

# *PLEASUREMAID*

Cricket Starr



## Chapter One

*She was cold. So very, very cold.* Shivering, the woman pulled herself to a sitting position and raised her head. Something liquid fell into her face and slid down the back of her neck.

She identified it. *Water. Rain.* Cold and wet, and she was outside, sitting on the ground. Her fingers on one hand stung and when she looked at them, there were pale red marks on the tips. Even as she watched the marks faded to thin lines, although the sting from them remained.

Rain dripped from her hair into her face.

She brushed the hair aside and a light caught her attention, just past the neatly trimmed bushes that surrounded her. She struggled to her feet and headed toward it.

Light meant warmth and shelter from the rain, and she needed both. She clutched her arms around herself trying to preserve what body heat she had.

It seemed to take forever, moving slowly across the thick plush of the ground cover – some sort of short grass, well tended and soft beneath her bare feet.

*Why aren't I wearing shoes?* Why was her only garment a simple shift – thin, sleeveless and barely reaching her knees, of no use in weather like this?

So many questions and no answers – she needed answers. The light she'd noticed was over a door set in a wall with a roof overhang. The wall of a building, large and imposing. She reached the door and for a brief moment gloried in the overhang that kept the rain off her. She found and held down the buzzer.

After a long time the door opened, revealing someone. She registered a man, tall, broad-shouldered, and dressed in a sleeping robe. His eyes...there was something about his eyes...she knew him.

He looked at her quizzically. "Who are you?"

She opened her mouth...and realized she had no answer for him. She knew him but not herself. She had no idea who she was.

It was one question too many – the world spun and she collapsed.

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Gall stared down at the damp bundle of woman on the floor and wondered at what was going on in his life. During the past two years he'd had a total of barely a dozen visitors and certainly none like the unconscious woman at his feet.

Of everyone, he preferred the woman. Even soaking wet and with her silvery hair plastered to her scalp, she was still nicer to look at than the old men who made up his father's council.

But nice as she was to look at she couldn't stay where she was. Her body blocked the doorway and the rain was blowing in. Gall lifted her so he could shut the door.

She settled into his arms with a sweet sigh, as nice to hold as she was to look at. A bit small, but curvy. Very wet, though, particularly her hair and dress, which clung to both of them, and her skin felt like ice. A deep shiver ran through her and he clutched her closer.

Whoever she was she'd get sick if she stayed like this. He needed to get her warmed up and the heated bathing pool in his quarters would be the best cure for that. Gall hoisted her higher and headed that way.

She was still unconscious when he got her to the tub and that gave him pause. He couldn't just put her in this way. He'd need to hold her head above water and it would be best to get in with her. Of course he couldn't keep on his robe...

Get in the tub naked with a beautiful woman? *What a darn shame that was!*

A grin on his face, he slipped off his sandals and robe and stepped into the heated water, still holding his insensible bundle. Her gown was already soaked and would take no further harm.

He settled onto the tub's seat and let her head rest against his shoulder. Her shivering gradually quieted, and after a moment her eyes opened. Gall startled at the look of them...like golden pools with a black iris in the middle, surrounded by lashes the same pale silver as her hair. Her lips parted, and she breathed in, a startled reaction to being in his arms.

Then she breathed out, and Gall caught the sweetness of her breath. It was like a drug, heavy and enticing. He took it deep into his lungs and his cock, already interested at having a woman so close, now hardened and throbbed.

He clutched her closer, pulling so her bottom rested against his lap. The feel of her buttocks against his cock was a sweet torture though the thin fabric of her gown.

She floated next to him, and her arms went around his neck. Her lips were just within reach. Gall closed his mouth over them.

A kiss. Just a kiss but when was the last time he'd tasted anything as sweet as this? If he'd thought her breath was intoxicating, her lips made him drunk. She opened her mouth to his probing tongue and he couldn't think.

He could barely keep himself from tearing her clothes from her and throwing her onto the marble floor of his bath, thrusting himself deep within her. It had been a long time since he'd had a woman so enticing beside him.

But he did no such thing. He forced his hands to be gentle, to strip away the thin gown with care. She seemed almost childlike—her eyes stared at him with no guile within them. He would not be forceful with her.

Her gaze might have been innocent, but there was nothing but woman in the heavy breasts he found under her garment, the nipples the most tempting pink he'd ever seen. Gall captured one of them with his mouth, and she arched against him. He suckled her and she cried out, her hand holding his head to her.

Hesitation disappeared at her welcoming response. She no longer shivered against him and the skin that had been like ice now seemed to burn. Gall slid her across his lap so his cock was poised just outside her opening. He thrust up through the water and speared her. She made a small sound of surprise and appreciation and her golden eyes were the size of saucers when he looked at her.

Her pussy was tight, hot and welcoming. He lifted his hips and drove deeper within her, then pulled back. Her arms tightened around his neck and she moaned, a long heartfelt sigh of appreciation.

He picked a rhythm that seemed to suit them both, the water undulating around them. Not too fast. The feel of her around his cock was that of a well-fitting glove and he wanted to enjoy that for as long as he could. It would be over too soon, he knew.

The pace he picked was perfect. She lifted her head and stared at him with those golden eyes of hers and he could see her approaching climax. Gall couldn't help his smile. He wanted to see her come, feel her climax while he was still in her. He sped up and she clutched at him, now driving herself onto his hard cock.

She was perfect in his arms and all he wanted was to keep doing this forever. Not likely—if only he could make her come before he did. He wanted to delay the inevitable.

But as her first wave of climax started, her pussy pulled at him and that was his undoing. He held off as long as he could, but even though she wasn't quite at her peak the urge to pull out of her became impossible to ignore.

She was still riding his cock when he grabbed her hips and with force pulled her off him. Gall lifted her onto the marble edging as, with a curse, he gave in to the orgasm he'd resisted.

Free of her, his cock discharged its load into the water.

Shock showed in her face. Shock and confusion. Gall steeled himself for the anger he knew would follow. Even the carefully trained courtesans charged with servicing him during the past two years had been unable to hide their displeasure when he'd pulled out of them like that. Finally he'd told his keepers to send no more of them. Better he service himself.

But this woman said nothing and as he watched concern filled her eyes. Her hand caressed his face.

"Why did you do that?"

Her soft question was almost harder to take than her anger would have been. He found himself telling her the truth.

"I...I was given a compulsion. I can't climax inside a woman...it's—it's to keep me from fathering any children."

"Oh."

He'd waited for her to ask why, but at her simple acceptance of his condition, something inside Gall released. Whoever this woman was, he liked that more than anything. "My name is Gall." He wouldn't burden her with the rest of his names for now.

For an instant she tensed and something like panic was in her eyes, but then her expression changed to one of relief and her lips curved into a smile. "I am Dina."

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Dina's pleasure at getting at least one memory back nearly overwhelmed her. At least now she knew her name and that meant that whatever had happened to her, the damage probably wasn't permanent.

So—she had a name but still couldn't remember her purpose...but she knew it had something to do with Gall. Once she'd smelled the man and tasted his lips, she'd known he was connected to why she was there.

Wrapped in a towel Dina watched as Gall sorted through his clothes, finding a long sleeveless tunic for her to wear. She couldn't keep her eyes off him. Tall and broad-shouldered, his body was all molded muscle. His face was that of a young god, dark-haired, with eyes so black they seemed made of stone.

But they weren't hard like stone. They danced with humor when he saw how big his garment was on her.

"You look like a child dressed in your big brother's clothes."

"I'm not a child," she told him saucily.

"No, you aren't." His lips curled up with sensual male interest and her core heated as his gaze raked over her body. "You are most definitely a woman. And I bet you are hungry."

She wasn't but she said nothing as he went off in search of food for them. At least she wasn't hungry for food. Her purpose here definitely had something to do with Gall.

She was here...to take care of him? No, that didn't seem quite right. To have sex with him, certainly. Once she'd woken up with his hands on her that had been all she could think about.

And it had been great up until he'd ended it so abruptly. He'd said he couldn't climax inside a woman...a compulsion. Perhaps she was here to help him with that?

Dina nibbled one of her fingernails, pulling it away when she realized how much shorter it was than the others. Chewing her nails must be a nervous habit of hers.

*Great.* All she wanted was to know who she was and her purpose. She knew her name was Dina, that she wanted sex with Gall, and that she bit her nails. It wasn't much

but at least now she was warm and dry and that was a lot better than being in a cold wet garden after falling off a wall...

*Wall?* Dina startled. Was that how she got into Gall's garden, by climbing over the wall surrounding it? Was the fall the reason for her memories being scrambled?

But why would she be sneaking in?

Gall's return ended her introspection. He held a platter of something that smelled wonderful and her stomach lurched in anticipation.

Dina smiled at him. "I guess I am hungry."

## Chapter Two

She had a good appetite, Gall noticed. He also enjoyed watching her eat. Every mouthful seemed to be an experiment, every taste a sensual delight for her. Only a few items didn't seem to meet her expectations and she only tried them once.

Dina tried the wine he brought but apparently that also wasn't to her taste. She preferred the fruit juice instead.

Gall watched her eat and wondered. Who was she and why was she here? Even more, what should he do about it? In truth he should have called his guards as soon as she'd arrived. It was against the rules for her to be here.

Perhaps that's why he didn't want to notify them. After all this time he didn't want to follow their rules any longer. He wanted this woman and he knew they'd take her from him, saying it was for his protection.

Ha! If anything she needed protection from him. Even after their earlier session in the tub he was interested in making love again. At least as much lovemaking as he was permitted to do.

Not for the first time, Gall bridled at the restrictions that had been put on his life. He'd been falsely accused. For them to lock him up, and, even worse, saddle him with that wretched compulsion...the first thing he'd do if he ever got out of here would be to see if there weren't some way to have that removed.

He really wanted to make proper love to a woman...starting with Dina.

She looked up and smiled at him. "I bet you're thinking about sex again."

"Would it surprise you if I said yes?"

"Not really. It would just mean that we are thinking very similar thoughts." She slid her hand up under his robe and found his cock, hard and ready again. "See, I told you sex was on your mind."

With a beautiful woman like Dina around, why wouldn't it be? He couldn't get over how wonderful she smelled. All he wanted to do was draw her close and make love all night long. Trouble was that he'd never be able to finish what he started.

Better he not start at all. He drew away from her. "Perhaps this isn't such a great idea."

"Are you worried about what happened before?" she asked softly.

He let his silence answer. Dina tilted her head as if in thought. "You say you can't come inside a woman...but what about inside her mouth? You couldn't make her pregnant that way."

*In her mouth?* Gall shook his head. "I haven't tried that."

Intrigued Gall watched her open his robe and free his cock, already weeping its interest. She smiled and gave it several long strokes. He lay back and signaled her permission to continue.

Dina poised over his cock, the too-large neckline of her tunic dipping low enough for him to see her breasts. He licked his lips only to see her mimic the gesture, just before she gave a tentative lick to the broad head of his penis.

It felt so good, he couldn't help his moan. Encouraged she took the tip into her mouth and this time he didn't even fight a groan. So hot and inviting was her mouth. He felt like he could stay in there all day. Her teeth rasped softly against the ridge under the tip, and she sucked the tip a little.

The top of his head nearly came off. "Please, more," he begged.

She gave him more, and then more again. Gall's stomach tightened with each draw of her mouth on him, each little suck, each sweet bite. She did it over and over, and Gall's hands clutched the sheets of the bed. Her mouth was so good...perfect.

His stomach clenched, his balls growing heavier. He was coming...he should pull out...he should...

But she didn't let him and she sucked him deeper into her mouth, and...

And then he was coming, hard, into the back of her throat. Her name was a soft prayer on his lips followed by his cry of ecstasy.

Dina made a quiet noise as if she were choking and then he felt her swallow, taking his cum into her.

She sat up, licking her lips like a cat with cream, her face showing the same satisfaction. Gall gathered her into his arms and then they were both on the bed, Dina held next to him. For the first time in years he felt the satisfied weariness of sexual completion.

"I didn't do anything for you," he whispered in her ear.

Dina raised her head to kiss him, her mouth sweet against his. "I'm fine for now. You are tired – let's sleep."

Sleep sounded so good. He pulled her close and let the world drift away.

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Dina listened to Gall's breathing even out and knew he slept. She still held his taste in her mouth, tart and familiar. Warmth filled her...satisfaction at having given him pleasure.

That's what she was here for. That's why they'd sent her...

*They'd* sent her? Uneasiness rose in Dina as another memory fell into place. She'd been sent here, by someone, but who and for what purpose? Sent to climb over a tall stone wall, to get inside his room. Sent with Gall's face in her mind and his taste and smell in her memory.



Sent to satisfy his needs—or perhaps to cure him of his compulsion? Maybe...but as Dina nestled deeper into his arms, she wished she was sure. Somehow she wondered if a darker purpose hadn't been intended. Why else would she have had to sneak in?

But it was a secret Gall wanted to keep as well. The next morning he had her hide in a closet while a maidservant cleaned the room and bath. Later he told her that he needed to keep her presence a secret. There were those who would make her leave if they found her.

Dina didn't want to leave and so sat in the dark stuffy closet as quietly as possible while Gall joked with the maid and someone else, a man with the gruff manner of a soldier.

A soldier guarding whom, she wondered—Gall, or the maidservant? The woman commented on Gall's good humor, and commented aloud on what he was so happy about.

Dina wondered if it might be due to her presence. Gall needed a regular lover and in the absence of other instructions that was the purpose she'd given herself. Something inside her craved a purpose.

She wanted to please him. This morning they'd tried to make love again, but he'd interrupted it as suddenly as he had in the tub. It had bothered her only a little, but she read Gall's frustration when he'd had to stop before climaxing inside her.

Finally she'd taken him into her mouth again, and this time he'd finished, even easier than before without trying to pull out. So his mind had accepted oral sex as acceptable. It was probably because the compulsion that gripped him had been linked to sex that could produce children.

That gave her another idea to explore later. She hoped to desensitize him to making love, decoupling it from procreation in his mind...then perhaps the compulsion could be banished completely.

Once his rooms had been cleaned, Gall let her out of the closet. He pulled a games board off a shelf, along with a box of carved pieces.

"I don't suppose you know how to play Castles."

She had to shake her head, but that didn't faze him. Instead he set out the board on the low table.

"It isn't like there is that much else for us to do," he said then, at her smile, gave a little laugh. "Well, other than *that*. But we can't stay in bed all day. I'll teach you."

## Chapter Three

The lesson went into the early evening. As it turned out, Gall was a fanatical player who loved the game and knew all its nuances. Thankfully he was also an excellent teacher. Faced with something new to study, Dina cheerfully threw herself into learning everything about the game that he could teach her.

They played all afternoon broken only by her returning to her closet hiding place whenever a guard made a sweep of the rooms. She realized that Gall wasn't afraid of the gruff-sounding men. He seemed more annoyed by them than anything else.

Later in the day a servant came with Gall's dinner, which he told the man to stow in the kitchen rather than serve it right away.

The food was fortunately quite plentiful as he shared it later with her. It was also delicious, the best she'd ever eaten...at least as far as she could remember. Dina still couldn't remember much from before waking on the grass outside Gall's home.

Bits and pieces came to her. A remembered taste, a smell that triggered a memory. But too much still remained hidden. She'd told Gall the truth, that she'd fallen off the wall and couldn't remember who or what she was, and he'd accepted it.

She hadn't. How was it that she'd come to this place? Sure, she'd climbed over the wall that she could now see through the vegetation lining the edges of the yard. Way at the top she saw a wire and a memory came of sudden intense pain.

But why had she climbed the wall? What had been her reason?

Plus the wall seemed forbiddingly high. Was she truly so gifted a climber to have taken it on or had someone helped her up on the other side? If so...who would have done such a thing?

Again too many questions. Whenever they became too much, Dina would look at Gall, breathe deeply of his wonderful sensual scent and let desire overwhelm the questions in her mind.

It was enough that she was here, with him. It was enough that he was hers to smile with, eat with, and challenge him at his favorite game. The answers to why she was here could wait.

It was enough that she was.

Every meal, every game, every conversation they had made her happy. From the way his initial reserve gradually gave way to warmth and smiles, her presence made him happy as well. The day passed with their growing closer together, until by nightfall they might have known each other from childhood.

Dina realized uncomfortably that she had no memories of any time spent as a child. It was as if she'd arrived at Gall's door fully grown into the world. Dina shuddered when that thought occurred to her and she wondered why.

Fortunately it didn't seem to occur to Gall. After a while Dina realized that he asked no uncomfortable questions of her, of whether she remembered anything of who she was or how she'd gotten here. He seemed to accept that she didn't know the answers.

He didn't seem to care, either. It appeared to be enough for him that she'd found her way here. What mattered to him was that she laughed when he made a joke, and teased him into good humor when he was glum, and loved having sex with him, even though he couldn't complete the act.

And that she played Castles. Gall loved playing Castles almost as much as he did making love.

He had one game strategy he was very fond of and used frequently in their practice games. Late that evening they were playing and she waited until she saw him set up for it. With a smile Dina moved her cavalry piece to thwart him, laughing at the surprise in his face.

Gall stared at her for a moment then joined her laughter.

"You've learned enough about this game for tonight, little mystery woman. Let's play a different game."

He pulled her into his arms and Dina surrendered to his kiss. Warm, sweet, and demanding. Gall kissed the way he played Castles...intensely and with the ambition to win.

But not just that. He played because he enjoyed the game and wanted to share that. In the game of sex the same ambition was there.

Gall wasn't satisfied to have his own needs met. He needed to satisfy her as well.

It wasn't that hard. All he had to do was touch her and desire swept through her. The touch of his lips burned, the swipe of a fingertip left a frisson of need that always settled in her groin.

He worshiped her breasts, nibbling the tips with gentle teeth and lips, sucking with soft intent. Each of her orbs seemed to swell, the nipples hardening into tender points. Each pull on a nipple spiraled down through her belly to center into her core.

Their clothes came off in quick succession and soon Dina was kneeling on the bed next to him. He entered her from behind, his hands caressing her back and coming to settle on her buttocks, kneading each gently.

Each deep thrust drove her closer to fulfillment, but as the wave built inside her, she sensed his discomfort rise as well. He was going to pull out of her again, before he reached climax himself.

She could feel it...and this time she didn't want it to happen that way.

Before the compulsion seized him, she pulled away from him, releasing his cock to dangle behind her. Gall groaned.

She didn't allow him to wallow in self-pity. Instead she looked over her shoulder at him, lifting her ass higher and wiggling it invitingly.

"There is more than one way to make love, Gall, and some carry no risk of pregnancy."

He stared at her for a long moment before apparently catching her drift. "You wish to do that...with me?"

"I want you to come inside me, my love. However that can be done."

He hesitated a minute more. "I don't want to hurt you."

"It doesn't hurt for me," she lied, not knowing if it was the truth. She couldn't remember having a man's cock in her ass, but who was to say that she hadn't...and that it had not caused her pain?

Gall raised her hips closer and his hand explored again the round mounds of her bottom. He reached forward to cup her sex, using his fingers on her clit to drive her crazy. She leaned into his hand, letting her ass rise higher in the air.

Gall leaned forward and spread the globules with his other hand, the first still pleasuring her. He poked a tentative finger into the tiny puckered opening.

Dina jerked further into his pleasuring hand, the sensation of being entered anally even by a fingertip sending shock waves through her. Some pain...and something that wasn't pain that she really wanted to explore. She knew immediately this was new for her, but it felt right anyway. She knew it was the right approach to take with Gall.

She looked over her shoulder and noted that Gall's face showed an intense fascination. From a drawer he produced a small vial of oil, which he used with a practiced hand on his cock, smoothing it on with long strokes. His eyes closed in pleasure, and Dina smiled. This was how he'd been satisfying his needs all this time.

Then he took the oil and worked a small amount into her tight opening. It made the opening slick and smooth and easier for him to enter. He let his finger mimic the action of his cock, loosening her up until he was able to work a second finger in, then a third. Dina groaned with each additional insertion but assured him he was causing her no harm.

In truth he wasn't. As three fingers now stretched her well-lubed opening, Dina cried out, an orgasm swamping her.

Gall took his cock in hand and fitted it with the now relaxed opening and thrust through it, just the head, letting her body learn to accept him. Now when she glanced back, she saw the sweat beading on his brow, his finely developed chest gleaming with forced patience. He grabbed her hips and pulled her toward him, slowly letting more of his cock fill her.

Dina's moan was heartfelt and it was all she could do not to simply impale herself further onto him. The oil had made the head of his cock slick and easy to accept. Now he reached to her channel to gather her liquid arousal and slide that along his shaft, working some of it into her opening, using her natural lubrication in addition to the oil.

He thrust and he was embedded deep within her, panting with the exertion of taking so slow an entry.

Such control Gall had. Dina wondered at it. She could see that it took all his strength to hold still and let her finish acclimating herself to his presence.

Then his control snapped and Gall pushed her forward to rest on her elbows, then back again, his hips pistoning in time. Now they were truly joined.

"So tight, so hot, and good," Gall said, his voice broken and harsh with passion and need. Each thrust put him closer to completion, and this time when she felt him tense, she did not get the feeling he would pull out.

This time he'd be able to stay within her to climax.

And he did. Just as she thought that, he froze in place, his breath a hot breeze against her back.

"I'm coming in you, Dina. Coming...coming!" The last was a long scream and then she felt him push hard inside her and his cock jerked, throbbed, and heat from his cum shot deep into her backside channel.

Dina climaxed as well, between the heat in her ass and his fingers still massaging her clit. She bucked and her ass milked him and it seemed like he came again, still inside her.

Gall threw his arms around her waist, burying his face in her back, nuzzling her hair.

"That was amazing," he whispered.

It had been, and it had been successful. Dina smiled at him.

"I can't wait to try your pussy again. This time, I think I can stay inside." He hesitated. "Dina...I am so glad you are here...I want to keep you beside me forever. If that could be arranged, would you agree?"

Sudden joy made it hard to speak. She felt the same for him and wanted to tell him so. Only something made her stop and wait.

This had happened so fast...she still didn't understand just who she was and why she was here. Worse, she didn't know what was going to become of them. She couldn't stay hidden in his closet forever and soon someone would figure out she was here. When that happened they'd be separated and somehow she knew that if they committed to loving each other it would only make things worse when that happened.

She did love him but there was still so much wrong with their situation.

He seemed to read her thoughts and something in him stilled. "I know there are a hundred reasons you should say no, Dina. We haven't known each other very long. You can't remember why you are here. I haven't told you why I'm locked up. Not that I want to tell you, but I can say that I'm innocent of what they accused me of."

Finally she found something to say. "You are a prisoner, then."

"Yes." He ran a finger down her face. "I don't want to lose you, Dina. For the first time in two years...actually longer than that, I don't feel alone. I want to keep you with me."

He lay back on the bed, rubbing his jaw, his face showing his frustration. "There must be something we can do to keep you here. Maybe I could ask my father...or my brother." Gall's laugh was bitter. "On second thought that's probably not such a good idea. It was his idea to saddle me with that compulsion. The last thing he'd want is to see me able to perform with a woman now."

Dina wanted to ask why his brother would have done so treacherous a thing, but she didn't. Instead she took Gall's hand and kissed it. "If you could keep me, I would live with you."

Gall's face lit up. "I think I could very well fall in love with you."

She couldn't help but smile. "I know I love you...that's why I want to stay."

He leaned in to seal the bargain with a kiss until a rap on the door, caught their attention.

"Who could be here this late?" Gall muttered. He grabbed his clothes off the floor and dressed. "Stay in the bed, Dina. I'll be back."

She couldn't help her fear, though and rose to stand behind the door, listening as Gall exclaimed a greeting to their midnight visitor.

"Himla? What makes you sneak in here at this time of night?"

A sense of danger came to her, which was reinforced by the stranger's first words.

"I came because I've heard there is a threat to your safety."

## Chapter Four

A threat to Gall? Acting with an instinct she didn't think about, Dina pulled on her thigh, uncovering a seam built into the skin. She tugged and it separated, revealing a narrow slit in her flesh—and a super-thin twelve-centimeter crystal blade hidden inside the muscle of her leg.

The presence of the weapon troubled her. Why did she have a hidden knife and how had she known it was there? Even so, she wanted it, to protect Gall if necessary. Dina shoved the question aside and pulled the knife, noting how familiar it felt in her hand.

Hefting it, Dina peeked through the crack in the door at the newcomer. A friend of Gall's, she could sense that, even though there seemed to be a lot of tension between the two men. An old friend, but not one who'd been to visit during Gall's imprisonment, she guessed. She used the rest of her senses to tell her about him.

His face showed guilt, shame, and anger, but the latter wasn't directed at Gall...he wasn't the threat she sensed. She eased the slender crystal blade back into its hiding place and resealed the skin over it.

"A threat to me here?" Gall scoffed. "I couldn't get hurt even if I tried."

"There have been rumors about an attempted assassination of you...and other things as well."

Gall's laugh was bitter. "Why kill me when I'm in here? I might as well be dead already."

"You know the evidence you were convicted on seemed overwhelmingly against you, but now there are doubts. Nothing substantial...nothing we can use as proof you were framed." The newcomer's frustration was genuine. "What I'm hearing now is if it can be proved you aren't guilty, then you'll be freed and that seems to be a threat to someone. It could even be that your brother is involved...that the attempt to kill him was just a plot to discredit you..."

"Gratus faked an assassination just to get rid of me?" Gall was outraged, but almost as quickly he calmed and Dina could see that the idea meant something to him. He rubbed his jaw and looked troubled. "That would explain a lot."

"I came because I needed to apologize. I should have known better. If I can help in any way..."

"There is no need. You were the last to abandon me and the first to seek me out now." As he did when he played Castles, Gall continued to rub his chin, obviously strategizing.

"Here is what we'll do. Get the evidence we need to clear me and get me out of here, Himla. That's what you can do."

"I'll do my best." His friend paused a moment. "You are my prince, Galleanus Ell Vanant and I pledge loyalty. I'll be in the guest quarters." He left, Gall staring after him, a look of hope in his expression.

Dina sank to the floor. Like a flood, memories came back to her. She knew the name, knew who he was. Prince Galleanus of the planet Vanant, a hereditary monarchy on the outskirts of the galaxy. His father was king, his brother the crown prince, and Gall was the second son, disgraced and banished to a hidden prison for attempted murder of king's heir. Convicted but not guilty, she knew.

*Not guilty because she knew who was...because she was part of the conspiracy against him!*

She reached up to the back of her head and found the small, almost impossible to notice input jacks buried under a skin flap in her scalp. That plus the hidden pocket in her flesh made it clear what she was and all the questions she'd had assembled in her mind lined up like soldiers alongside their matching answers.

Who was she? She was Dina, a synthetic human created and programmed for a specific purpose.

Whose purpose? Not hers...those who had sent her here.

Who were they? A name came to her, as well as a face—Prince Gratus, the brother Gall was supposed to have conspired against.

And why? Because it hadn't been enough to frame Gall and lock him away. She knew now her purpose, and that of the knife.

Dina returned to bed before Gall entered the room, pretending to sleep as he lay down beside her and wrapped his body around hers. Eventually he muttered into her neck and his breathing evened out.

She couldn't tell him what she knew. Not now. It was still too fresh and she needed to think.

No more questions now. Dina had wanted to know who she was and what purpose she had. She now knew both but she didn't like the answers. One thing confused her...why hadn't she already killed him? She'd had ample opportunity. The programming they'd given her should have activated before now, forcing her to embed the knife into his heart.

But she'd hurt her hand on the wire at the top of the fence and lost her memory. She flexed her fingers at the remembered pain. Somehow that had stopped her.

What to do now? His friend Himla said they needed evidence to prove Gall's innocence. She could give it to them...names and faces she remembered, the fact of what she was, her presence here, and the knife in her thigh—proof of the conspiracy.

She couldn't give it to Gall. Inside her heart ached over deceiving him, but she couldn't face telling him the truth.

He'd said he thought he loved her. She was synth...not someone to love.



When she knew Gall slept, Dina slid from his arms and crept from the bed. For a moment she watched him, heart breaking over what she needed to do. Now she knew what the ache she'd felt meant when she looked at him. It meant she loved him.

For a moment she was almost glad she hadn't said the words that would have bound them together. Her hesitation hadn't been in error.

She'd thought her purpose was to love him. But she'd been wrong. It had been to kill him, but she'd fallen in love anyway.

She could keep her silence and stay with him for as long as they could be together. But that would be wrong. Gall deserved better than the half-life he was living.

Dina took a shuddering breath. Her purpose was no longer to kill him or to love him. It was to save him from his enemies and set him free.

Silently she left to find his friend and give him the proof he needed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gall gazed through the one-way glass in the observation chamber of the palace interrogation room. Dina sat on the narrow bed in the adjacent room, head bowed, face blank. Now that he knew the truth, he could see the signs of what she was—the inhumanly even tone of her skin and the silky sameness of her hair color.

No blemishes, moles, freckles, or scars marred that perfect skin. There were no tiny lines from laughing or frowning to crease her face. She was perfect because she'd been designed to be that way, grown fully formed within a few weeks and not years, programmed to be a person in only a day. No history marked her as it did normal people.

Dina was synthetic—a manufactured human with memories and thoughts programmed into her.

Too perfect—too inhuman. Gall kept his face composed but inside he was dying. He'd fallen in love with a synth, a woman he couldn't keep.

She spoke, answering the question posed her by the interrogator, her voice an even, emotionless monotone. "I didn't remember at first why I was there. I thought..." Her voice trailed off for a second, and Gall thought he saw her chest heave with suppressed emotion. "I thought I was there to please him."

"Please him?"

"Give him pleasure." She raised her hand and her finger strayed to her mouth. Absently she chewed on the nail, and Gall suddenly remembered her doing that at his home. Nibbling her fingernail.

"You were programmed to kill him."

The accusation came in a flat monotone. She answered in the same way. "Yes."

"Why didn't you?"

"I didn't remember my mission. I..." Her voice broke. "In the climb over the wall I caught my hand on the electrified wire." She held up her hand, showing the thin scars across the fingertips. "I didn't remember anything at first. But his smell, his voice..."

Her questioner came into view, holding a shirt. Gall recognized it as one of his that hadn't returned from the laundry.

"You were given this to learn his smell. Played recordings of his voice and shown his picture. You were imprinted on him to be his slayer."

Dina's face lifted and while her face stayed impassive, her eyes seemed to glint with unshed tears. "Yes."

The other man showed her pictures and she identified them. "I remember this one and this. They were there."

"Your brother's men." Himla's voice came over Gall's shoulder. "We didn't believe it at first, but this is proof. Your brother sent that assassin synth in to kill you."

"But she didn't," he found himself saying.

"No. As she said, she was damaged in entering and her primary function kicked in instead." Himla gave a short bark of a laugh. "Lucky you, she was a pleasuremaid."

His sweet little Dina, a reprogrammed pleasuremaid made into an assassin. Gall shook his head.

The other man gave him a curious look. "I've heard good talk about those things. How was it in bed?"

"She," Gall said firmly. Dina might be a synth, but she was no object, not in his opinion. But then he didn't have the words to describe how it had been to make love with her. Her infinite patience and skill, her sweetness and sexual inventiveness, the latter of which had finally removed the blocks in his mind about lovemaking.

"She was perfect," was all he said finally.

He could feel Himla's gaze boring into him and the speculation in it. "I guess she was. Too bad they're going to have to dismantle her."

Gall spun around. "What do you mean? They can't kill her!"

"She's damaged, your highness. Unreliable. Programmed for one thing, then another...who knows what she's capable of?"

"She could have killed me, but she didn't. I can't let her die in return."

Himla stared at him. "It isn't like it's a real woman, Gall."

He gritted his teeth. The old prejudice against synthetic humans—one he would have agreed with just two days ago, but now... "She's real enough for me."

"Of course she's real!" A small bewhiskered man with white hair and an impatient air bustled over to them. He took a long look at the woman through the glass. "One of my best works, too. I spent a lot of time on her kind."

Gall swung to face him. "You made Dina?" Inside him something cringed. More proof she wasn't the woman he thought she was.

"I'm Dr. Lassa—I designed the line," he said proudly. "A highly limited group, each an individual. No cookie-cutter synths where they all look and sound alike. Like her sisters, she's one of a kind and perfect." He frowned as she raised her hand and nibbled her nail. "Except for that. This one has always had that nervous habit."

"I didn't think synths had habits," Himla said.

The old man shook his head. "Of course they do. They are humans, just like us. Just not born the same way."

"But preprogrammed to be slaves," Himla said. "At the whim of whoever controls them. Like this one was."

The man muttered angrily. "I didn't authorize what happened to her—she was stolen from our laboratory. The programming is only a result of those who don't want to see artificial humans with free will." He spoke to Gall. "Your Dina is different. She broke through her conditioning to warn you of the plot against your life."

Gall considered that. Dina had come forward to warn him, and she had to have known what the result would be. Synths had no rights and could be destroyed.

Himla wasn't convinced. "You can't let her get close to you, Gall. You don't know what she's capable of."

"She was capable of love."

"She's a pleasuremaid—it's programmed into her. As soon as she was given your scent she locked in on it and would do anything to please you. It isn't real, Gall."

Wasn't it real? They'd spent just two days together and yet he'd thought he'd known her better than any other woman. But he hadn't. If he had, she would have told him directly what she was and why she was there. Instead he'd heard it from Himla after waking to find her gone.

Perhaps he did love her but she wasn't what he'd thought her to be and his friend was right. With Gratus discredited, he'd have to take the role of crown prince and he couldn't afford a liaison with a woman he couldn't trust.

Slowly he shook his head. "Get the evidence we need from her, Himla. Make sure we can prove my brother is responsible and clear my name. And then..." His voice trailed off. Dina looked at the glass wall between them, as if she could see through it, as if she knew he was on the other side. She looked sad and lost, but resigned.

That image of her would haunt him forever, he knew. She'd saved him, both from his brother and his imprisonment. Even more, she'd saved him from the despair he'd been mired in, and more—she'd returned his sexuality to him.

He'd fallen in love with her...an artificial woman preprogrammed to love him. No free will, no options. What she felt for him wasn't real and what he felt for her couldn't be either.

"I leave her in your care. Take her to one of your estates, or whatever. Don't destroy her or sell her—I don't want her harmed in any way. In fact, make sure she's given an

identity to make her a free woman. I want her to live to do whatever she wishes...but I never want to see her again."

He left the room without another look.

## Chapter Five

Dina was reading when Himla entered the room that had been her home for the past six months. Her home...more like her prison cell, luxurious as it was. In some ways it reminded her of the place where Gall had been held.

In some ways it was, but she could at least leave these walls temporarily. Gall's only restriction as far as she was concerned had been that she not be brought where he could see her, so Himla had taken her everywhere else.

They'd visited many towns and villages, gone to plays and concerts, and he'd even taken her on small trips to other countries on their world, broadening her experiences. That plus the books she read had given her great insight into humanity. She understood many things now. She even occasionally advised Himla on some point of law or the kingdom's politics.

She even understood why Gall had abandoned her. Not that she accepted his reasoning that as a synth she wasn't to be trusted. After long sessions with her designer, Dr. Lassa, she knew far more about who she was.

Despite her origin, she was a woman. Little more – and nothing less.

Himla shook his head at her. "Don't you ever get tired of this?" He indicated the stacks of electronic book disks piled next to the vidscreen, plus the many old-fashioned paper books she'd borrowed from various libraries.

"Not really," she said, but when she shut off the screen she rubbed her eyes wearily. When she looked closely at her reflection in the mirror, she now saw tiny lines in the corners of her eyes. The experience of living marked her face but she didn't mind...she'd rather have those lines than ignorance.

"Wouldn't it be faster to just download what you want to know? You still have the jacks for it."

"Perhaps, but that only really works for facts...to really understand a subject you must go through the process of reading a book the way the author wanted you to. Besides..." she hesitated.

Himla pushed aside a stack of disks and sat on the desk's corner. "Besides it seems more human to do it this way."

Her guardian-captor was too perceptive. "There is that, as well."

"You really want to be human?"

A flash of anger swept through her, something that happened more frequently now. "I *am* human," she snapped at him, "no matter what anyone else thinks."

To her surprise, he smiled. "About time you showed some spunk. You've become a real woman, Dina."

"You didn't believe I was before."

"No," he admitted. "But I didn't really know you, either. Gall said you were, though. At first."

She turned away, hiding her pain. "He changed his mind. He said he never wanted to see me again."

Himla shrugged. "It was a chaotic time. Many things were said then, even by me." He reached out and gently touched her cheek. "Have you given any thought to what I asked?"

She sighed. Yes, Himla did believe her a real woman now. Real enough to fall a little bit in love with, a fine joke given his role in making Gall give her up. He'd asked her to his bed a few days ago but while she enjoyed his company, he wasn't the man she wanted intimacy with.

Dina shook her head. "I care for you, but..."

Himla drew away, disappointed, but she read the understanding in his face. "But you still love him, even now."

She didn't have to answer him. For a while they sat in silence.

"How is he?" Dina hated her need to ask, but Himla had seen him just today.

"He's well. Busy with his position..." he hesitated. "But lonely. He needs someone."

Some of her studies had included the social activities of the crown prince. "There have been many women in his life since he was exonerated." Since he'd abandoned her she left unsaid.

"There has not been the one woman he needs." Himla shook his head. "I'm afraid I have a problem."

Dina turned to him. "Why is that?"

"I swore an oath to obey his orders." He gave a heartfelt sigh. "Trouble is it looks like the best way to be his friend is going to be to break that oath."

\* \* \* \* \*

Galleanus Ell Vanant stared out the window of his new palace, that of the crown prince of Vanant. How far things had come in six months and yet, not far at all. Yes, he was no longer a prisoner, nor was he in disgrace. He was now heir to the throne, something that he hadn't even anticipated before his brother, in a fit of paranoia, had framed him and then tried to end his life.

Gall shook his head. Apparently Gratus had been worried that the charismatic Gall was too popular with their people and would overshadow him even after he'd taken the throne. He'd taken steps to see to it the brothers would never be compared.

There was no need to worry about that anymore. Their father had not been amused by Gratus conspiring against his younger brother and now Gratus was the one

languishing in the luxurious but secure quarters that had been Gall's home for the past few years.

There hadn't been any complaints from the kingdom's people. When Gall had been named crown prince there had been considerable rejoicing on Vanant as Gall wasn't the only person his brother had conspired against over the years.

Dina's testimony had been instrumental in proving his brother's guilt...as a synth she wasn't considered capable of telling a falsehood, consequently she'd been believed. Only a few had heard her speak, but based on her secret testimony Gall had been freed and his brother convicted.

Ironical. He hadn't wanted her near because he didn't trust her, but the court had believed her implicitly.

So now he was free, no longer a prisoner. But in spite of that, one thing from Gall's imprisonment remained. He was still very much alone.

Sure there'd been women since his return. Several women. In fact, as he thought about it, probably too many women. His return to court life and the fact that he no longer suffered from the compulsion that had made his sex life so miserable had led him to many liaisons.

Probably he should have settled with one woman and made her his consort. Certainly his father had made pointed comments about that from time to time. As crown prince he needed an heir and a woman to bear that child.

But no woman appealed to him enough, and after the initial rush of passion, he lost interest in whatever lady he was involved with.

In fact, there'd been no one in his bed for several weeks and he realized he didn't miss sex at all. A fine thing—to have back his ability to make love and not want to take advantage of it.

Not that women didn't still interest him. Lately whenever a small pale-haired woman passed him in a palace hallway he would turn to look, but he was always disappointed when he saw the woman more clearly. He kept searching for hair so pale it was the color of silver, and eyes of golden-brown.

He wouldn't say her name aloud...Dina...but she was whom he wanted, even now. And Dina was lost and he was alone.

"Your highness." It was Himla in the room and the man's presence annoyed him. In the past few months he'd been tempted to ask about Dina, but hadn't dared. He'd told Himla to keep her far from him and much as he wanted to, he couldn't go back on his word now.

"What is it?" he asked, hating the impatience in his voice, but not able to hide it this time. Too many things irritated him these days.

His friend didn't seem to mind. "You haven't been sleeping well."

"So you've decided to keep me company? Or you've brought me some new cure for insomnia?"

"I've brought you something to pass the time."

"A new game? Castles bores me these days. It's been months since I had a worthy opponent."

"No, not a game." Himla seemed to hesitate. "I left it in your room. You can thank me – or not – in the morning." Then he headed for the door.

Curious, Gall opened the door to his suite. At first he didn't see anything, but then a shadow rose from the couch in front of the fireplace, a silhouette against the firelight.

He sucked in a great breath. "Dina?"

She stepped closer, and Gall saw her eyes, a bright blue, and he let his held breath out. Not Dina with her golden eyes. This woman's hair was different too, a darker shade of silver, plus there were other differences...subtle ones.

She smiled, a bright artificial thing, and shook her head. "Who, your highness?"

"You're a pleasuremaid?" he asked, but it wasn't really a question. This wasn't Dina, but he knew she was a synth like her. The slender, voluptuous body, the bone structure, the same perfect skin. She and Dina could have been sisters.

*Damn Himla for this.* Last thing he needed was a poor copy of what he'd given up.

The woman's smile seemed to sadden but she nodded. "Yes, Prince Galleanus. My name..." she hesitated for a moment. "My name is Lees."

"You're supposed to distract me somehow? I don't need a synth for sex."

She seemed to flinch but her voice remained even. "Of course not, your highness. I'm here to entertain you. Whatever you wish me to do. I can sing, or play an instrument. Or we could play a game."

Her sweet soft voice reminded him of Dina's and for a brief moment he took comfort in that. He was going to tell her to leave, but suddenly her company didn't seem so bad. What could it hurt to have the woman entertain him?

"I don't suppose you play Castles."

Her smile returned and brightened. "Yes, actually, I do."

Trying not to think of the last time he'd matched wits with one her kind, Gall set up the board on an inlaid table and they sat opposite each other in the firelight.

To his surprise Lees turned out to be a worthy opponent. Gall won the first two games, but she made it close to a draw during the second. They were midway through the third game when she moved her cavalry piece in an unusual way. She smiled as he picked up his bowman, then put it down realizing she'd blocked his next move.

Gall stared at the board and her. "How did you know I was going to move there?"

"It's what you usually do in that situation..." Lees' voice trailed off and her smile faded. Her hand fluttered up to mouth.

"How did you know that? I've not used that strategy tonight," Gall said. He stared at her, then noticed her fingers, in particular the nails. One was noticeably shorter, bitten nearly to the quick.



"I did make that same move six months ago...with another synth. Another woman," he corrected himself.

Her blue eyes widened. "Your highness..."

Hope rose in him. "Dina. It's you, isn't it?"

This time she didn't deny it. She turned her face, and the firelight danced in her eyes, turning them the familiar gold he remembered and lighting her hair to silver. "Please don't be angry. I know you didn't want me near you."

And he hadn't, and now he couldn't remember why. "But you came to me anyway."

"I...I wanted to see you again."

"I've wanted to see you." He moved around the game table and lifted her to her feet. He stared into her face. "You changed your hair...and your eyes."

"A dye in both. It will fade away."

He stroked her cheek. "I'm glad. I liked them as they were."

She stared at him solemnly. "You liked my hair and eyes...but not me? You said you never wanted to see me again."

"Dina..." he said but he couldn't continue. Explaining how he'd felt then and how he didn't feel that way now was going to take too long.

Instead he kissed her. A long passionate kiss that felt like coming home. Her taste made his cock harden in a way he'd not felt in the six months they'd been apart.

When he drew back a tentative smile took over her face. "Does that mean I can stay?"

"You aren't going anywhere, Dina. Not now."

"You're *demanding* I stay?" Her smile broadened, and he saw a glimpse of a new spirit in her. "But you can't do that. You freed me, remember? I'm not legally even a synth...I have papers to prove it."

"Yes, you are free. But a long time ago I asked you to live by my side and you agreed." Sudden concern ripped through him. "Don't you want to be with me, Dina? Why else would you come here?"

"I came for you. But I want to know it is on my terms that I stay. You sent me away once—I want to be certain you don't do it again."

Gall stilled. "What promises can I make to you?"

"That you agree to let me live by your side."

"You're a synth..."

He wasn't sure why he said it, but it fired a response in her that made him proud. She met his challenge with bright eyes and a firm jaw. "I am a *person*! A woman in love with a man...regardless of how I came to exist."

"You still love me?"

Her anger faded. "Yes. These past six months, I've had a lot of time to think. Dr. Lassa examined me from head to toe. I've somehow become different from the others. How that came to be, I don't know. Dr. Lassa isn't sure, although he thinks it has something to do with the reprogramming, plus the shock I took climbing over the wall. Whatever it was, it changed me. I'm not a simple synth, programmed for one purpose. That used to bother me – that I didn't have a firm purpose, but I've come to terms with it. I know who I am now and I won't be any less than what I can be."

"And what are you?"

"I'm a woman... just that, a thinking, living being. A woman who loves you, Gall. More than that I can't tell you, you'll just have to find out."

He leaned back and stared at her. All the loneliness of the past few months seemed to fade away. For a few days back in his prison, he'd had something precious within his grasp. A companion – someone to share his life with. What did it matter whether or not she'd been born in the normal way? All that was important was that she existed.

She wasn't completely human...but she wasn't anything else, either. She was capable of love and she loved him.

And he realized he loved her, too and for the first time in six months, he didn't feel alone. "Stay with me, Dina. I need you."

She relaxed in his arms and he saw her smile, a real smile this time, not the artificial one she'd put on while pretending to be Lees. "I need you, too. That's why I'm here."

Barely able to control his joy, Gall lifted her in his arms. She was still a small woman, curved in all the right places. He carried her to the bed that had been his alone for too long. Now he would share it with her. Now he'd share everything with her.

Her clothes ended up on the floor as fast as he could pull them off. He wanted to be slow but somehow couldn't take the time. Long weeks of deprivation, long months of loneliness had caught up with him. Now Gall wanted her skin perfectly bare next to his.

Dina seemed no better. Her hands pulled his shirt so hard that fasteners flew across the room. "I'll fix that later," she told him when he startled. "Now I need you naked."

He pulled off his own pants and boots, sparing their fastenings. And then he was in bed with her, and they were entwined together. He kissed her, tilting her head to angle his mouth against him.

Again it was like coming home, her kiss, the familiarity, the passion. She opened to him and he swept his tongue deep inside. "Mine, Dina. You are mine."

"I am my own. But you can have me."

He worked his way down her body, kissing and licking, until he was poised just outside her pussy, the warmth and scent of her enticing him. He'd been inside her many times, but hadn't finished there. She'd cured him of his compulsion but had yet to reap the benefit of it.

Gall smiled to himself. Tonight he'd rectify that.

He leaned in for an intimate kiss and she moaned, hips lifting to his mouth. So responsive...her arousal flooded his tongue and he felt like climaxing on the spot. How had he gone so long without her taste? He bore down on her, pulling her clit into his mouth and suckled it gently. Dina moaned again, and her hands clutched his hair.

"So good..."

*Good? He was just getting started!*

Gall set to work and by the time he finished, Dina was nearly inarticulate. Moans had developed into cries and then screams. She lay limp when he finally rose up over her. "Dina, it's time we made love properly. I want to come inside you."

She stilled. "I need to get up for a moment."

Confused, he stared at her. "What is it?"

She smiled. "I'm sorry...I should have done it earlier, but I wasn't sure... I'm past due for a contraceptive shot. I haven't been with anyone so there was no need. I have a barrier, though. I just need to put it in."

A barrier was a thin film to prevent conception that a woman slid inside her vagina. That Dina hadn't already put one in told him how uncertain she'd been of her reception from him.

He didn't let her up. "You can have children?"

"Of course, Gall. I'm no different that way than any other woman. Pleasuremaids are given shots to prevent them conceiving, but they can if their master wishes them to."

He hadn't thought of that. Dina was fertile—and the woman he desired above all others. And as crown prince there was something he needed to solidify his position.

She rose to head for the lavatory, but he caught her arm. "No, Dina. Don't put it in."

"I have to, Gall."

"You don't."

She stared at him with those odd blue eyes of hers and he wished they were already back to the golden brown color he loved.

"Gall, you are crown prince now. Only your consort is allowed to have your children."

"So become my consort, Dina."

She stared at him with wide eyes. "You're the crown prince of Vanant. You can't make me your consort."

"Why not?"

"I'm a synth, a pleasuremaid!" she cried. "No one would ever accept it."

"Who says that's what you are? You are one of a kind, Dina. There are no others like you anywhere and only a few know what you were." He used the past tense deliberately. She was no more a pleasuremaid now than his brother was crown prince. The latter had proved unworthy of his position, Dina was worthy of much more.

"I want to marry you, Dina, and keep you with me always. That's what you asked me for. And I want no other woman to bear my children."

She seemed stricken. "But Gall. Suppose someone does find out. The king could disinherit you."

Gall laughed. "I've been disinherited before, Dina. Having you with me made it bearable. Not having you has made the last six months nearly intolerable. Given the choice I'd rather have you than be on my father's throne."

He pressed closer to her, pushing her back onto the bed. Parting her knees he moved between them and poised just outside her pussy.

"Don't put anything between us, Dina. You say you are a person. I know you are the woman I want to make love to, and if you bear my child, that's all to the good. Do you want my baby?"

Her hands cupped his face. "I would love it. But, Gall, you are certain this is what you want?"

He smiled and entered her with one swift thrust that wrung a moan out of her and a short groan from him. He set up a fast pace that made her cry out in pleasure over and over again, until she shuddered beneath him, her hands clutching at his back.

As she climaxed, her shaft tightened around his cock, milking it, but Gall held on for just a moment longer. Leaning over her he stared into her eyes, letting her see all the love he held for her. "I've never been so certain of anything in my life."

And then he let passion override him and he emptied himself into her. His seed shot deep into his woman, hopefully to begin a new life, a baby made from both of them. A baby for them to love—a child to be raised to be tolerant of others, no matter how they came to exist.

Of course it was possible that she wouldn't conceive this time, but as Gall collapsed next to her, and drew his new consort into his arms, he decided not to let that bother him.

If it didn't happen tonight, they'd just have to do it again.

*The End*



## About the Author

Cricket Starr lives in the San Francisco Bay area with her husband of more years than she chooses to count. She loves fantasies, particularly sexual fantasies, and sees her writing as an opportunity to test boundaries. Her driving ambition is to have more fun than anyone should or could have. While published in other venues under her own name, she's found a home for her erotica writing here at Ellora's Cave.

Cricket welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

## Also by Cricket Starr

Divine Interventions 1: Violet Among the Roses

Divine Interventions 2: Echo In the Hall

Divine Interventions 3: Nemesis of the Garden

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Hollywood After Dark: Ghosts of Christmas Past

Holiday Reflections *anthology*

Memories To Come

The Doll

Two Men and a Lady *anthology*

If you are a fan of Cricket's Hollywood After Dark vampire stories, be sure to see the first in the series, *All Night Inn*, at Cerridwen Press ([www.cerridwenpress.com](http://www.cerridwenpress.com)), written under the name Janet Miller.



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