard enough to hurt. But he wouldn't force her to it. If she wasn't ready to admit that they were destined for each other, he would request that Zale send him someone who was willing to feed him. He couldn't keep up his strength without sustenance.

When he opened the door to Alcina's suite, he saw that Rosa had covered the mattress with silky sheets and placed candles around the room. A stick of musky incense burned on a low table. Rosa had clearly readied the room for a night of seduction. At least someone was confident in his ability to tame Alcina.

Alcina removed the royal robe she'd put on for her public speech. After hanging it in her wardrobe, she turned to face Ivan. Her chest rose and fell rapidly and her cheeks were stained pink. The tangy scent of lust rolled off her. Ivan squeezed his hands into fists to keep from grabbing her like the barbarian her people thought he was.

"Alcina, I must feed tonight. Do you offer yourself to assuage my needs or shall I seek another?" His tone came out angrier than he'd intended. He was losing his grip on his raging need.

She scowled. "No other woman in this palace will touch you."

"Then you will give yourself to me?"

She drew in a long breath. "Yes."

"Do you understand what I may demand of you?"

She lowered her head. "Yes, Master."

Tension drained from Ivan's body. Varin's balls, if he could stave off his need to climax long enough to show her how to enjoy her surrender, they would both find new heights of pleasure that night.

"Kneel."

She did as he commanded. Her terror washed over him, and he drank it down like ambrosia. "I will do no more than your body can handle, but I expect your total submission. I will choose where to take you tonight. Do you trust me?"

She kept her head down. He watched her body expand with breath. "Y-yes."

"Stretch out on your stomach on the mattress."

She did as he asked. He climbed onto the low platform bed as well, sitting on his heels at her side. When he brushed his hand across her back, she shivered.

"Relax."

"I'm not sure I can."

"You will."

He ran his hands lightly over her body. Then began to massage her knotted muscles. She'd pushed her body hard for the past several days. While she did not require feeding as a Lalatian would, he was certain she craved the release of tension that orgasm would bring her.

As Ivan kneaded Alcina's tight shoulders, she moaned and wiggled her hips against the bed. Desire already consumed her. She would soon be ready for the sensual spanking that would send her into a sub trance.

* * * * *

Alcina groaned as Ivan turned his focus to her calves. His large fingers worked magic on her muscles, which had grown stiffer than a Boetian's ever should. She doubted she could even perform her limbering exercises at the moment. His touch was pleasure itself, lulling her into a relaxed state she hadn't experienced for days.

As her tension dissipated, a sensual storm brewed in her body. Ivan's touch sent flames racing up her legs, straight to her pussy. She wiggled and pumped her hips, needing to rub her clit against the cool silky sheets. Her peaked nipples dug into the mattress. She shifted her upper body, rubbing her nipples with the silk as she stimulated her clit. She wanted Ivan's skilled hands to massage her breasts and pinch her nipples. As she thought about his cock thrusting between her legs, she moaned and her hips worked faster.

Ivan massaged her thighs. His hands moved aching close to her pussy, and her breathing accelerated. Her awareness narrowed to what was happening on the bed. The rest of the world, including her grief and anxiety, fell away.

As she sank further into the soft mattress, she began to understand the power of surrender. She hadn't felt so loose and light for ages. She wanted nothing more than to be Ivan's, to let him minister to her, pleasure her, punish her.

His hand slapped her ass. His touch was lighter than it had been the first time he'd spanked her. Her ass felt warm, but the slap hadn't hurt. She pushed her hips up, silently asking for more.

He slapped her other cheek, then rubbed her hot flesh with the silky top sheet. "Hold still."

She pumped her hips against the mattress, unable to obey. She craved release as strongly as she had under the influence of Ivan's aphrodisiac, but she knew her desire was completely natural.

Surrendering to Ivan still terrified her, but he'd proven himself honorable time and again. Fighting her need to give in to his demands was growing harder and harder. She desperately wanted to please him, but desire raged in her. She couldn't keep her body from reaching for what it needed.

Ivan's hand struck her ass, harder. "I said hold still."

The sting of his blows sent waves of heat radiating through her body. She fisted her hands and bit down on her lower lip in her struggle to halt the rush of pleasure. But her hips rocked against the bed. Fiend's blood, she needed to come.

Ivan caressed her back and thighs with the cool, silk sheet, accentuating the heat rising from her buttocks. She shuddered with her effort not to move. "Let the pain and pleasure flow over you. Sink below it, like you're sinking into the water of a lake. I know you can do it."

Alcina smiled. His confidence warmed her body in a different way than his touch.

He slapped her ass, harder now. Two times. Three. She fought for control, tensing her muscles to hold herself still. Her ass ached and stung.

"Don't tense up. Relax and breathe. Let yourself sink."

She exhaled with the next blow, literally feeling as if she were sinking into a sea of pleasure. In some corner of her brain, she knew the spanking hurt, but all she felt through her raging need was an intense sensation that shot straight to her pussy. She craved a touch that was hard and fast and primitive. She would take whatever Ivan offered.

The blows stopped. She hoped Ivan was ready to fuck her, but he'd gone days without feeding. She imagined he needed more than a simple spanking to satisfy him.

Her teeth sank into her lip as she fought to keep still. She gripped the slick sheet, pulling it so tight, she worried it would rip. She let her hips tilt downward. The pressure on her clit made her gasp.

Ivan gave her ass a light slap, drawing her attention. "Concentrate on your breathing." He laid his hand on her back as she spoke. "Push my hand up."

She inhaled deeply and did as he asked.

"Good. Now let my hand sink."

He pushed against her as she exhaled, and she let every bit of air out. She went through several more cycles of breath before Ivan removed his hand.

“Keep that slow, steady rhythm, and remember not to tense. I’m going to use a crop on you now. It will hurt more, but I believe you can take it. I want you to relax and let the sensations take you to a place where all you want to do is follow my commands.”

Alcina nodded, unable to speak, frightened and exhilarated at the same time. She wanted to prove to Ivan and herself that she could let go if she wanted to.

He drew the crop down her back. The smooth leather tickled. She giggled without meaning to and immediately tried to stifle the sound.

“It’s all right to laugh or cry or scream. Don’t hold anything in.” Without pause, he brought the crop down across her already sore ass.

She shrieked.

He gave her no time to catch her breath. The blows came fast and hard. For a few moments she lost the ability to turn the pain into pleasure. She tensed and bucked.

He kept going. “Breathe, Alcina. You can do this.”

She panted through several more strikes but finally found her breath again. He attacked the backs of her thighs and her upper back with the crop, giving her new sensations to process. He returned to her buttocks again and again until they burned so hot she thought they would catch fire. Yet the agony was delicious. Shamelessly, she lifted her ass toward the crop each time it came down. When Ivan gave her a particularly hard crack, she screamed.

Still, she wanted more. She could hear Ivan’s breath rushing in and out quickly. Every time she screamed, he moaned. She wanted to tell him how much she enjoyed his presence in her mind as he drank down her suffering, but she couldn’t find her voice.

As her punishment went on and on, she began to float, lost in a world of sensation. Finally, she realized the room had grown silent and the spanking had stopped. She remained still, eyes closed, basking in the lust pulsing through her.

“Turn over.”

Ivan’s voice ran over her like velvet. She did as he said without hesitation.

He pushed her legs up and apart. She opened her eyes then, wanting to watch him fuck her. His red eyes glowed. He looked like a ferocious, barbarian warrior. She shivered, but she sensed his primal need to claim her and opened her legs further, offering her body up to him.

He captured her wrists with his hands, pushing them to the mattress on either side of her head. She reveled in her helplessness. Her heart sped up and her pulse throbbed between her legs.

“Who do you belong to?” He snarled the words as he positioned himself between her legs, poised to drive deep within her.

The part of her mind that could register the outside world protested the answer she wanted to give. She trembled, holding her bottom lip in her teeth.

Ivan’s jaw clenched, hardening the muscles of his face. “Alcina, who do you belong to?”

She struggled in his grip, caught between terror that made her want to fight her way free and a soul-deep longing to admit she was his.

Ivan pushed further into her mind, lowering his shields as he did so. She felt his surface emotions: desperate wild lust, anger, and fear. The realization that this dominant man was afraid that she would deny their bond broke down her barriers. “You. I belong to you.”

He thrust deep, and she screamed with pleasure. His cock stretched her mercilessly. She arched up, trying to take more, but he pulled back, snarling.

“You’ll take nothing more than I give you.” He let go of her wrists and pinned her hips to the mattress.

His thrusts were shallow at first. She struggled, whimpering and begging him to free her. Never had she been so desperate to feel a man’s cock filling her pussy.

When she reached the point of pure frenzy, tossing her head back and forth while screaming at him to fuck her, he finally let her hips go. She surged against him, and he met her with equal ferocity. He pushed her legs up, angling himself so he put agonizing pressure on the ridges inside her as he withdrew.

The intensity of sensation blinded her. She hung on the edge of an orgasm, but she feared its power might stop her heart. She reached for it anyway, squeezing her legs against Ivan's and arching her back so her clit rubbed his pubic bone.

He shoved her hips down again. "You will come when I tell you to."

"I need it now!" she screamed at him, mindless in her need.

He let go with one hand and used it to torment her nipple, pinching the tight bud between his thumb and forefinger. He tugged and twisted, making her moan. Once again, her body hung at the precipice of orgasm. Pleasure raced in lightning bolts across her body. "Please," she sobbed.

"Please what?"

"Please, Master."

He pulled out and slammed his cock into her as he took both nipples and pinched them savagely. Starbursts exploded in her mind. Her shields dropped as she tensed, stretched on a rack of burning pleasure. Raw ecstasy wracked her in spasm after spasm.

Then Ivan screamed. His thoughts poured into her mind. She saw them wrapped around each other, spiraling around a glowing helix. As they fell faster, she grew more afraid.

Ivan's mind opened further. His hunger, pleasure, and alarm, battered her mind. The intense feelings he kept hidden from others dizzied her until she succumbed to blackness.

Chapter Twelve

Ivan wrestled with the swirl of emotions that knotted his stomach. He wanted to push Alcina from the hover car and drag her back to the safety of the palace.

Before leaving the palace, he and Zale had tried once more to convince Alcina that she was not bound to challenge Vasilis. But she wouldn't hear any arguments suggesting that she send in troops rather than making a challenge. No matter what they said, she insisted it was her duty to her father and her people to make the offer.

Ivan knew Alcina was a damn fine athlete and a skilled fighter, but Vasilis was nearly a foot taller than she and likely weighed half again what she did. By the rules of a one-to-one challenge, the combatants would fight hand-to-hand with no weapons. The fight lasted until one of the parties fell and could not get up. Nothing in the rules required either party to die, but Ivan had no doubt that if Vasilis got the chance, he would kill Alcina.

Even if Ivan felt nothing more for Alcina than friendship, he would not want her to sacrifice herself. As it was, the thought of that bastard hitting her again made Ivan's blood boil. He'd sworn to himself that Vasilis would die for his treatment of Alcina, and he would fulfill that vow.

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The hover car came to a halt less than one hundred meters from Vasilis's headquarters. Zale had convinced Alcina that there was no point in trying to arrive in secrecy. Vasilis would have scouts covering all routes to Kedalion, and Boetia's rightful ruler should not have to sneak around behind trees.

Zale believed they should declare themselves and order the pretenders to step down. Alcina had conceded Zale's point, but she also knew that Vasilis was ruthless and dishonorable. He had to be getting desperate as his forces weakened. What would prevent him from attacking them on sight? She would have to make her challenge immediately so his forces would have no time to engage her men.

Ivan opened the hover car door for her, and she stepped through. The insignia of a Regent had been hastily sewn on the night before by Rosa. There hadn't been time to add the Regent insignia to the tattoos circling her arms. She hoped she lived long enough to acquire them.

She stepped from the hover car, trying to project more confidence that she had. She forced herself not to look at Ivan. Distress and anger radiated from him, seeing it reflected in his eyes might make her crumble. After what they'd shared the night before, she couldn't bear the thought of his leaving. She loved him down to her soul, and she wanted to live long enough to tell him.

If she lived through the day then she would ask Ivan to be her Regent Consort. She prayed they could work out a balance of power they could both live with. Thinking of a future with Ivan reminded her just how much she stood to lose. She brought a hand to the center of her chest, massaging the painful knot there.

She approached Vasilis's tent, flanked by Ivan and Zale and surrounded by a contingent of royal guards. They carried a turquoise flag, indicating their desire for a conference with their enemies. The men guarding the tent flap drew their swords.

Alcina's heart raced. She prayed she could keep her voice steady. She felt Ivan's strong presence beside her, and she wanted to grab his hand and pull him close for comfort. Since their minds had opened so thoroughly, she'd been able to feel the buzz of his emotions. His anger at Vasilis ran so hot it could be lethal to them all if his temper broke. She had to speak fast.

"I've come to challenge Vasilis to single combat to avenge the death of my father."

Vasilis emerged from the tent. He scowled at her. "I do not recognize your rule. Women are not fit to be rulers over others."

"The New Constitution ratified under my father --"

Ivan stepped forward, laying a hand on her shoulder. "Would you accept me as your champion, Your Highness?"

Alcina's heart pounded. If Ivan defeated Vasilis, her goal of preventing more bloodshed would be gained, and Zale would be satisfied because she wasn't putting the stability of the world at risk. Could she let the man she loved risk himself for her?

She glanced up and saw love and passion burning in his eyes. "I declare Ivan of Lalatia my sanctioned champion."

Ivan bowed to her and turned to Vasilis. "As Alcina's champion and her mate, I challenge you to single combat. If I win, you must surrender yourself and your men and recognize Alcina as Regent of Boetia and her brother as king."

"And if I win?"

"Then we retreat, and you have a chance to prove that you and your men are worthy to conquer and rule Boetia."

"So, in truth, I get nothing but the satisfaction of killing you."

"Your numbers have dwindled. If we open a battle, we will defeat you. If you kill me, at least you have a chance."

Vasilis grinned. "I'm going to enjoy ripping you apart, Lalatian." He spat the word out as if the mere sound disgusted him. "I accept."

Tears formed behind Alcina's eyes, sadness warring with her anger. Ivan probably assumed he could easily defeat Vasilis. He had a clear advantage of strength, but he had only one experience fighting Boetians. He'd killed several of his opponents with his energy weapon. No weapons were allowed in a circle of challenge, and Ivan had no idea how many tricks a Boetian's flexible bodies could perform in hand-to-hand combat. Vasilis would have no scruples about playing dirty.

She had feared her own death, but the thought of watching Vasilis slay the only man who'd ever touched her heart brought tears to her eyes. She ached so deep inside she had to dig her fingernails into her palms to stop herself from crying out. The challenge had been made. She would have to let it proceed or risk shaming Ivan, something a man like him would not forgive.

Ivan unbuckled his weapons holster and handed it to one of the royal guards. Vasilis faced him, but made no move to ready himself.

"If you accept the challenge then I see no need to wait. I'd like to be back in Kedalion tonight so I can celebrate my victory with a feast tonight."

Vasilis snarled. He detached the cloak he wore around his shoulders, purely for effect Alcina assumed, since the heat was sweltering. He and Ivan stared coldly at one another as they removed their boots. Ivan pulled a leather tie from the waistband of his kilt and secured his hair.

One of the royal guards and one of Vasilis's men walked a circle in the grass around the two men, laying out the purple ribbon Alcina had brought to mark the boundaries should Vasilis accept her challenge. She tried to detach herself from what was happening and focus on the ceremonial aspects, but her heart thudded in her throat and her stomach roiled.

If only she could have a few moments to talk to Ivan, to prepare him for the tricks Vasilis would surely try against him. She knew Vasilis's fighting style well. They'd learn to fight together, as children, back when her life was far simpler.

Zale stepped into the circle where Vasilis and Ivan now faced each other, wearing nothing but their kilts. Zale held up his hand, quieting the rush of whispers that had started as soon as Ivan issued his challenge. "As a member of the Advisory Council of Boetia, I hereby witness this challenge and pledge to enforce the terms as stated by the participants, Ivan of Lalatia and Vasilis of House Kedaro."

"So heard," called the two men who had walked the circle.

"On three, the contest shall begin." Zale began to back out of the circle as he counted. When he reached the perimeter, he spoke a loud, resounding "three."

Ivan struck first, surprising Vasilis with a lightning fast right hook. Vasilis struck back with a kick that took Ivan in the chest and made him stagger.

Then Ivan charged, ramming his head into Vasilis's abdomen and knocking the lighter man to the ground. Vasilis sprang up before Ivan could attack further, his supple body allowing him to twist out of reach of Ivan's roundhouse kick.

Alcina watched the two men fight, anticipating most of Vasilis's moves and cringing every time one of his blows connected with Ivan's face. The two men were well matched. Both were excellent strategists, and Vasilis's flexibility countered Ivan's superior strength.

She smiled when Ivan caught Vasilis in the chest with a vicious kick. Vasilis fell to the ground near the edge of the circle. The sun glinted off something by Vasilis's hand.

Shit! A knife. Alcina's heart slammed against her chest. She could well imagine the knife had been dipped in poison, just like the one used to kill her father. Vasilis's guard must have planted it when he walked the circle.

Ivan wouldn't be anticipating a weapon. Vasilis could easily leap up and throw the knife at Ivan's chest. She saw the smile on Vasilis's face. He thought he'd won.

She burst into the circle and tackled Ivan, knocking him to the ground and out of Vasilis's range. But Vasilis arched his body into a bridge, rolled backward and threw the knife anyway. Ivan shoved Alcina off him and rolled just in time to prevent the knife from burying itself in her back.

"Run," Ivan snarled as he plucked the knife from the ground.

Alcina remained seated on the ground, frozen in place as Ivan spun around and kicked Vasilis's in the chin. Vasilis staggered backward, but found his balance, swinging his arm for a punch. Ivan blocked the blow, catching Vasilis's arm in a tight grip. Alcina heard the sickening snap of bone.

Vasilis screamed as Ivan brought his other arm up and buried the knife in Vasilis chest. Ivan shoved the weapon deep, going for the kill. "That, is for cheating."

Ivan twisted the knife, exerting even more pressure. "That is for daring to harm my mate. May you rot in the lowest pit of hell."

As Ivan stood over Vasilis, watching him fall to his knees and then over on his side, Ivan looked like the Lord of Hell himself. Alcina crawled backward, frightened by the pure rage flowing from him.

Alcina glanced around, making sure Vasilis's guards weren't going to fight now that their leader had been slain. Most of them had dropped their weapons and taken a posture of surrender, heads down and arms at their sides. A few had run and were being pursued by her men. None seemed eager to fight the royal guard contingent. She exhaled slowly. But when she turned to face Ivan, her breath caught.

Flames leapt in his red eyes. Never had she felt such searing anger directed at her, not even when she'd run from him at the cabin. He pulled her to her feet then lifted her and slung her over his shoulder. Turning toward Zale, he said. "I will see the Regent home. I trust you can clean up this mess."

"Yes, my lord," Zale answered.

My lord? She hadn't even announced their betrothal and already her men recognized him as Regent Consort. Would she have any authority left by the time they were married in truth? Of course her stunt in the circle had done nothing to raise her in her men's esteem.

"Check the knife for poison and find a fit punishment for the man who planted it in the circle."

"Rest assured I will, my lord," Zale answered.

Ivan deposited Alcina in the hover car. "Don't move. Don't speak. Don't do anything but breathe."

A confusing mix of emotions filled her mind: desire, terror, anger, and embarrassment. She'd thought Vasilis was going to kill Ivan. How was she to know Ivan had some sixth sense for fighting that let him anticipate his enemy's every move?

She'd thought she was doing the right thing when she rushed in to fix things like she always did. She could have paid for her mistake by losing her own life or his. Tears stung her eyes.

Ivan's anger made the air in the car oppressive. His intensity scared her, but it excited her, too. She imagined him fucking her with rage flowing between them. The images in her mind made her so wet she worried she'd soak the hover car's seat before they made it back to Kedalion.

Chapter Thirteen

“Kneel by the bed and don’t move.”

Alcina did as Ivan directed. She wasn’t sure whether to fear or anticipate what would happen next, but now was not the time to challenge him. Whatever he had in mind, he would not truly hurt her.

His anger hadn’t dissipated during the ride, and Alcina had been ready to jump out of her skin by the time they’d arrived at the palace. Why wouldn’t he yell at her or spank her or preferably fuck her rough and hard? His cold silence had her nerves on edge.

Slowly and deliberately, Ivan pulled coil after coil of red rope from his duffle bag, the one she’d learned contained nothing but sex toys and implements for punishment. Her heart raced. Could she really let him tie her up when he was angry with her? Would he give her a choice this time or had she pushed him too far?

He walked toward the corner of the room, and she turned her head so she could watch him work. He unhooked one side of her sleeping hammock and re-hung it so it stretched wider. Then he began attaching lengths of red rope at strategic points.

“You endangered yourself and me and all the people of Boetia. You need to be punished.”

Her heart rate sped up. She'd expected another spanking, maybe a harsher one than she'd had the night before, but she sensed he had something worse in mind.

"Do you acknowledge my right to punish you?"

"Yes, Master." She couldn't stop the words from slipping past her lips.

"Climb into the hammock. Lift your arms over your heads and spread your legs."

Her legs shook so hard as she tried to stand that she wasn't certain she could cross the room on her own powers.

"This is your last chance to prove your willingness to me. Either surrender to the punishment I've devised or let me go."

The way he phrased his order helped her steady herself. He was as trapped by their web of hunger and love as she was. No matter how scared she was of his anger, she was more scared of losing him.

She climbed into the hammock and positioned herself as commanded. He pulled her body toward him until her ass rested on the hammock's lower edge. She stretched her legs into the air and rested them against the hammock's lower supports.

Ivan lifted a length of rope and brushed it across the inside of her upper arm. He dragged it downward, caressing the side of her breast before pulling it away. The soft, tickling sensations made her shiver. Ivan wrapped the rope around her wrist and secured it to one of the ropes forming the frame of the hammock. He teased her again before binding her arm just above her elbow. He restrained her other arm in the same fashion.

He remained completely silent as he worked. Her heart beat so loudly it echoed in her ears, but she held herself still, spellbound by the erotic tension he created.

He took a longer piece of rope and caressed the underside of her breasts with it. Then he wrapped it around her body just above her breasts, circling her chest twice before securing the loose end. He tickled her stomach with the next piece and then wrapped it below her breasts.

Alcina stared at his hands as they slid over her body with such skill. She found herself objectively observing him as if the bondage wasn't happening to her. She admired the red rope's contrast to her blue skin and marveled at how Ivan tied knots with such efficiency.

Long moments passed before she realized Ivan had her thoroughly immobilized. Ropes circled her waist, her hips, both legs at the thighs, below the knees, and the ankles, even around the arch of the foot. The ropes weren't tight enough to hurt, but he'd left no play in them.

Panic seized her, but Ivan laid his hand on her stomach. "Breathe."

She obeyed, instantly calmed by the gentle tone in his voice.

"This is the most fitting punishment I could devise, Alcina. Your heart and soul longs to surrender control, but your mind protests. You proved today that you are incapable of letting someone else champion you. You trust no one. You want control in every situation. But our relationship cannot exist that way. My nature will not allow it. So I've taken control from you."

Alcina whimpered. Trepidation filled her, and she shook beneath the ropes. Once again, Ivan paused and laid a hand on her stomach. "Breathe. Learn to enjoy your helplessness. Let go of the need to move, to do, to control."

She took a deep breath and stilled herself.

"When you can't move, you must rely on someone else to take care of your needs, to perform your responsibilities. You are bound, but you are also free from expectations."

Alcina shook her head. "But --"

"You cannot talk your way out of this, or command someone to rescue you. You have to choose. Find a way to enjoy giving up control, or send me back to Lalatia."

Ivan stared down at her, his eyes blazing, but he said no more. Alcina closed her eyes against his penetrating gaze. She fought the urge to struggle to jerk and tear at her bonds, to beg him to let her go. She knew he was right. She couldn't direct everyone all the time. The

effort was killing her. She'd known for years that she could never be free when she was being crushed under the weight of her responsibilities. She needed to get rid of her stress even if Ivan had to whip it out of her.

"I'm yours to command, Master."

She opened her eyes as she spoke. Ivan smiled at her, warming her and making her aware that desire still pulsed through her veins despite her apprehension.

He drew in a deep breath and smiled. "Your anxiety tastes marvelous."

She shivered, rocking the hammock.

He pulled a glass dildo from his bag. It was as red as the rope, and five graduated spheres lined the shaft. The largest one was as thick as his own impressive cock. The flange at the end told her he was likely going to put it up her ass. She chewed her bottom lip in nervous anticipation.

He lubed it thoroughly and slipped it between her legs. She tried to curl up enough to watch what he was doing, but she was tied too tightly for even that small movement. She tensed when the tip of the fake cock pressed against her asshole.

"Relax. Open for me."

She drew in a long breath before pushing out against the dildo. Ivan worked it inside her slowly. But gentle as he was, her ass still burned. She gasped as he pushed the largest section into her. Her ass closed around the narrow base, and she felt his finger push at the flange. Then the dildo began to vibrate.

The vibrations eased the stretching agony. She tried to wiggle her hips, but she could make only the slightest movement. She squeezed her muscles against the vibrator as it teased her, making her crave a good hard fucking. Her pussy felt far too empty with her ass so full.

Her eyes followed Ivan's hands as he reached into his bag once more. He pulled out a pair of evil-looking clamps. She tensed. Her nipples tightened instinctively as she remembered the anguish the other set had given her.

Without saying a word, Ivan leaned over her, pinched one of her nipples, and stretched it outward. She whimpered even as she rotated her hips and felt cream run down her thighs.

He snapped the clamp closed. She gasped but quickly realized this clamp wasn't sprung as tightly as the one he'd used before. He pressed a button on the side of it, and it began to vibrate. She gasped as tingling, mind-blowing pleasure raced from her nipple straight to her clit.

"These are for pleasure, not pain."

She nodded, unable to speak.

"Of course, after a while, you won't be sure which is which, because I have no intention of letting you come any time soon. This is a punishment after all."

She shuddered unable to look away from the heat in Ivan's eyes. Flames still leapt there, but they were generated by hunger and passion now. His anger was gone and she wanted him so fiercely she feared she'd combust.

Ivan set the second clamp on her other nipple. When he turned on the vibration, a jolt of lust ran through her body. She arched up hard enough to rock the hammock despite how little play there was in the ropes.

Ivan only smiled at her predicament. "Watch me, Alcina. Watch me stroke my cock."

Though he didn't have the power to command her eyes to stay open, he might as well have. Nothing could have stopped her from staring at his hands as he shoved his kilt over his hips and took his thick shaft in one hand, using the other to lift and tug at his balls. Her hips lifted as high as they could, offering him what she knew he wouldn't take, not yet at least.

He smiled. "Do you wish you could touch me, stroke me, feel me in your pussy?"

She moaned. He slicked his hand with the lube he'd used on the dildo and stroked himself faster and faster. She loved that her bound form had worked him up to the point of frenzy, and she was torn between wanting to see hot jets of his come splash her body and wanting his cock pounding inside her.

He pumped himself relentlessly. He had to be close to the edge. Her hips jerked up and down, straining against the ropes. The vibrations in her ass and against her nipples sent fire racing to her clit. She was on the verge of coming herself.

Then he stopped. Her body pulsed with unrequited need. She was so revved up, she might have come without him ever touching her if she'd seen him shoot his load. He reached up and untied one of her arms. She didn't dare move or even breathe. Was he really going to unbind her so soon?

He stepped back. She watched him, hyperaware of every move he made. "Take your clit between your first two fingers. I will allow you to touch yourself but only as I direct. Disobey and I will retie your hand. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Master."

He positioned himself between her legs again and took his cock back into his hand. "Squeeze your clit and make circles with your fingers. Do not move your hand unless I tell you to."

She did as he said. In no time, she was back at the brink of orgasm.

"Stop."

She whimpered. "Please. I --"

He lifted his brows and stared. "Do you want to come or not?"

"Yes, Master."

"Then obey me. Slide two fingers into your pussy, curl them forward and rub your hot spot. Use the heel of your hand to press against your clit."

She shifted her hand into position, groaning as she worked herself with her fingers. She was close. Ivan was too, she could tell by the feverish way his hand moved on his cock. He held his bottom lip between his teeth. His eyes were wide, his breathing ragged. Oh Goddess, they were both going to come. Waves of tight, hot need rushed along her body.

“Stop.” She sobbed as she pulled her hand from her body. He licked his lips, feeling her agony. She shivered with the thought of him longing for her to suffer, loving and hating it at the same time.

Ivan stepped closer until his thighs brushed her own. His engorged cock hung right over her clit. Please, let him put it inside her.

“Use your hand to spread your lips, I want to come on your clit.”

She whimpered, opening herself as wide as she could. Her breath rushed in and out so fast she was growing dizzy despite her reclined position. She licked her lips and lifted her hips as far as she possibly could, using her toes to bear down on the ropes and push herself higher. In that moment, she wanted nothing more than to have her lover come on her. She wanted to serve him, to please him, to bring him to the point of climax by simply existing for him.

Ivan stroked himself faster and faster. Then he froze. Jets of come splashed against her. She moaned, watching the beauty of his release.

“Make yourself come.” His voice was low and passion-drunk. She slid her fingers through Ivan’s come, lubing her clit before she squeezed it. She needed only a few seconds of stimulation before she was caught in a web of desire so strong it wracked her body with enough force to make her scream. Her body spasmed and jerked, she couldn’t help fighting her bonds as she needed to ride the fierce wave.

When her pulse had slowed, she opened her eyes.

Ivan’s chest still rose and fell rapidly. He was hanging onto the ropes at the bottom of the hammock. She smiled. “Did I please you?”

He smiled. “Yes, Alcina. You always please me.”

Ivan untied her and removed the dildo from her ass. Then they settled themselves on pillows around a table where Rosa had left a carafe of wine. Alcina sobered as she came back

to reality. Sadness gripped her. She couldn't give Ivan up, no matter what staying with him meant.

"Ivan, you've implied you would stay on Boetia if I acknowledged you as my mate. Would you truly live on here when Lalatians long to be around others of their kind?"

Ivan nodded, suddenly serious. "Yes."

"Would you spend all your time longing to be home?"

"Lalatians do crave socialization with others of our kind, primarily because our need to feed is rarely satisfied by members of any other races. But once we've found a mate, no separation could be as torturous as being away from her or him."

"Then you would accept the official title of Regent Consort?"

He drew in a long, slow breath. "Before I can, we must perform the Lalatian bonding ritual. If the bonding is not successful then my government will not allow me to stay on Boetia."

"I love you, Ivan. I've never felt this way about anyone. I know I was scared to admit it, but I do believe we are destined for each other."

"So do I, or I would've never suggested that we perform the ritual. I must warn you though, if our bonding is successful, you will become pregnant. That is the sure sign that our bond is solid."

Alcina's heart pounded. She had longed to have children of her own, but had never imagined she'd meet a man she'd want to create them with. But she had just become Regent. She had to look after her people and her brother. "There isn't another choice, is there? I can do the ritual and we can have a child, or I will lose you."

Ivan nodded. "I cannot stay on Boetia unless we are mated in truth."

She tried to breathe deeply and calm herself. Hadn't Ivan spent the past four days teaching her that she had to learn to let go and rely on others? If he were by her side, she

could handle anything. She could raise a child and be Regent, because he would help her. He would even order her to relax when life rested too heavily on her.

A child would bring hope to her people after the death of their king. Tears stung her eyes as she thought of how her father would never see her child. She prayed that somehow he would know and approve.

“We haven’t much time before Zale and the others return. They will want to feast. If we are successful, I will officially name you Regent Consort and announce a date for our marriage ceremony.”

Ivan’s eyes widened. “Then you agree to the bonding?”

“Yes. I would not have chosen this time to have a child, but the thought of creating a life with you gives me indescribable joy.”

“Do you have a sacred space within the palace, a chapel or sanctuary?”

Alcina nodded. “There is a small goddess chapel right at the edge of the sea.”

“Direct me there and speak to whomever you must to see that we are not disturbed. I will attend to the other preparations.”

Chapter Fourteen

Ivan completed the circle of protection, drawing the final ward in front of one of the chapel's two altars. He opened a jar and poured loose incense onto the charcoal burner he'd placed in a bowl. The incense was a special blend his people used to put themselves into a trance state.

He used the yellow candle, representative of the element of air, to incinerate the pile of loose incense. Then he drew in a deep breath. He didn't want to go too far under yet. But he needed the calming effect to settle his fears before leading Alcina on a journey that would challenge her like nothing before.

He crossed the room to the second altar that lay at the opposite end of the hexagon. He lit a second pile of incense. With a last deep calming breath, he approached his mate.

Alcina hung by her knees from one of the ropes that crisscrossed the hexagonal room. When he'd asked her to lie on her back on the cool marble floor, she'd informed him that Boetians used a hanging posture for meditation. He was far more concerned about her ability to relax and let go than how she positioned herself, so he'd allowed her to get comfortable in her own way.

Her lust perfumed the air. His cock hardened, and he had to restrain himself from leaning down and running his tongue over her clit. The time for that would come soon enough. "I'm going to begin a chant that will help us sink as deep into each others' minds as it is possible to go. Take long, deep breaths, drawing the incense into your lungs."

Alcina lifted her arms from where they braced her on the floor and laid her hands one over the other on her chest. "Yes, Master."

Her voice sounded far away, meaning the incense was already beginning to take effect. Ivan began his chant. Alcina swayed gently from the rope. He kept himself tuned to her body, hearing her heartbeat slow and the time between her breaths lengthen.

When he finished the chant, he lay a hand on her hip, caressing her gently. He pressed against her mind, and her shields crumbled easily. He moved through layer after layer until he was freefalling. A thump jolted him. He looked around, seeing a verdant bower. He was completely surrounded by thick vegetation. "Alcina?"

"Yes?"

"Do you acknowledge a desire to mate with me?"

"Yes."

"Do you willingly pledge obedience, giving your pain and fear to feed my hunger?"

"Yes, Master."

"Open to me."

He waited, his heart racing, would Alcina be able to bare her deepest thoughts? Suddenly the trees in front of him parted. A rush of visions pushed him to the ground of her mind's inner sanctum.

He saw Alcina as a young child, playing happily with her mother by the sea behind the palace.

He watched her weep over her mother's fever-wracked body.

He saw her begging her father to shake off his depression and rule once more.

He felt exhilaration take her as she ran her first race against those who wished to marry her.

Then the lust she'd felt the moment she'd first seen Ivan poured into him. His cock grew so hard it hurt. He had to tear at his palms with his nails to stop himself from taking Alcina before the bond was complete. The physical need pulled him out of her mind and slammed him into his own body. He opened his eyes.

Alcina remained upside down, but she looked up at him, her eyes wide. "What happened?"

"I saw your deepest thoughts so I could form an unbreakable bond with you."

"Is the ritual over?"

"No, my love. Now you must come into me and see my soul."

"I don't know how."

"You do. Open yourself and search for the secrets of the ritual."

Alcina took a deep breath, letting the incense fill her body, trying to bring back the languor she had felt before Ivan had plunged into her mind. She probed gently at his mind, still uncertain what to do. His shields parted like soft butter and she fell.

Red flames wavered around her as she plunged deeper and deeper. She landed with a smack against the floor of a stone room. She appeared to be in a tower with the spire soaring above her.

What had happened? Her mind refused to accept the answer, but her heart knew that physically she was still in the chapel with Ivan. What she saw around her was the deepest recess of Ivan's mind.

She took a deep breath, and her mind was suddenly filled with the correct questions. "Do you acknowledge your desire to mate with me?"

"Yes." Ivan's voice echoed around the room, firm and steady.

“Do you promise to protect me and accept the service my body needs to give?”

“Yes.”

“Open to me.”

Pictures flashed on the wall in front of her. She saw Ivan begin training as a dominant on Lalatia.

She watched him complete his first rescue mission in a remote region of Lalatia.

She felt the uncertainty inside him when he accepted his assignment to travel to Boetia.

Then the raw desire she inspired in him poured into her mind. She gasped. Ravenous hunger assailed her. She flew faster than a jump ship and landed back in her body with a smack, nearly falling from her position on the rope. Her pussy clenched and her nipples tightened, hard as rocks. She reached for Ivan, desperate to feel his naked flesh against hers.

“No.” He grabbed her wrists and stepped back.

“Please.” She didn’t try to stop herself from begging. Her body burned and only Ivan could cool it.

“I need you to fuck me.”

He shook her arms, jostling her and distracting her from the pulse of lust. “Do you promise to obey me?”

“Yes.”

“Put your hands on the floor to brace yourself. Slide your legs further apart, then don’t move.”

Automatically, she did as he ordered. When he wrapped his hands around her thighs and lowered his mouth to her pussy, she tried to push herself higher to reach his skilled tongue but found she was completely paralyzed.

Her breath caught and her heart sped up. “Ivan, what’s wrong with me?”

“Within the circle, once you promise obedience, I control you completely.”

“I can’t move.”

“I told you not to, so you can’t. You literally cannot disobey.”

Panic nearly consumed her. “Ivan, help me. I can’t do this.”

“You can. You have no choice.”

“Please, let me go.”

“No.”

She was on the verge of hysterical screams, but he bent deeper and swiped his tongue across her pussy. When he sucked her clit into his mouth, her terror drowned in her yearning to feel his hot mouth around her. She no longer cared if she could move. She needed only Ivan and what he could do for her.

He licked and sucked, torturing her clit with tongue and teeth until she went over in a climax that literally made her see stars.

He stepped back. “You may move now. Lower yourself to the floor and kneel.”

She did as he asked. He positioned himself in front of her, and she leaned forward to suck his cock into her mouth, need already raging in her again.

He backed out of reach. “You will not touch me unless I command it.”

“Ivan, I need you.”

“You need to submit.”

A shiver ran over her. He was right. She needed to know he could command her. She stilled herself. “I am in charge, and I am going to fuck your mouth.”

“Yes, Master.” His sharp words sent a wave of pleasure over her. She nearly wept to have found a man who knew what she needed better than she did herself.

He stepped forward. “Open your mouth.”

She did as he commanded.

He brushed her lips with his cock. "Do not move."

She tried to wiggle her fingers and found herself paralyzed once again. Anxiety pulsed in her veins despite the heat building in her cunt. He took a deep breath and licked his lips. "I could live on your fear alone."

Warmth suffused her as he fisted his hands in her hair and pulled her mouth onto his cock. He slid in and out with an increasingly fast rhythm, pushing himself deep. Her throat opened to take him. She wanted him to use her, to shove his whole cock down her throat, to mark her as his. If she could have spoken, she would have begged for his hot come. She whimpered when he stopped and pulled his cock from her mouth.

Panting, he stepped away from her. "Hands and knees."

Loosed from her paralysis, she dropped to her hands and scrambled to turn around and present her pussy to him.

Ivan knelt behind her and wrapped his hands around her hips. "I'm going to fuck you until you can't think, can't breathe, can't do anything but feel my cock ramming into you. I want to take all of you. I want to own you." He drove into her, fully seating himself in one stroke.

"Goddess, yes." Alcina spiraled rapidly toward another orgasm. Ivan took her harder and faster than ever. She felt entirely consumed by him.

He let go of one hip and wet two fingers in her creams before pushing them into her ass. The added stimulation almost threw her over.

"You will not come until I command it."

His words enflamed her. She growled and whined like an animal. She slammed her hips back against him. Not caring about the bruises they would both have later. "Fuck me, Ivan. Fuck me."

He snarled. "Who do you belong to?"

Her breath caught, and she whimpered.

“Tell me, Alcina.” His strokes were savage, and he worked her ass just as hard and fast.
“Tell me.”

“You. I belong to you.”

“Come for me.”

She did. Instantly. Her body stiffened, then convulsed. She heard Ivan shout and felt the hot splash of his come inside her.

Stars flashed in front of her eyes as he pistoned her through his climax. He pushed her shields down, and his thoughts wrapped around hers. They spiraled together until she grew so dizzy, darkness took her.

* * * * *

Ivan woke first. They tumbled to the side as their minds connected. His first thought was of the child they might have created. He pulled Alcina tight against him and laid his hand over her belly. Opening his mind, he scanned her.

Relief and joy inundated him. She was with child. She was his.

Alcina’s eyes fluttered open. “That was incredible. I thought I understood why I craved submission before, but now I know. Nothing feels better than being under your control, knowing you want only to bring us both pleasure.”

He smiled. “It was incredible, and it worked.”

“You mean --”

“Yes, you are with child.”

“How can you be sure?”

“I scanned your body the same way I would to determine your need for submission or dominance. This time I felt a new presence within you.”

Alcina smiled though tears fell from her eyes. “I love you, Ivan.”

“I love you, too.”

“Thank you for not giving up on me. You are exactly what I need in my life.”

“That is what it means for us to be mates. Although I have a feeling you may forget how wise I am on occasion. Good thing I know just how to keep you in line.” He slapped her lightly on the ass.

She giggled. “Yes, Master.”

He tried to scowl at her mocking tone, but he laughed instead. Fisting a hand in her hair he pulled her against him and captured her in a ferocious kiss.

She pulled back sooner than he liked. “We must clean up and return to the palace. I saw Prokopios before I met you here. He is frantic with the need to make arrangements for a victory celebration.”

Ivan nodded. He’d been dreading this moment since he realized Alcina was his mate. “How easily will your people accept an off-worlder as Regent Consort?”

“Some, like Zale, have already accepted you after witnessing your loyalty. Most will revere you as the hero of the Vasilis Rebellion. Others will be wary, especially those who agreed with Vasilis’s views even if they would not take arms against my family. In time, they will all come to see you as I do, as a hero whose strength of character knows no bounds.”

He watched tears of joy run down Alcina’s face, close to weeping himself. Her words of praise had touched his soul. She reached up and drew his head down to hers, taking his lips in the tenderest kiss they’d ever shared.

 THE END 

Silvia Violet

I have adored the written word since birth. By the time I was one and a half, I was "reading" nursery rhymes to my parents. At age thirteen, I began my love affair with romances when a friend found a stash of historicals hidden under her living room couch. Since then, I've devoured countless romances - historicals, contemporaries and paranormals. I'm a sucker for a good alpha hero no matter what the genre.

I earned a BA and then an MA in history, all the while thinking I would rather be writing romances than research papers on obscure topics. Then four years ago, I decided I was going to stop wishing I could write a romance and actually do it. Nearly a year later, after many shots of espresso and many hours of writing when I should have been doing my "real job", I finished my first novel. I've been writing ever since.

I live in the mountains of North Carolina with my high school sweetheart (whom I married nine years ago) and our toddler-aged daughter. I am a stay-at-home mom and even when I've had no sleep and have just mopped the floor for the eighth time that day, I know I would never trade my life for anything else.

Along with writing, I enjoy baking, reading, and surfing the web for more books to buy. When I'm not chasing my toddler, I enjoy getting exercise by hiking and walking around my quaint neighborhood.

Visit Silvia on the Web at <http://violet.chaosnet.org>.