

The book cover features a close-up portrait of a young man with light skin and striking blue eyes. He is shirtless, and his expression is neutral as he looks directly at the viewer. The background is a dark, cosmic scene with a vibrant blue nebula and a sliver of a planet's horizon visible in the lower right corner. The author's name, 'Sherrill Quinn', is printed in a large, white, bold, sans-serif font in the upper right quadrant. The title, 'Claiming Hannah', is displayed in the same font style at the bottom, with the word 'Claiming' on the first line and 'Hannah' on the second line.

Sherrill
Quinn

Claiming
Hannah

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...Jax set her on her feet. From behind her, he immediately clamped that broad hand around her wrists, holding them once more behind her back. Ian came out of the other room, a towel draped around his lean waist and another one hanging over one tanned shoulder. His dark brown hair was damp and tousled, his skin still moist from his recent shower.

Green eyes narrowed on her face before his gaze swept up and down her body, taking in her black clothing and boots. “Well, well.” He looked at Jax. “Seems to me you said something about someone’s ass being yours?”

“Mmm. You’re right. I have been talking about discharging my weapon to get him—or, rather *her*—to talk, haven’t I?”

“Listen, guys, you have the wrong idea...” Hannah trailed off as Ian came closer. His stride was loose-hipped. God, he was sex-on-a-stick, a stick that tented the towel he wore.

He brought his face close and whispered, “I don’t think we do, little thief.”

“You tell me where my cows are off to, and it’ll go easier with you with the authorities.” Jax spun her around to face him.

Ian grasped her wrists, keeping them captive behind her back. He moved in, the heat from his body covering her like a living blanket.

Hannah *couldn’t* tell. It’d be handing a death sentence to the defenseless *bovina*, not to mention jail time for her friends...

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CLAIMING HANNAH

BY

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CLAIMING HANNAH
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Suz, Sara and Alison—you're the best!

CHAPTER 1

Jax Marjani jolted awake and knew something was wrong by the silence from the pens. Even as late in the night as it was, the *bovina* had been restless, as if aware of their fate to land on dinner plates in the not-too-distant future. That was, after all, the reason they'd been bred.

And so they usually shifted their weight, stomping their hooves and mooing to each other as if seeking comfort. But today they were unusually quiet. Poor things.

He snorted. "A couple of months alone and you're turning maudlin," he muttered. After finding out his government was in collusion in the attempted wrongful imprisonment of the man who ended up being his brother-in-law—and going

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through imprisonment himself—Jax had left his home planet of Tima Prime and taken a job hauling cargo for his new brother-in-law. The most recent “cargo” was the *bovina*. He was supposed to have merely stopped, loaded the cattle, and taken them to their final destination.

But the ranch manager had quit two months ago, and Jax had promised he’d play the part of cowboy until another manager could be found. He’d taken up residence on this small ranch on O’Kar Six where the *bovina* had been raised. And up until two days ago when his friend Ian Hunter had joined him, he’d been by himself.

He’d found that, though he missed being out in space, the simplicity of the barbarian planet suited him—it provided a place where a man could lick his wounds without a lot of people trying to get him to talk about his feelings. He didn’t need to talk. He just needed to work. Everything would sort itself out in due time.

If it weren’t for those fucking cattle thieves... The animal rights activists had come, leaving their graffiti spread over the side of the barn, and tried to steal his cows and set them free somewhere so they could... What? Eat, sleep, and procreate.

He raised his eyebrows. Now that he thought about it, that didn’t sound like a bad life after all. Food, sleep and hot, randy sex. Wasn’t much else a man needed.

Scowling, he pulled on his boots. Damned animal rights activists. It was a fact of life that some people still ate real meat, not the reconstituted shit those righteous ARAs tried to pass off as a suitable substitute. His brother-in-law, Rhys

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Valorian—the ruler of the planet Nosfer—was a prime example of someone who wouldn't tolerate anything but the real thing. Of course, being a vampire probably had a lot to do with his taste for rare beef.

The quiet clack of metal on metal echoed through the still night. Someone closing the pen gate? It *wasn't* Jax's imagination that the normally vocal cattle were uncharacteristically silent tonight.

He had to see what was up. He didn't bother with a shirt. This area of O'Kar 6, an arid patch tucked between mountain ranges, was warm and humid this time of the year. But he did grab a phase rifle. He was hot, not stupid.

Jax went into the second bedroom and touched Ian's shoulder. The other man came instantly awake.

A residual effect of spending time in prison—you awoke at the slightest sound or touch.

"What is it?" Ian asked, his voice soft and low.

"Rustlers."

Without another word, Ian rolled bare-assed out of bed and yanked on his jeans. Another habit picked up from prison. Or, rather, after prison. Being locked up in a chastity harness and only permitted to whip out the johnson long enough to pee or bathe gave a man a new sense of freedom when he could just let it all hang out.

It also made him hornier than hell when he got out of jail. Jax wouldn't be surprised to hear that Ian had fucked every available woman in the nearby settlement. Hell, the next two settlements, for that matter.

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Once Ian had pulled on his boots, he took his phase pistol from where it rested on a chair beside the bed. Being defenseless in prison had left him with a need to have his weapon nearby. Added to that was the threat caused by the recent incursions onto the ranch by tribesmen from the neighboring territory.

Horny men looking for women were the most dangerous kind of animal and, when they were tired and hungry, they didn't care about things like property rights.

He had no idea what kind of head start the cattle thieves had, so whatever they were going to do they needed to do now. Going outside, Jax walked with quiet treads toward the corrals, keenly aware of Ian to his right and just behind him. Lights bolted to the outside of the barn shed enough illumination over the yard and the pens beyond. When he saw the empty corrals, his jaw clamped. Goddamn sons of...

Someone had stolen his entire herd.

That someone was gonna get a blast up his ass if Jax had anything to say about it.

He'd worked damned hard to keep this herd thriving. It had given him a chance to stay in one place for a while instead of living on his ship, going from one planet to another on a three-quadrant supply run.

Plus, he'd given his word that he'd deliver the *bovina* on schedule. A man just didn't go back on his word.

Dragging his thoughts back to his current problem, Jax squatted and looked at the prints on the ground. Whoever was stealing his herd was leaving a mighty wide trail for him to

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follow.

Must really be wanting that blast up the ass.

Of course, it'd be hard to mask the trail of a hundred head of *bovina*. Not impossible, but most animal rights activists didn't have the kind of blunt it took to purchase that sort of equipment.

When the tracks split up, the two men looked at each other. Jax pointed to himself and then to his left, and Ian nodded and headed toward a small box canyon. Jax watched as the other man proceeded up the path in silence.

From up ahead, Jax heard the low moos of his *bovina*. He crept toward the small clearing he knew was just ahead. The thieves probably had a cargo ship waiting and, even now, were loading the cattle for transport to some safe haven.

Sure enough. The last of the cows were being herded up the gangplank. From the light coming from inside the ship, Jax could see at least three people, which meant a fourth most likely had taken a few head up the canyon as a decoy.

Shit. His buddy could be in some serious trouble. Jax hesitated one moment longer then, seeing the last cow step into the ship and the plank begin to retract, he made the only decision he could. He had to make sure Ian was all right. He could always try to track down his stolen beef; he could never replace a friend.

He whipped around and took off at a run, heels pounding against the hard-packed earth. At the juncture where he and Ian had split up, Jax slowed and began his approach of the canyon with caution.

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Sidling up behind a boulder, he peered around, his gaze darting, trying to see through the darkness. A couple dozen of his cattle bunched at the wall of the small box canyon. Not able to see his friend, he took a chance and called out, "Ian?"

"Keep your head down," Ian yelled, just as a blast from a phase weapon splintered pieces of rock from the boulder near Jax's head.

Jax swore and ducked, keeping the debris out of his eyes. He looked toward where he thought the blast had come from, squinting to focus his vision. In the light from the twin moons he caught a glimpse of the sheen of metal from the other weapon. It was enough.

Putting the stock of his phase rifle to his shoulder, he sighted down the barrel and pulled the trigger. There was a sound of the blast striking the other weapon and a low cry, then twigs snapping as the rustler made a break for it.

Ian came out of his hiding place.

Jax circled around until he met up with his friend. "You all right?"

"Fine." Ian's voice was harsh with restrained anger. "I caught one on my arm, but it's just a scratch. Hardly worth mentioning."

"And yet you mention it." Jax sent him a quick grin, but quickly sobered. "Let's go get the bastard. I want my *bovina* back, and he'll be able to tell me where they're being taken."

"You know how radical some of these ARAs are," Ian muttered. "He may not talk."

"If I have to ram my weapon where the sun don't shine,

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he'll talk. Unless he wants me to unload on his ass."

"I'm with you there." Ian brought his weapon back up and switched on the light.

Jax did the same. And the two cowboys became hunters.

* * *

Hannah Trueblood perched precariously on the branch of a *limlo* tree, trying to keep her hands away from the two-inch thorns that grew from the gray-green bark. It wasn't easy. The thorns were spaced four or five inches apart. She'd been as careful as possible climbing up into the damned thing, but she had tiny scratches from the thorns she hadn't been able to avoid in her hurry to hide.

Thankfully, lush leaves hid her from sight from the men on the ground.

Her right hand was still a little numb from where the phase pistol had been blasted out of it. Her left hand wasn't doing much better—she had a three-inch cactus needle sticking out of the pad of her thumb, and it stung like hell. She pulled the barb free, biting the inside of her cheek to hold in an instinctive yelp of pain.

She stuck her thumb in her mouth and sucked away the blood that beaded from the shallow cut, aware she was bleeding from several other places where she'd brushed up against the shoulder-high *evara* plants—reminiscent of the barrel variety of Earth cacti—that dotted the landscape in this area. Everything on this barbaric planet had pricks, it seemed.

And the men wanted to use theirs all the time. Especially

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here in the Kerba province where the men often publicly “claimed” their women in order to remind other males that the females weren’t available.

For a submissive like her, a planet like O’Kar Six wasn’t a bad place to be. But she wasn’t here to bend over and take it; she was here to save some animals from being slaughtered.

The two *bovina* dealers chasing her had slowed to a stealthy heel-to-toe walk, their weapons at the ready, looking less and less like the romantic cowboy of olden times she’d often pictured in her head, and more and more like modern-day warriors. She’d wounded one—doing no real damage, but pissing the hell out of him, she could tell. The other one, the newcomer to the party, was built like a Kerban barbarian.

Muscles and then some, and not a spare ounce of fat on him, he carried himself with the straight posture of a military man. An alpha male.

He wore only faded blue pants and boots. From the light of the moons she could see the moisture gleaming on his naked torso. As he got closer, her eyes widened. She knew this man. As in *knew*.

She’d just joined up with the local ARA cell a year ago, more for a chance to make a difference somewhere instead of just coasting through her life than from any deep-seated need to ban people from eating meat. Several members had met up on Tima Prime and one night, when she went off by herself, she met Ajax “Call me Jax” Marjani in a pub. He’d taken one look at the chain tattoo around her right wrist—the symbol of a submissive—and suggested a session or two.

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And oh, boy, what sessions they'd been. She still woke up some nights with the memory of her wrists bound behind her back while his big cock reamed her ass. She'd been completely at his mercy, and she'd loved every minute of it.

But she hadn't been ready for anything serious at the time—she was trying to find herself, and so she'd slipped out of the hotel room early the next morning, before he'd awakened. And had questioned that decision every day since then.

What if she'd stayed and they'd talked? Would they have discovered they had more in common than just the characteristics of a dominant to his submissive? What kind of path might her life have taken?

No time to dwell on that now. The men were upon her, pausing beneath her hiding place. Trying to stay as quiet as possible, Hannah took short, shallow breaths through her nose. Hopefully they wouldn't think to look up.

Her heart started banging away against her ribs, so much that the artery in the side of her neck throbbed in time. Thank God these were just two normal human males—no special senses where they could smell her or hear the frantic lurch of her heart.

The men shone the lights from their weapons on the ground, and one of them—the one she'd injured—said, "Here," and started following the false trail she'd had but scant seconds to lay down. *Thank you*, she said silently to her long-dead military father. At least something he'd drilled into her had finally come in useful.

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The bogus trail ended at an area of flat rock.

“Shit.” From the light on their weapons, she could see Jax rub the back of his neck. Muscles rippled in his massive upper arms and shoulders. “We’ve lost him.”

Her, she corrected silently, but happy they’d made the assumption their rustler was a man. Because if she did get away from these two, that misconception could help her elude the authorities they were sure to notify.

“I need those *bovina*,” he went on. “Hell, Ian, I can’t call Rhys and tell him I’ve lost his damned cattle. Only been here two months... I’ll look like a complete fuck-up.”

“You didn’t lose them. They were stolen.” The wounded man’s voice was deep and calm, though still shot with an underlying thread of anger. “Valorian will understand that. Besides, it’s not like he’s gonna do anything to you. He’s married to your sister, after all.”

Valorian. As in King Rhys Valorian? Oh, great God above. She’d helped to steal animals meant for the ruler of Nosfer? She’d thought she was liberating them so they wouldn’t be brutalized by ordinary citizens of the vampire planet.

She sure as hell didn’t want to tangle with the king and a bunch of angry—and hungry—vampire nobles.

The men turned and walked back toward the tree where she crouched twelve feet above their heads. Probing his wounded arm with the tip of his index finger, the first man swore under his breath. He looked over at Jax and said, “Listen, we can at least get the *bovina* in the canyon back to the pens. I’ll go into town in the morning and talk to the

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magistrate, and you can get on the comm link to let Valorian know what's happened. At any rate, we can deliver the few head we have left. That should at least take care of the banquet your sister's planning next week."

Hannah gritted her teeth. She couldn't let those beautiful animals be taken to Nosfer, where God only knew what kind of horrific fate would befall them. She'd never had any dealings with bloodsuckers, though she'd heard plenty of stories. She envisioned a crowd of excited vampires thronging around the poor beasts, fangs curled over their bottom lips and eyes flashing silver with hunger. Fangs that would pierce through the hide of the *bovina* and suck the blood from them until they were drained.

"When I get my hands on that little thief..." Jax's voice was deep and gruff with frustration, and it sent a thrill through her. She'd always had a thing about big tough guys, and this one and his equally annoyed friend were as big and tough as they got.

If either one of them ever did manage to put his hands on her, she had a feeling she'd never be the same.

"At least you didn't get shot."

"Ian, quit bitchin' about it. It's barely a scratch—you said so yourself."

Why in the hell were they hanging out under her tree? *Move on*, she silently urged, wishing that she had telepathic abilities. That was one trait for which she envied the Nosfera.

"Yeah, well, it still hurt." The man called Ian sounded disgruntled and still thoroughly pissed off.

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She wished he'd go be pissed about it someplace else. Her legs were starting to cramp.

"Let's go get my cows," Jax muttered.

The two men walked away from the tree, heading back toward the little box canyon where she'd led the dozen or so *bovina*. She stayed put long after she could no longer hear them, long after her left foot went to sleep.

When she was certain they were gone, she gingerly left her hiding place, cursing softly under her breath when she couldn't avoid the *limlo* thorns, and they pierced her palms in several places. She jumped the last meter to the ground and stuck the pad of her right thumb in her mouth, licking away the blood oozing from a deep puncture.

"Damned tree." Hannah looked around, torn between following the men back to the ranch to try to liberate the *bovina* again and wanting to get the hell out of here. The plan had been that, were she not to be able to hook back up with the group, she would make her way to the largest city in the province and charter a transport from there. Her friends, such as they were, wouldn't wait around for her and jeopardize their mission. They didn't hesitate to place animal lives above those of humans.

She didn't want to see these sweet, gentle creatures being made into a grisly vampire feast. Even though she guiltily admitted she had from time to time enjoyed a good, real steak—though not in recent years—there were more humane ways of butchering animals than by biting them to death. And now that she was here, she just couldn't think of leaving the

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cattle behind. She had no place to hide the animals, yet the thought of them being shipped off to their grisly fate made her heartsick.

Feeling like she was overheating in the black-on-black clothing she wore, she reached up and ripped the hooded mask off her face. She dropped it on the ground and stared in the direction of the ranch. In the end, her soft heart won over common sense. Even though she had a feeling this course of action would come back to bite her in the ass, she headed toward the small ranch.

CHAPTER 2

Hannah peeked through a window and watched the two men inside the main house. She stayed in the shadows created by the harsh angles and planes of the unusual architecture of the two-story structure. A light by the front door kept most of the porch lit up, but not this one spot by the front window.

Jax sprayed Ian's wound with an analgesic that hardened to a polymer bandage. Then he turned his back, and Ian reached out to pluck several cactus needles from his shoulder blade.

"There's not a lot we can do before morning." Ian yanked out another needle, making Jax wince. "We don't have the kind of lights we need to be out roaming around after dark.

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The cattle will be safe enough tonight.”

Jax heaved a sigh. He glanced over his shoulder, clearly trying to see what Ian was doing. “I know,” he said. He faced forward again, and Hannah saw his big hands clench into fists. “Dammit.”

Ian dropped the last cactus needle into a small wastebasket. “Done.”

God, these men were gorgeous. If the situation were different, she’d probably be in there right now playing the submissive to their dominant. Heat rolled through her, sending cream slicking along the folds of her sex. She clamped her thighs together and rolled her hips to try to relieve the ache.

Jax turned toward the window. Hannah gasped and dropped to her belly on the rough wooden planks of the porch. His voice, when it came again, told her he was standing right above where she lay beneath the window. If he slid open the window, leaned out and looked down, he’d see her.

But all he did was mutter a pithy comment about rustlers and their origins and turn away.

Hannah swallowed at her near miss. *Stop fooling around, girl, and get a move on.*

Staying on her belly, she crawled along the porch and down the steps. Now she knew the perspective snakes had. She couldn’t say she liked it.

Once she had the southern wall of the house covering her, she got to her feet and lightly dusted herself off. She looked toward the pens where the few remaining *bovina* munched happily on dried grass.

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Now that she was here, she knew she couldn't go through with it. Really, she'd known it the whole time she trailed the men as they herded the *bovina* back to the corrals. She had nowhere to pen the animals, no place where they'd be safe. All she'd end up doing was stranding them—and her—out in the desert.

It had been an ill-conceived plan from the beginning, but she'd finally felt like she was doing something to justify her existence. Now, though, there was nothing more she could do.

With a last wistful glance toward the peaceful-looking creatures, she turned and started back the way she'd come.

When she smacked into something solid, a startled "Oof!" left her. She would have fallen on her rear if strong hands hadn't reached out and latched around her wrists. She looked up into Jax's scowling face.

Blinking, she stared at him without speaking. This side of the house was in darkness, so she couldn't see much beyond the downward turn of his mouth and the deeper shadows where his eyes were. She knew she should say something to explain what she was doing here, but the longer he was silent, the more frozen her brain became.

"Hannah?" His raspy voice skittered along her nerve endings like a match to flint and, in spite of getting caught—or perhaps because of it—the gruff sound enflamed her to instant arousal.

Hannah opened her mouth and then closed it. She couldn't think of a thing to say. She, who was usually the articulate one of the bunch, was speechless.

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Keeping hold of one of her wrists, he dragged her around the corner and up onto the porch. Once in the light, he took hold of her other wrist and stared down at her. He brought his free hand up and cupped her chin. His gaze skated over her face. Blue eyes glittered with lust. “Looks like you tangled with a cactus and lost,” he mused and leaned down to press a light kiss on a scratch on her cheek. “What’re you doing here?”

When she remained silent, gentle affection turned to hard suspicion. “What’re you doing here?” he repeated. He shoved her hands behind her back, wrapping one big hand around her wrists. The position made her body arch. His gaze went to her breasts, and the heated passion in their depths flared.

Her womb clenched at his show of dominance. She gave her head a mental shake. She wasn’t here for this. And, seeing how he waited patiently for her answer—not patient as in a teacher with a student, but patient like a predator stalking its prey—she inwardly cursed. No one had prepared her for this type of situation. What could she say? *I was out for an evening stroll—in the middle of nowhere—and got lost?*

Nope. That wouldn’t work.

My ship crashed?

Nope.

I stole your cattle?

Hell, no.

His hands tightened on her wrists.

“I...ah, I—”

“You’re one of them, aren’t you? That’s why you’re here.

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You're one of the rustlers." He bent her back slightly, his face coming within inches of hers. "You shot Ian."

Her eyes widened. "No!" Okay, that was a lie, but no way was she going to admit she'd injured his friend.

"I think you did." Without warning, he stooped and folded her over his broad shoulder like a she weighed no more than a bedroll. As he straightened, she tried not to notice the smooth, supple skin of his back or the flex of the muscular ass covered in jeans, but it wasn't easy to ignore so much sexy maleness within pinching distance.

Struggle, you nitwit. Hannah bucked against his shoulder. A big hand smacked her butt, startling a shriek from her. Her body liked that big hand on her ass, because her pussy slicked with cream.

He strode to the door and opened it, carrying her inside. "Ian!" he called out. "Look what I've got."

Jax set her on her feet. From behind her, he immediately clamped that broad hand around her wrists, holding them once more behind her back. Ian came out of the other room, a towel draped around his lean waist and another one hanging over one tanned shoulder. His dark brown hair was damp and tousled, his skin still moist from his recent shower.

Green eyes narrowed on her face before his gaze swept up and down her body, taking in her black clothing and boots. "Well, well." He looked at Jax. "Seems to me you said something about someone's ass being yours?"

"Mmm. You're right. I have been talking about discharging my weapon to get him—or, rather *her*—to talk,

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haven't I?"

"Listen, guys, you have the wrong idea..." Hannah trailed off as Ian came closer. His stride was loose-hipped. God, he was sex-on-a-stick, a stick that tented the towel he wore.

He brought his face close and whispered, "I don't think we do, little thief."

"You tell me where my cows are off to, and it'll go easier with you with the authorities." Jax spun her around to face him.

Ian grasped her wrists, keeping them captive behind her back. He moved in, the heat from his body covering her like a living blanket.

Hannah *couldn't* tell. It'd be handing a death sentence to the defenseless *bovina*, not to mention jail time for her friends. Clamping her lips together, she shook her head.

She felt a momentary unease. But in their encounter a year ago, Jax had been dominant but gentle, so she had no fear he would hurt her. Ian was a wild card, but she couldn't believe Jax would let him hurt her, either. Deep in her gut she knew she was safe.

By the lust in their hard faces, not out of danger completely, though. She fought back a shiver as her arousal ratcheted up another notch.

"Guess she wants you to make her talk," Ian drawled, his voice thick and rough. He rubbed one thumb along her inner wrist, and her heartbeat went mad.

"Yippee-kai-ay," Jax muttered with a feral grin.

Big man in front of her, big man behind. Both so

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handsome, so dominant, her pussy flared with renewed heat.

Desire gleamed in Jax's eyes. She knew she'd see the same lust in Ian's gaze if she looked—she'd heard it in his voice.

The last time she'd felt vulnerable like this had been when she'd been willingly submissive in Jax's grip a year ago, bent to his will on Tima Prime. He made her feel ultra feminine. Incredibly submissive.

As much as the idea of being taken by both of these men, by being *punished*, excited her, it didn't mean she was going to make it easy for them. Submissive or not. "You're not some kind of space cowboy, you know," she spat out, desire warring with anger over what they were allowing to happen to the cattle. She focused on the man in front of her. "You're nothing but an old-time gangster, trafficking in the lives of those poor animals."

Ian laughed. "If he's a gangster, he's a gangster of love. Isn't that right, Jax?"

* * *

Jax leaned in, crowding Hannah against his friend. From the moment he'd grabbed hold of her, his body had gone wild with lust. Now his cock was a hard wedge demanding to be set free. God, he had to drive his dick into this woman again before he went crazy. He didn't know exactly why she'd walked away from him a year ago, though he suspected her quest to "find herself" was the underlying cause. Of course, he never would have expected her to show up in the guise of a cattle thief.

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But first things first. “What I do is legal, baby. You may not like it, but nobody gives a flyin’ fuck ’bout that. What *you* do is illegal. Ill-ee-gull—as in, I could turn your ass over to the magistrate and he’d haul you away, no questions asked.” He tilted his pelvis just enough to let her feel the ridge of his erection riding along the seam of clothing between her thighs.

Her eyes dilated, but not with fear. Fear didn’t make a woman’s nipples go hard and pointed against her shirt. Fear didn’t slick up her sex so that her arousal perfumed the air. Besides, he knew just what a hot little submissive she really was. Her long-sleeved shirt and form-fitting gloves might hide the tattoo, but he knew it was there.

“You’re right,” he went on. “I’m not a space cowboy. And unlike what Ian said...” He shot his friend a hard stare. “I’m not a gangster of love, either. I’m just a man trying to run a business. A business you’ve interfered with.”

“Listen, Maurice—”

“The name’s Marjani. Ajax Marjani, as you well know.” On impulse, Jax cupped one breast and swept his thumb over the pebbled peak.

Her lips parted on a gasp. She pushed against his hand, wordlessly asking for more.

“Damn, you should feel her pulse,” Ian said. “It’s goin’ like a piston on fire.”

Jax could see it hammering in her throat. How much of it was fear and how much was arousal, he didn’t know. But he was going to find out. He had a strong sense that this little minx was up for a bit of domination from him and Ian.

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If there turned out to be more fear than passion, he'd back off. If not... He'd release his load up her ass, for sure. He placed two fingers over her pulse. "I think maybe she *wants* to be restrained and questioned."

Her heartbeat leapt and then settled into a strong, steady rhythm. The tip of her tongue peeked out to stroke over her lips, and she pressed her breast into his palm.

A smile of delight spread across his face. "Ah, yes." He glanced over her shoulder at Ian. "I was right." Looking back at her, he asked in a voice husky with desire, "Though I'm surprised to see what you've been up to lately, that you're still a submissive at heart pleases me no end."

A tide of red rushed from her cleavage right up to her hairline, but she remained stubbornly silent.

"What are you talking about?" Ian moved closer.

Jax stripped off her right glove and slid the sleeve of her shirt up to her elbow, showing the tattoo around her wrist.

Ian's eyebrows rose, and a slow smile spread over his face.

With a growl, Jax slid his hand down her torso, slowly, keeping his gaze fixed to hers. When his fingers dipped beneath the waistband of her slacks, her breath hitched in her throat. As his hand traveled lower, a strangled moan left her. She canted her hips forward.

He slipped his fingers into the soft folds of her sex and found her slick and hot. One long finger dipped into her sheath, and she trembled against him.

Just as slowly he pulled his hand free, wordlessly lifting it and showing the evidence of her arousal to Ian. The other man

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nodded.

Jax spun around and locked the front door, then followed as Ian urged Hannah into the bedroom with the largest bed—Jax’s room. Jax closed that door and locked it, too. Now was not the time to be interrupted by *anyone*.

Ian let her go, and she whirled to face them. Her posture suggested she was ready to run, but she clasped her hands in front of her and watched them warily. She might be a submissive, ready to do his bidding, but she’d also been caught with her hand in the cookie jar and could be in a heap of trouble, and she knew it.

“Now, is that any way to be, honey?” Ian asked. He gripped the towel at his waist. Her brown eyes looked huge in her elfin face as she stared at his hands. She ran her tongue over her lips, and her gaze cut to Jax.

That was definitely the look of desire. Now, to see if she was just as submissive as she’d been before.

CHAPTER 3

“Strip.”

Hannah looked at Jax and shook her head, even as her heart rate tripled and her core gushed so much cream she could feel her panties sticking to her labia. This was what she dreamed about in the middle of the night in her lonely bed—a man to command her passion, to give her what he knew she needed, to take everything she had to give.

And in the darkest of times she’d even dared to dream of more than one man, intent upon her arousal, wringing response after response from her until she was sated.

“I really don’t even know you.” She tried to keep her voice steady so she wouldn’t betray her growing excitement.

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One corner of his mouth tilted up as if he knew she was trying to delay the inevitable. “Oh, don’t worry, sweetheart. In about two minutes you’re going to get to *know* us real well. Now, strip.”

She lifted her chin. Damned bossy man. She didn’t want him to see how much it thrilled her.

He crossed his arms. “You’re not afraid of us,” he said. “You might be afraid of what we’ll make you feel, but you’re not afraid we’ll hurt you. So don’t try to fool me.”

He was right. She crossed her arms, mimicking his stance. “I suppose if I don’t do what you say, you’ll turn me over to the magistrate.”

One dark blond eyebrow rose. “I might just do that anyway, sweetheart. No one steals from me and gets away with it. A couple nights in jail while you’re waiting for the provincial magistrate to respond might make you think twice about doing something like this again.”

A couple of nights in a Kerban jail and she wouldn’t be able to walk for two weeks. A woman without a man was a woman who could be claimed.

She swallowed. He couldn’t be serious. Men usually relaxed if they got what they wanted.

But if he wanted his herd of *bovina* more than he wanted her...she’d be SOL.

Except...she might be able to *persuade* him to think differently.

“Don’t make me tell you again.” Jax propped his fists on his hips, drawing her attention to the center of his body, where

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the bulge at his groin had grown even larger. This dominant-submissive game they played was getting to him, too.

Hannah glanced at Ian and saw the way his cock pushed against the towel wrapped around his hips. When he saw her gaze on him, a small smile tilted one corner of his mouth. He pulled the towel from around his neck and tossed it onto a nearby chair. "Here, maybe this'll make it easier for you." With a jerk of one wrist, he loosened the towel at his waist and let it drop to the floor.

His thick erection jutted straight forward, the tip moist with his arousal. Her pussy clenched. She wanted to taste him, take him deep in her throat until he came.

With a hard swallow, she looked back at Jax and took off her remaining glove. As her fingers went to her waist, she held his gaze. Slowly, she pulled her shirt free from her pants. She drew it over her head and let it fall to the floor, resisting the urge to cover her naked breasts.

"The rest of it." Jax's voice was a croak of sound, betraying the extent of his desire. He wasn't as unmoved as he tried to make her believe he was.

Toe to heel, she pushed off first one boot and then the other, then bent and to draw off her socks. Once she'd pulled them both off, she straightened, her breasts swaying with her movements.

When her hands went to the magnetized closure of her pants, she heard a growl from Ian. "Hurry up, or I'll rip those off you."

From the set of his jaw, she surmised that Jax felt the same

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urgency as Ian. She let her lashes flutter down to cover her eyes, shielding the surge of feminine triumph she felt. Who was in control of whom?

Hannah unfastened her pants and shimmied them over her hips, letting them drop around her ankles. She stepped out of them and hooked her fingers around the waistband of her panties. Before she could do more than wiggle them down an inch or so, Jax's patience apparently ran out.

His muttered, "That's it," came just before he pounced.

He surged forward and ripped her panties away, then picked her up and tossed her onto the bed. She bounced a few times, her bangs flopping into her eyes. When she brushed them away, he was naked and standing beside the bed.

Ian stood on the other side. Both men wore identical expressions of such carnal hunger she couldn't stop the shudder that went through her.

Jax moved to a dresser near the headboard and pushed the small release button. The top drawer slid smoothly open. He reached inside and drew out a few items, which he laid out on the bed.

A smooth crystal phallus, set in a harness that would strap around the very tops of her thighs to hold it inside her. The thing was half as long as her forearm and nearly as thick as her wrist. There was also a small spray applicator of lubricant and a Y-shaped gold chain with three clamps.

Her entire body clenched in arousal.

"Lift your feet." She complied and Jax slipped the loops of the harness around each thigh and drew the contraption toward

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her swollen pussy. Once the loops were just above her knees, he coated the dildo with lube until it gleamed.

Ian leaned over and snagged the chain in one hand, letting it drag across her body as he straightened. He sat on the edge of the bed and bent over her, his mouth whispering over her collarbones and then down between her breasts. He kissed his way over to one diamond-hard nipple, giving it a quick lick.

Hannah jerked and gasped. He chuckled and latched onto the peak with his mouth, sucking on it with strong pulls of his tongue. Warm fingers parted the folds of her sex and she felt the cool, slick slide of the phallus at the opening to her sheath.

Jax began working the dildo inside her, a slow slide in, a short glide out, only for it to stroke back in again. Ian let loose of her nipple and before she could even think to protest she felt the bite of one of the clamps. Her breath hitched at the small pain.

Ian's mouth latched onto her other nipple. Jax continued to tease her with the phallus. By the time he had it fully inserted, her hips were lurching upward, straining for more. He tightened the straps around her thighs, ensuring the dildo would remain seated deep inside her.

Hannah sobbed with need. Jax stroked her folds, spreading the lube and her cream. She quivered, hips bucking. "Please. God, please." She needed a firmer touch, her body hungry for an orgasm. "Jax, please!"

The sharp smack of his hand against her mound shocked her. But it also stoked the fire of her arousal higher.

Ian let loose of her nipple. She tensed, preparing for the

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second clamp. Jax's warm breath blew against her sex, then his tongue flicked her engorged clit at the same moment that Ian attached the clip to the hardened peak of her breast.

Hannah sucked in a sharp breath at the sting. Jax suckled her clit, ramping her arousal higher and higher until she hovered on the brink. When he took his mouth away, she cried out in protest—she was so close!

The third golden clip clamped onto her throbbing clit. Her climax ripped through her, tearing a scream from her throat, bowing her body. Even before the tremors faded, Jax flipped her onto her knees.

“This is what you’ve been craving, isn’t it?” he growled. “To be dominated.”

“Yes,” she moaned. She’d put her desires on hold while she’d been part of the “greater good”. But, God, she’d missed this.

She hung her head, licking her lips as cool lube dripped onto her anus, and his fingers began spreading it around in a circle. The tip of one thick digit speared into her rosebud opening. The gold chain dangled, lightly swaying, tugging at the clamps on her nipples. The small pain sparked a response deep in her core.

“You’re going to give me exactly what I need.” His breath warmed the small of her back just before he pressed a kiss there.

Hannah bit her lip. Hot cream flooded her sex as his finger pressed deeper inside her. With the phallus in her pussy, even his finger felt thick. Too thick. She shivered with excitement

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and dread at the thought of him ramming his cock into her ass.

It would be too much.

It wouldn't be enough.

"Over and over, you're going to satisfy me. Satisfy *us*." Another finger joined the first and he thrust deeper, scissoring them to stretch the tight ring of muscles. She gasped at the stinging pressure, but pushed back against him for more.

"Open your mouth and show Ian just what a good little submissive you are."

She should say no. Any captive worth her salt would refuse to cooperate with her jailors. But with these two men...and that thick, juicy cock right in front of her face...

The fat head blushed dark with Ian's lust, and a drop of pre-cum pearled in the slit. His shaft lengthened even more, jutting upward toward his belly.

She opened her mouth.

His musky, spicy scent hit her nostrils as he guided the thick stalk of flesh between her lips. She began to suck, gently at first, then with increased suction. He groaned and brought one knee up to brace against the bed.

Hannah pressed her head forward, taking him deeper, then pulled back, tightening her lips. Wanting to focus completely on the feel of him in her mouth, she closed her eyes.

Strong hands clasped her head, fingers lacing through her curls. Ian shuddered and groaned again, and she reversed her stroke, taking him deeper and deeper until the big head hit the back of her throat.

Jax prodded her ass with the lubricated tip of his cock. He

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pressed in. “Oh, yeah,” he groaned. “This is gonna be good.”

She gasped around the hard shaft between her lips and faltered for a moment as her anus was stretched by Jax’s thick length. Fire raced up her back as he pushed in a few centimeters more. Then he pulled out, leaving flames of a different kind in his wake, before pressing back in again.

He felt so big. Thick, forcing her to spread. And strong. Even if she’d wanted, she couldn’t have kept him out. Feeling conquered, *possessed*, she moaned.

“Suck!” Ian commanded, his fingers tightening in her hair.

She sucked, pulling back from his cock until she held only the head between her lips. Salty fluid hit her tongue and she drew away, letting him leave her mouth with a wet *pop*. She pointed her tongue and dipped into the slit to scoop out his essence.

* * *

Jax worked his way into her ass millimeter by millimeter, shuddering as her strong muscles clenched around him. The sight of his dick disappearing inside her clasp channel and Ian being pleased with her mouth made him half-crazy with lust.

God, she was tight. And hot—so hot he was about to burn alive. With a low groan he pushed forward until his balls rested against the plump folds of her sex. Sensations seared their way up his spine with an intensity that threatened to blow right through his skull.

Gritting his teeth, he drew out until just the tip of his cock

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was held in her snug channel. Then he started to thrust.

She met him stroke for stroke, pushing her ass back against him, moaning around Ian's thick cock. As he increased the speed of his thrusts, ramming into her faster, harder, the pleasure wound inside him like a coiled spring about to burst.

He leaned over her, slipping his hands underneath to finger the clamps on her nipples. He twisted them lightly.

She mewled and shivered, writhing in his arms, her pussy and ass clamping down in her orgasm. He saw Ian's hips start to jerk faster, shuttling his hard shaft in and out of her mouth. His friend stiffened and shouted as his climax tore through him.

Jax brought his hands back to Hannah's hips, fingers digging into her as he reamed her ass with short, hard jabs. The spring coiled tighter and tighter and then broke free. He pistoned into her once, twice, his hunger ruthless. Then he could do nothing more than hold still against her and roar out his own climax.

He collapsed against her, having enough presence of mind to roll to his back, but kept his cock seated deep inside her. He closed his eyes and panted, the passion still so thick in his mind he had a hard time remembering his own name.

He and Ian had shared women before, but it had been nothing like this. Hannah was a true submissive, yet stubborn, with a mind of her own. He'd often thought about her, wondering where she was and what—and who—she was doing.

And, in unguarded moments, he'd missed her. Even after

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one night, at least on a subconscious level he'd recognized something in her, something that could complete him, make him a better man.

Except that would mean settling down, and he wasn't sure he was ready to do that just yet. Especially not after having spent time in prison where he couldn't just pick up and go whenever he wanted. Having a woman in his life would put too many restrictions on him.

That's what he told himself, anyway.

He heard her gasp, and he opened his eyes. Ian held one nipple clamp in his hand and was reaching for the other one. He removed it as well, and she gasped again as blood rushed back into her compressed flesh.

Ian released the harness from around her thighs, and started to pull the phallus out of her vagina. She shivered and whimpered, and a slow grin spread across his face. "I think she wants more," Ian said, his voice deep and raspy.

Jax bumped his hips against her buttocks, driving his burgeoning erection deeper into her ass. "Then let's give her more."

Ian started thrusting the dildo in and out, fast and deep and hard, in contrast to Jax's almost lazy reaming of her ass. Jax clenched his jaw as he felt the slide of the phallus against his cock, only a thin barrier of flesh separating the two hard lengths. When Ian dipped his head to her sex, he knew the other man was licking through her slick folds from the slurping sounds coming from between her legs.

Within only a few minutes, she was screaming in another

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climax, her body stiff and quaking against Jax. That was all it took for him to empty himself inside her steamy depths.

When she settled down again, Ian stood, his cock once more straining away from his body, the head ruddy and moist. "I believe I want a piece of that ass," he muttered. His green eyes gleamed with passion. "I haven't had a chance to really pay her back for wounding me."

She gasped out a "Wait just a minute!" then moaned as Jax pulled slowly out of her abused ass.

Ian grasped her ankles and slid her around until her legs dangled over the edge of the bed, then he flipped her over, big hands going to her hips to position her the way he wanted.

"But it's only a flesh wound, I heard you say so." Hannah peered over her shoulder, her bangs tousled and sticking to her sweaty forehead.

Jax climbed off the bed and watched as Ian slicked up his dick with lubricant and then began working his way into her ass.

"It's still a wound," Ian growled, and rammed home.

Her scream was one of pleasure-pain. Her neck bowed until she rested her forehead against the mattress. Ian's buttocks flexed as he drove into her. Reaching beneath her body, his fingers found her clit, and he started strumming her.

When she came this time, it was just as strongly as before. Jax watched her head twist helplessly against the bed, tears streaming down her face.

"Oh, God, please!" She pushed back against Ian and pled for more. "Fuck me harder."

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“Happy to oblige.” Ian’s response was ground out from between clenched teeth. His grin faded, and he plunged into her again and again, the force of his thrusts shaking the bed.

She screamed and shuddered as her climax roiled through her. His face flushed, Ian shouted as his own release came. Then he collapsed on top of her, his back shiny with sweat and heaving with his harsh breaths.

Jax glanced away for a few moments, trying to calm down his own randy dick that must’ve thought he was a teenager, the way it was acting. He looked back at the couple on the bed in time to see his friend carefully pull out of Hannah.

When she winced, Ian murmured, “It’s all right, darling. A nice hot bath will help ease those aches and pains.”

Jax lifted her into his arms. Following Ian, he carried her into the bathroom. “You’re right, Ian. A bath will be better than the sonic shower.”

Ian nodded and turned on the taps, letting the tub fill.

By the time Jax lowered her into the warm water, Hannah was nearly asleep.

He brushed the hair away from her face and met Ian’s eyes. Whatever Ian saw on his face, he gave a brief nod and turned away. “I’ll just go clean up in the ranch hand quarters,” he muttered, leaving them with their privacy in the only bathroom in the house.

Jax turned back to Hannah. He knew a nice, long soak would ease her sore muscles, but he was afraid if he left her in here on her own she’d fall asleep and drown. So he climbed in behind her, settled her between his legs and took the cleansing

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cloth in his hand. He wet it and soaped it up, then started gently running it over her skin.

She murmured and leaned more heavily against him. From her soft breathing, he figured she *had* fallen asleep. He smiled. Finding his cattle was still important, but they could wait for now. He'd spend the night with this woman in his arms.

"Tomorrow's another day," he murmured, and held her close.

CHAPTER 4

Hannah heard Jax's muttered words, and it woke her right up out of her doze. She kept her eyes closed, her breathing slow and even, though her mind raced.

She had to get away, because it sounded like he still meant to persuade her to tell him where his *bovina* were. And while the sex was the hottest she'd ever had—hotter than hot—she would not betray those animals or her friends.

If she could just ignore the deep pang in the vicinity of her heart, the one that warned her that walking away from this man again would be a mistake.

Jax bent her forward and ran the cloth down her back. The strong arm around her waist held her securely while he gently

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bathed her. He brought her back against his chest and slipped the cloth between her legs, parting her folds to gently cleanse away their combined juices and lubricant.

She shivered and moaned, pressing her head against his shoulder as her still-sensitive flesh flared at the touch of the slightly abrasive cloth. He murmured something and placed a kiss against her temple. Then he urged her to lean forward and the cloth slid between her buttocks, rubbing gently over her anus.

Hannah winced and tried to move away from him.

“Hang on there, darlin’.” His arm tightened around her waist. “I know you’re sore, but I need to get you clean.”

After a few moments, he quickly cleansed himself. Getting out of the tub, he lifted her out and set her on her feet, then grabbed a towel and lightly scrubbed her dry. He dropped the towel and swung her into his arms. Back in the bedroom, he placed her on the bed and pulled the covers up to her chin.

She closed her eyes and turned her face away from him, afraid he’d see she was no longer drowsy. Her mind raced as she formulated a plan of escape.

“Poor little sprite.” Ian’s voice came from the doorway. The low tones held sympathy and a large dose of humor. “Looks like we wore her out.”

“Hmm.” Fingers lightly stroked over her cheek. She felt Jax’s warm breath just before he placed a soft kiss on her forehead. “I’ll let her rest for now.”

The two men left the room, closing the door behind them.

Hannah immediately pushed back the covers and rolled out

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of bed. Her backside protested the quick movement, and she stilled, wincing. Damn. Part of her wished Jax had kept her in the tub longer than he had. The other part knew she needed to get out of here, aches or no aches.

Even though it was still dark, she should be safe enough to get to the nearest settlement. Thank God she wasn't in Mabon territory—the warriors there took a woman alone as an invitation to hold a public claiming. And while she might consider having sex in public, she wanted it to be at a time and place—and with the man—of her own choosing.

But the Kerban warriors weren't like that. So she should be all right.

She gathered up her clothing and stared for a moment at her ruined panties dangling from one finger. "Guess I won't be wearing these," she muttered and let them drop to the floor. She stepped into her loose-fitting pants and pulled them up, fastening them quickly. Once she'd dragged her shirt over her head, she left it hanging loose over her waist.

Socks, then boots, and she was ready to go. She tiptoed to the door and pressed her ear to it. The low murmur of voices told her both men were still up, so the only way out was the window.

"Dammit. I need those cattle." Jax's voice came louder and she jerked away, afraid he was coming in. But then his voice faded, and she realized he was pacing in the other room. She crept back to the door to listen again.

"Valorian will know it wasn't your fault," Ian said. "Why are you so worked up over this?"

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“They stole my cows!”

“It’s more than that. I wanna know why.”

There was silence for a moment, then Jax said, “My sister’s married to him.”

“Yeah. So?”

Hannah could picture Jax in her mind’s eye, his hand rubbing over the back of his neck. She closed her eyes. How could she *know* that about him?

“It’s because of me she ended up with Rhys.”

There was another pause. “I thought she loved him.” Ian’s voice held confusion.

“She does.”

“Then I don’t see the problem.”

There was a loud thud as if someone—Jax, probably—had slammed his hands down onto a hard surface. “I don’t want the King of the Nosfera to look like he has a *dwible* for a brother-in-law.”

Ian snorted a laugh.

“Yeah, laugh it up,” Jax snarled. “You’re not the one standing here lookin’ like a dickhead. I gave him my word. All I have is my reputation, and those fucking rustlers have put a serious dent in it.”

Oops. “Fucking” and “rustlers” didn’t bode well for her.

It was time to go. Hannah backed away from the door and went to the window. She didn’t think it would be long before Jax would be in to check on her, and she needed to get as much of a head start as possible.

She unlatched the window and pushed it open. It gave a

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slight creak, and she froze, holding her breath. Her pulse thundered in her ears. Keeping her gaze fixed on the door, she waited. When neither man came, she exhaled slowly and threw one leg over the sill. Five minutes later she was away from the house and running for all she was worth, going south. If she could get into Bakari territory, where women were in control, she'd be safe.

Jax and Ian would be stupid to travel across the border and take the chance of being captured by the warrior women there. Two hard, virile men would be highly prized, captured and chained before they even knew they were in trouble.

And then it would be the men who were "claimed." If she got enough distance between her and them, they'd realize the futility of following her.

An hour later she stopped at a small stream. Her shirt stuck to her skin, and her tongue felt thick and dry. Once she'd quenched her thirst, she leaned against a boulder to rest. There was no sign of a pursuit, but she knew they must have surely discovered her missing by now.

After a few minutes, she pushed away from the boulder and started on her way again. She figured she had less than an hour before dawn came—already the sky was beginning to lighten—and about two kilometers to the border. Then she'd be home free.

Hannah skirted around a fluffy-looking cactus and nearly ran into an evava plant. She skidded to a halt, but not before one of the wicked barbed needles got stuck in her nose.

"Ow!" She stomped her feet at the pain and went cross-

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eyed trying to focus on the needle. With tears in her eyes, she reached up and yanked the offending barb out. She cursed and rubbed her nose. Her fingers came away sticky with blood. “Oh, this is just perfect,” she muttered.

Along with tired feet and an aching back, now she had a nose that thought it was a pincushion. Not to mention her sore bum.

“I am so freaking tired of pricks.”

A brawny arm wrapped around her from behind and, over her shriek of fright, an unfamiliar male voice said, “I’m very sorry to hear that from an unclaimed female.”

* * *

Just after daybreak, Jax hunkered down in front of an evara plant and studied the muddled footprints. Glancing up at Ian, he said, “She was here.”

“Yep. And about five Mabonites from the looks of these boot prints.” Ian squatted beside Jax and pointed to a distinctive heel print in the sand—a line drawn into a circle, symbolizing a cock penetrating a cunt. Frowning, he reached out and touched a small brownish-red spot on a flat stone in the sand. “Blood.”

Jax’s heart jammed in his throat. As angry as he had been when he’d discovered Hannah had run off on him, he was now just as scared. Mabon warriors weren’t known for their patience. To them, a woman alone was a woman available to be claimed. “If their Dar was with them...”

“As tribal chieftain, he would have first right to a

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claiming,” Ian finished. He stood and looked around. “It doesn’t appear as though it happened here, so she may still be all right.”

“But for how long?” Jax surged to his feet, hands clenched at his sides. “Damned little... I wouldn’t have hurt her.” He turned his bewildered gaze on his friend.

Ian grimaced. “She didn’t look scared to me,” he said, his own gaze thoughtful. “But I think she knew we planned to press her for information on your *bovina*. She strikes me as a stubborn little cuss. I mean, for her to come back to the ranch after we’d almost caught her...” He shook his head. “I think *that’s* what made her run—she was afraid she might give up the location of those cows.”

As if the cattle mattered now.

When Jax had gone in to check on Hannah—he peered at the glowing readout on his wristwatch—four hours ago, he’d been furious to find her gone. Furious because she didn’t trust him, although why she should was anybody’s guess. Just because he’d fucked her didn’t guarantee a happily-ever-after.

And furious that she’d walked away from him. Again. Even as he reminded himself that settling down sure as hell wasn’t in his plans, the disappointment that twisted his gut had been just as powerful as the anger.

He didn’t want to look too closely at that. But he couldn’t leave her in the hands of the men on this planet. She’d find herself with a chain around her neck and adorned with her new owner’s nipple and clit rings before she had time to blink.

Jax scrubbed the back of his neck, lifting the sweat-

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dampened hair off his nape. “I swear, when I get hold of her, I’m gonna spank her little butt ’til it glows.”

He forced down his body’s instinctive reaction to the mental image of a naked Hannah stretched out over his lap, her buttocks pink from his hand, her sex wet and swollen with her arousal.

Because a sweet submissive like her sure as hell would be aroused by a spanking.

Ian’s gaze followed the boot prints. “Looks like they’re headed into the settlement. I know the local Dar there. Chances are he’s planning to put her up for a public claiming to give his men some sport. That’s what he usually does. Maybe we can head them off.”

Jax nodded and started walking again, soon breaking into an easy lope, Ian at his side. He needed to get to Hannah before she got herself into even more trouble.

CHAPTER 5

Jax and Ian took up positions on opposite sides of the *lek*—a grassy area approximately twenty meters in diameter where claimings took place—so that, when the opportunity presented itself, at least one of them would be ready to intercede for Hannah.

The thought that the intercession would be in the form of a public claiming didn't bother Jax in the least. There was enough of the barbarian in him to relish the idea of proving to other men that *this* feisty female was his.

He glanced around the grassy enclosure, looking closely at the women to make sure Hannah hadn't already been claimed. He didn't see her and heaved a sigh of relief.

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His gaze tracked around the small *lek* again. Two wooden poles—roughly twenty centimeters in diameter and carved to look like erect cocks—stood silent sentinel at the north and south sides, with hooks at various levels where slave chains could be attached, depending on whether the woman was prone, on her knees or standing.

On a nearby bench, a naked woman lay on her back being fucked by a brawny warrior. His big hands clasped her hips as he slammed into her, making her breasts bounce with each jab of his hips. Her head was thrown back, her mouth opened with her loud cries of ecstasy. The gold nipple rings with the connecting chain showed her to be the man's wife.

On the grass not that far away from them was another couple. The man was on his knees with the woman's legs draped over his shoulders, his mouth buried between her thighs. Her keening moans loudly broadcasted her building arousal.

Which was what a public claiming was all about. Men showing the watching warriors that they were able to completely pleasure their women.

More moans coming from behind him made Jax turn. In a small alley between shops, a big warrior plunged his cock into a naked woman who had her legs wrapped around his hips. Pushing her back to the wall, he roughly fucked her while he bent to suck at her distended nipples.

"Whole lotta fuckin' goin' on," Jax muttered. Reaching down, he adjusted his dick in pants that were much too tight.

A sudden commotion brought his gaze back to the *lek*.

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People made way for the local Dar, who strode to the center of the square. Two women followed him—a wild-eyed brunette and Hannah. Both women's hands were restrained behind their backs, and they were naked except for shiny silver nipple rings.

Silver, the color of availability.

The tribal chieftain held chains in each hand. Both chains branched out into a Y shape, the ends of which were attached to the rings in the women's nipples. Being tethered this way, neither female had any choice but to follow the Dar wherever he went.

Hannah looked scared, but put on a tough front, a scowl on her face and mutiny in her eyes. "That's my girl," Jax murmured and worked his way to the front of the crowd.

The Dar gestured toward the dark-haired woman. "Who will lay claim to this one? She is beautiful, but I warn you: she is willful and rebellious. A challenge to any man who would take her." He jangled the chain. "Her former mate died in battle two summers ago. Her time of mourning is now over, and she is ready for a new mate. Who will claim her?"

A man on the other side of the square, standing near Ian, stepped forward. A crossbow was strapped to his bare back, and a phase pistol rested in a holster on his muscled thigh. His erection bulged beneath the leather breechclout he wore. "I will."

As another man shouted out his desire for the woman, the Dar held up the hand that grasped the chain attached to the brunette's nipple rings. The action stretched her nipples taut,

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forcing her to her tiptoes to relieve the pressure. Even so, her dark gaze latched onto the big warrior who'd spoken first.

It looked to Jax as if this had been pre-arranged.

"Today it is the first man who speaks who is given the right of Claiming," the Dar said. "Marcellus, come forward."

Yep. For the Dar to not allow the men to postulate to see who was the biggest and baddest meant he'd worked something out for this couple. That might just work in Jax's favor.

Marcellus walked over, taking the end of the chain the tribal leader handed to him. The dark-haired woman looked at him from beneath her lashes then, as he got close enough, she kicked out at him. A slow smile spread over his face. "Just like the *zitma* bird—showing her interest and then pretending reluctance. I shall enjoy taming this one."

He led the woman over to one of the giant wooden phalli. Pushing her against the pole, he positioned her breasts so the smooth wood was nestled between them. He released the clamp that held the wrist manacles together. With her hands in front of her, he clipped the restraints together, attached his end of the chain to the manacles, then drew her hands up and attached the restraints to hooks far above her head. Thus placed, her nipples were pulled upward as well. The woman's face bore a look of discomfort. When Marcellus leaned down and licked the tip of one breast, discomfort mixed with desire.

But then she kicked out at him again. His smile faded, and he brought one hand down on her naked ass. Hard. The woman squealed in pain and did a little jig, no doubt trying to

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lessen the sting. She quickly stilled as her movements put more strain on her stretched nipples.

"I did not tell you to dance," the big man said, and smacked her other buttock.

This time she held still, though she bit her lower lip and sent him a look that promised retribution.

He responded with a loud laugh. Leaning forward, he murmured something to her that Jax couldn't hear, but it was enough to make the woman blush.

Jax glanced back toward Hannah. Her cheeks were pale, making her eyes seem huge in her face as she watched what unfolded before them. He could see she was terrified the same thing would happen to her.

While she *would* be publicly claimed, it would be by him, and he'd never treat her so roughly.

At least not in public. That she had an ass-beating coming was definite.

Another loud slap sounded, then another and another, drawing Jax's attention back to the pair at the pole. Marcellus ran his hand over the woman's now-red buttocks, pressing lightly, eliciting a moan from her. He moved his hand between her legs and brought it back out again, showing the spectators the viscous evidence of her arousal.

"She likes being spanked, this one does." Marcellus speared two fingers into her cunt and pumped in and out of her a few times, then inserted the same two fingers through the snug ring of her anus.

When she moaned and wriggled, he crowed, "The little

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tunc likes her ass reamed, too.” He put his other hand over his erection and squeezed. “It’s a good thing I have just the tool for the job.”

The men in the crowd roared with laughter while the woman’s face flared even brighter.

From a pouch around his waist Marcellus pulled out a pair of manacles, which he fastened around each of her ankles. He anchored them to ground hooks Jax hadn’t seen before now. Then, his expression growing intense with lust, the man lowered himself to a sitting position facing the crowd, put his hands on her upper thighs and pulled her toward him.

The action brought her pussy closer to his face, but it also put more strain on her nipples. The woman moaned and tried to resist, but with her feet now restrained she couldn’t get any leverage. She had no choice but to be in whatever position he wanted.

He slid his fingers into her backside again. As he began thrusting them in and out, he began spanking her in a rhythm that had her crying and writhing, and all the men around the *lek* groaning.

“By Mabon’s balls!” A man next to Jax pushed his loincloth to one side. Fisting his hand around his hard shaft, he started stroking, rolling his hips slowly, his gaze riveted to the claiming taking place in front of him. Jax studied the man’s face. From the tribal tattoo that covered one cheek, he realized the warrior was a Mabonite.

Jax slid another look to Hannah. A tear rolled down one of her cheeks, flushed now with...what? Embarrassment,

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humiliation for the other woman and, just maybe, a hint of arousal?

God knew *he* was aroused.

He looked back toward the couple at the pole just as Marcellus put his mouth to her sex. In a matter of moments the woman shuddered against him in an orgasm, which seemed to be the signal the barbarian was waiting for. He withdrew his fingers from her rectum and scooted out from between her legs. Getting to his feet, he freed his erection from his breechclout and rubbed it through her wet folds, slicking his cock with her juices. Guiding himself with one hand, he began forcing his hard length into her ass.

By the way she pushed back against him, shuddering, her voice high and thin as she cried, “Master!” Jax knew they’d done this before.

With everyone’s gazes fixed to Marcellus and his woman, Jax looked at the chieftain and waited for the next woman—Hannah—to be offered up. Jax had to be the first one to claim her. There was no other choice.

He saw the Dar’s chest rise with his inhalation, then the man called out, “And who will claim *this* woman?”

“I do.” Jax spoke before anyone else. Stepping forward, he kept one hand lightly on the phase pistol on his hip, though he didn’t think he’d face a challenge, not after what the Dar had said earlier. “The woman belongs to me.”

The relief on Hannah’s face outweighed whatever misgivings she might be feeling about seeing him again. In fact, he’d almost swear she looked happy to see him.

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Probably was. *Better the cock you know than one you don't.*

The warrior who'd been standing beside Jax and masturbating stepped forward, his thick cock still jutting from his groin. He was as unconcerned with his nudity as all of the other men seemed to be. "I have first right to the woman," he said, scowling at Jax. He put one hand on the sheathed sword at his side. The other hand wrapped around his shaft and tugged. "She was alone when my men and I came upon her. I captured her—I claim her."

"You were trespassing on my land, and the capture was illegal. Mabonites have no right to capture women in Kerban territory." Jax put his palm on the handle of his phase pistol. "She's *my* woman. She belongs to me."

The chieftain looked from Jax to the warrior. "Is what he says true?" he asked the man, motioning toward Jax. "Is this capture the result of an excursion into our territory?"

The warrior blustered for a moment and then, lips clamped firmly shut, he quieted, though the look on his face indicated the truth of the matter.

The chieftain frowned. "You did not capture this woman in your own territory; therefore, your claim is not valid." He looked at Jax with raised eyebrows. "You say she belongs to you, yet when she was taken, there were no rings of ownership on her nipples or between her thighs." To make his point, he put one hand between her legs and began playing through the soft folds of her sex. At the same time he jerked lightly on the chain, which in turn tugged on the nipple rings.

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It had to hurt, since the piercings were so new.

Sure enough, Hannah whimpered and tried to move away from him, but he tightened his hold on the chain. She bit her lip and held still, though her lashes fluttered down to cover tear-filled eyes.

Jax clenched his jaw. Fuck. This had better not get out of hand, or it could get messy. He glanced across the way at Ian and saw his friend standing alert, his phase pistol in one hand that was partially hidden behind his thigh.

Looking back at the Dar, Jax said, "The ring ceremony was to take place early this morning, but she ran from me." He let a grin curl his lips. "She's young and doesn't yet realize that I am master of her passion." His smile faded, and he met her gaze. "But she will."

The cries of carnal pleasure coming from the other woman echoed through the square. Jax held out his hand. There was a slight pause during which the chieftain continued to stroke Hannah's pussy, then the Dar placed the end of the chain across Jax's palm. "Pleasure her well, friend," the barbarian leader murmured. "For if you do not, there are others here who will gladly take your place."

CHAPTER 6

If her hands hadn't been tied behind her back, Hannah would have hugged Jax, so great was her relief to see him. Regardless that he'd threatened to turn her over to the magistrate, which meant she could've ended up here in the public square anyway, she would still rather he be the one to "claim" her than anyone else.

She followed him to the vacant phallic pole at the far edge of the grassy area. She couldn't help but allow her gaze to track it all the way to the top, where it flared out in a bulbous head complete with what appeared to be semen drops carved into the wood. With a slight grimace, she looked around at the crowd, not allowing her gaze to linger on any particular man.

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That could be seen as an invitation to issue a challenge to Jax and his claim.

But one man caught—and held—her attention. Ian stood only a few meters away, his stance tense, one hand wrapped around the grip of a phase pistol. She jerked her gaze to Jax's back. "Jax?"

"Just do what I say when I say it," Jax responded in a low voice. He gave a brief nod to Ian, then reached behind her and loosened the clip that held the wrist restraints together. "And don't forget to call me Master."

Relieved, she brought her arms around to the front, wincing as the circulation began flowing freely again.

In a loud voice he said, "On your back, wench."

If she hadn't known he was playing to the crowd, she would've given him what-for for calling her "wench." As it was, there were a lot worse things he could call her and, if he could get her out of this mess, he could call her just about anything he wanted.

She'd heard what the Dar told him. There were dozens of men here who looked like they couldn't wait to rape her. If she had to have forced sex, it would be with her sexy, dominant cowboy.

And it wouldn't be forced, not really. She wanted him with a fervor she'd never felt before. She just wasn't thrilled about doing it in public.

But the louder the men shouted and the more rigid cocks she could see being stroked as they watched her and Jax, she discovered she wasn't all that averse to having sex with Jax

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again even in front of a crowd.

Put her in a gang of barbarians and her submissive tendencies really came out to play.

“Yes, Master.” Hannah slowly went to her knees, then shifted to her back, trying to keep her interesting bits as concealed as possible, even knowing she would soon be completely on display.

Jax knelt beside her and clipped the wrist restraints together again. Raising her hands, he hoisted the silver manacles over a hook on the pole just above her head, high enough to give her less ability to try to lever her hands off it, but not high enough to cause strain to her shoulders.

The sounds of sex were all around her, and she couldn’t help but look around the small enclosure.

“Just look at me.” Jax’s gentle voice brought her gaze back to him. His eyes glittered with lust and a heightened awareness she’d only ever seen before in military men, mixed with a tenderness that stole her breath. He unstrapped his holster and placed it on the ground next to her leg. Within easy reach, she noted.

Broad hands went to the hem of his form-fitting polylinen shirt, and he pulled it off over his head. Then he unbuttoned the top tab of his jeans and knelt between her legs. “Don’t pay attention to them. Keep your eyes on me, *limlana*. Only me.”

“Calling me ‘thorny flower’ won’t exactly get me in the mood.” Nerves and fear made her abrupt. Men calling out to him drew her attention, but she doggedly kept her gaze on his.

At her response, his blue eyes lightened with a spark of

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humor. “Haven’t you ever seen the flower of the *limlo* tree, Hannah? While the tree itself is nondescript and covered with thorns, its flower is soft and lush, pink and peach fading to a creamy white center...” He put his hands on her knees and guided her legs apart. His heated gaze fixated on the plump folds of her sex. “The locals call it the ‘blossom of heaven’ because its fragrance is so sweet.” He looked into her eyes. “And I’m told the nectar from the flower makes a perfume that acts like an aphrodisiac to the men here.”

“Like they need any more encouragement,” she muttered.

His expression remained intense, though humor lingered in his eyes. “Well,” he drawled as he bent closer to her pussy, his hands cupping her buttocks to raise her up to meet his descending mouth, “I aim to give them plenty of encouragement—to go find their own women and leave mine the hell alone.”

She thrilled at his masterful tone.

The first touch of his tongue made her suck in her breath. The next couple of swipes made her shiver. With another lick her legs fell open even farther, and the sounds of the crowd faded as her entire world spiraled down to what was happening between her thighs.

Jax swirled his tongue at her opening. She tensed, anticipating his next touch. When his tongue plunged into her sheath and stroked her sensitive walls, Hannah couldn’t hold back a moan. He withdrew, and she moaned again at the loss.

His tongue speared back in. As it left her once more, his moan reverberated through her slick flesh. “God, you taste so

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good, *limlana*.” He slid the flat of his tongue up her folds. “Nectar of the gods.”

He put one arm around her waist to support her. As he started flicking the tip of his tongue through her folds, he slowly pressed a long finger inside her vagina. He set a steady rhythm. In. Out.

In.

Out.

Then a second finger joined, and a third. The movements of his hand came faster and harder. His mouth latched onto her clit, and he suckled her so hard his cheeks hollowed. Her hips instinctively lifted, seeking more, pumping against his hand and mouth.

Her body tightened. When he curled his fingers and stroked against the sensitive bundle of nerves inside her sheath, her orgasm exploded through her like fireworks. She closed her eyes and cried out, her back bowing as she hung from her restraints, her lower body still cradled by one strong arm.

Before the last tremor had faded, he pushed his cock through her clenching muscles. His jaw was tight, the cords in his neck straining as he pressed all the way in until his balls slapped against the curve of her ass.

* * *

She was going to kill him with pleasure.

“God, you’re so hot, so tight.” Careful to keep his weight off her tender breasts, Jax leaned down and pressed a kiss

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against the corner of her mouth, then slid his tongue over the seam of her lips. She opened for him, and he forged inside. When she sucked on his tongue, it sent shock waves straight to his rigid dick.

With no choice but to obey the demands of his body, he fucked into her with slow thrusts, savoring each ripple of slick, wet muscle around his cock. He heard the calls of encouragement from the assembled warriors, but tuned them out. His entire focus was on the woman beneath him. He'd thoroughly enjoyed taking her in the ass last night, but now, feeling the strong grip of her hot pussy...

He was just sorry he was getting reacquainted with her creamy depths in front of a raucous audience.

Unable to resist the lure of her pretty breasts, Jax kept lazily thrusting into her and leaned over her to lightly touch the tip of his tongue to one pointed nipple. She gasped and shivered, making the golden chain jingle.

He glanced up at her face. "Did that hurt?"

White teeth clamped onto her lower lip. "Yes. No." A blush stole over her face. "A little. But I like it."

He felt that admission like a fist around his dick. His little submissive had a small streak of masochism, which he'd suspected from the way she'd reacted to having those clamps on her nipples last night.

That was all right by him—he knew all too well that sometimes a little pain could enhance the pleasure.

With careful attention he bent to her breast again. He licked over the tight nub and flicked the ring back and forth.

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Her gasping moan was encouragement enough that she liked what he was doing. Jax switched to her other breast and lightly tongued the ring.

Her vagina tightened around him. He answered that call, too, speeding up the rhythm of his thrusts until he was pounding into her. She brought her legs up and clasped her ankles at the small of his back, her hips rising to meet his downward lunges.

Easing her onto the grass, he withdrew his arm from around her and brought his right hand to her clit, rubbing it with his thumb. He looked down, watching his thick length driving into her body. His balls drew up tight against his body. Jax pistoned into her—short, hard jabs, his breathing labored, fire dancing through his testicles and up his spine.

Hannah was giving little mewling cries with each lunge of his cock. Eyes squeezed tight, she tossed her head back and forth. Her face and neck flushed, and she cried out, crashing her hips up into his as her climax made her clamp down on his cock. Her grasping channel triggered his orgasm. He stiffened, shouting his release, his cum jetting into her with thick, hot spurts.

When he could once again form a coherent thought, he leaned down and kissed her, then slowly withdrew from the sweet well of her body. She shuddered, her inner muscles trying to clasp him, and her eyelids swept up to reveal eyes bright and glowing.

“You okay?” He shoved his cock into his pants and fastened them, then leaned over and unhooked her wrists from

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the pole.

As he helped her to her feet, she gave a nod. “Better than okay.”

Jax smiled. “What do you say we get out of here and talk.” He took the chain in one hand, making sure to keep plenty of slack in it. As he left the *lek*, she fell into obedient step behind him. Warriors clapped him on the shoulder as he passed, complimenting him on his skill.

He nodded acceptance of their words, but didn’t linger. He wanted to get Hannah to a private room at the nearby inn. His little rustler might be out of danger from being gang-raped, but she still had to answer to him about his *bovina*.

CHAPTER 7

Hannah sat at a small table in the little room in the inn just off the *lek*. Ian had registered with them, but then had muttered something about getting supplies and had left at least an hour ago. She and Jax had been going 'round and 'round about his precious cattle ever since. He with the intent of getting her to tell him where they were, and she just as determined not to.

“Please understand,” Hannah pleaded with him. She gripped the lapels of the robe the small inn had provided. The bath she'd taken had felt wonderful but, once again, she hadn't gotten to really soak like she'd wanted. Not with this cowboy nattering at her to tell him where his cows were. “If I tell you

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where they are, the *bovina* will be slaughtered and my friends will go to jail. I can't let that happen."

"But you're willing to make me look like an ass." He frowned. At least he hadn't threatened her with prison again. "Of course you are. You don't know me. I'm just a guy you've fucked." His scowl deepened. "In more ways than one."

She tightened her lips. He was wrong—he was more to her than just a guy she'd had sex with. But for now she had to focus on the problem at hand, because on this issue they were planets apart.

"Nosfera don't drink blood 'just because,'" he said. "It's an integral part of their society, of their traditions, and—"

"Ooh, don't talk to me about tradition," Hannah seethed. There was nothing that got her going faster than someone doing something simply because that's the way it had always been done. "Doing something just because it's 'tradition' is just an excuse to subjugate the weak—usually women or animals. Many ancient peoples of Earth used to sacrifice animals—even people!—to their gods, but they gave that up for a more civilized approach to worship. Or they died out," she said pointedly. She got off her chair and paced to the window. Spinning around to face him, she added, "As a matter of fact, most civilized people don't eat real meat anymore."

A muscle ticked in his jaw. "If you'd let me finish?" He waited for her nod. "The need for blood for a Nosfer native is more than just societal—it's physiological as well. They *have* to ingest blood. You'd rather they go around snacking on

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people instead?”

She sent him a glare. He wasn't getting it. "Of course not. But they could develop a synthetic substitute, couldn't they?"

"You've never tasted real meat, have you?" He walked closer, his fingers tucked into the front pockets of his jeans.

"Of course I have." She flushed with her admission. "Just not in a while." Not since she'd teamed up with the ARAs.

"You don't know what you're missin'." Jax stopped an arm's length away. "A piece of *bovina* that's been broiled over a wood fire..." He patted his flat stomach and made a smacking noise with his lips. Then he turned serious again. "But that's not really the point, is it? You and your friends took something from me, and I want it back."

"I can't." Hannah twisted her hands together. "Jax, please understand. I know you think this will reflect badly on you—and your sister and her husband—but I just can't give the *bovina* up to be slaughtered." She put one hand on his brawny forearm. "They won't blame you."

His eyes narrowed and such coolness filtered into them that she withdrew her hand from his arm.

"Just what do you know about that?"

"Only what I've overheard you and Ian talking about."

He turned away from her and stalked to the other side of the room. From the set of his shoulders she could tell he was angry. Well, angrier, anyway.

"My sister was essentially blackmailed into bringing an innocent man in on false charges so she could get me out of prison." His big hands fisted at his sides. "Luckily for all of

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us, she couldn't go through with it, and Rhys was able to break me out."

Her brows rose. "You were in prison?"

He gave an abrupt nod. "I was jailed on false charges as well, but the government went to a lot of trouble to make sure those charges would stick long enough to use it against Kass."

"What were the charges?" At his sharp look, she spread her hands. "I'm sorry, I don't mean to pry." She chewed on her lip a moment, then admitted, "Yes, I do. I'm curious. I don't really know anything about you, Jax." Except what a great lover he was. "And I want to know more." A lot more.

He sighed and went over to the bed. Slumping down onto it, he scrubbed the back of his neck with one big hand. "I was charged with treason against my home world, Tima Prime. Ian and I met in prison." He closed his eyes. "I've been out about six months. Ian was released a little over a month ago."

Hannah blinked. Ian had served time, too? She would never have guessed—these two didn't strike her as former convicts. Of course, having never met a convict before, how would she know what one would be like?

That they'd been incarcerated—she'd read stories about how the prisoners were kept celibate—could explain their seeming insatiability of the night before. Both of them had had two orgasms apiece and she had a feeling that if she'd stuck around they would've come back to her for more.

Her clit thumped. They might come back for more now, now that she was back with them.

"I've heard stories about Tima Prime," she said, bringing

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her attention back to the discussion. She left the window and came to sit beside Jax on the bed. “They say the government’s pretty corrupt.”

“They’d be right,” he responded. His lashes swept up and glittering blue eyes met hers. “My only crime was having a sister who’d been the lover of the exiled prince of Nosfer. In order to *encourage* Kass to capture Rhys and bring him in on trumped-up charges, they created bogus charges against me as well. And I spent almost two years in prison while she chased Rhys around the galaxy.”

Hannah cleared her throat. “What about Ian? What was he in for?”

He studied her a moment, then sighed. “I suppose you have a right to know, seeing as how you’ve known him on a pretty basic level.” He sent her a fleeting grin that quickly faded. “I don’t know all of the details—he doesn’t talk about it much. But he was serving time for murder.”

“Murder...” Not sure what to say, she looked down at her hands, clasped in her lap. “Did he...did he do it?”

He drew in a deep breath and held it a moment, then exhaled. “I don’t know, Hannah. He hasn’t denied it.”

The door to the small room opened and the object of their conversation walked in, carrying two bulging hemsacks in one hand. When they sat there staring at him, the silence growing, Ian asked, “What?” He reached up and rubbed across one cheek. “I have something on my face?”

Hannah opened her mouth, then closed it.

Jax shrugged. “I told Hannah how we met. I thought she

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should know about our convict status.”

“Oh, is that all?” Ian closed the door and came farther into the room. He dropped the rough hemp sacks on the floor and gave her a wink. “Here I thought it was something serious.”

She blinked. And had to ask, “You don’t think murder is serious?”

He heaved a sigh and brought one hand up to rub across his brow. Going over to the table, he plopped down in the chair. He leaned forward, clasping his hands between his knees. After a few moments, he looked over at her. “I only returned the favor. The bastard killed my wife. Timan officials protected him—I did what I had to do.”

“Your wife was murdered?” Hannah stood and went over to him. Pulling the second chair closer, she sat down. “Ian, I’m so sorry.”

He shrugged. “It was a long time ago,” he muttered and stared down at his hands. As he flexed his fingers, his knuckles cracked. He rubbed one thumb over the side of the opposite index finger. Looking back up at her, he added, “I couldn’t let her murderer go free. Justice had to be served.”

“Justice or revenge?” she asked as gently as she could.

His green eyes glittered. “I went after him to make him confess—I’d planned to beat it out of him if I had to. Fucking son-of-a-bitch. If you knew what he did to her...”

She could understand the emotions behind his actions. It seemed that the wicked were rewarded while those who tried to do right were always being shoved aside. But to commit murder himself...

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She sighed and glanced toward the window. For a moment she thought she saw the shadow of movement, but when a branch scraped lightly against the glass, she realized it was just the wind in the trees. Turning back to Ian, she asked, “Do you regret it?”

He looked at her, and she saw incredible sadness and misery in his eyes. He regretted it.

“I did what I did, sweetheart, and it doesn’t matter that it wasn’t premeditated, although that was a factor in the amount of time I served.” He drew in a sharp breath and held it, then slowly exhaled. “Killing a man is something I’ll have to live with ’til the day I die.” His shrug was fatalistic. “It doesn’t matter. My life ended the day my wife died.”

She swallowed back tears at the flat tone of his voice. He’d given up on love.

His grin was forced as he took one of her hands in his. “Don’t fret, darlin’,” he drawled, clearly putting the past and its sadness behind him. “I’m not a homicidal maniac. I’ve killed exactly one time—and believe me, I have no intention of repeating the experience.” He pressed a kiss into her palm and let go of her hand. Leaning back in his chair, he rested one ankle on the opposite knee and clasped his hands over his flat belly.

“Well, I’m sorry for your loss,” Hannah finally said a bit lamely. She looked over at Jax for help.

He got up and came over to the table. Pulling her out of the chair, he sat down, settling her on his lap, her back cushioned against his chest. One hand rested around her waist, his fingers

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splayed over her tummy, the other hand slid under her robe and covered her left breast in blatant possession.

Ian's face darkened with passion. He leaned forward, bracing his elbows on his knees.

Still not used to having sex in front of an audience, she squirmed in embarrassment—and blossoming desire. Jax's erection beneath her grew. She gasped as his fingers began flicking the nipple ring, sending shock waves zinging to her clit.

It was a little painful, while at the same time made her wet with need.

"Does it hurt?" Jax asked, stopping the movement.

"A little," she admitted. "But I want you to touch me there."

His fingers started playing with the ring again. "At a time like this, *limlana*," Jax's voice rumbled in her ear, rasping along her nerve endings like raw silk, "a man doesn't need talk. He needs something to take his mind away from the painful memories. Think you know something that'll help with that?"

Ian scooted off his chair and knelt in front of her, his hands going to the belt at her waist. His slow smile was feral, full of masculine approval and satisfaction. His gaze held hers while Jax continued to ply her nipple with hard, sure fingers.

"I sure as hell do." A muscle flexed in Ian's jaw.

Her breath hitched at the raw passion blazing in his eyes. As Ian untied the belt, Jax placed his feet between hers and then widened his legs, pulling her thighs apart in the process.

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Then he slid down in the chair just enough to be able to tilt their pelvises up. As the robe parted, Ian moved into the space between her thighs.

He latched onto her right breast. His tongue relaxed for a moment, playing with the nipple ring, then he started suckling again. Jax's fingers lightly squeezed her other nipple, twisting it back and forth.

Both men were being exquisitely careful with her newly pierced flesh, and it aroused her like nothing else could have. Her clit throbbed, her pussy spasmed, hungry to be filled.

As Ian kissed his way down her torso, Jax brought his other hand up to her breast and began tugging both nipples.

Then Ian's tongue flicked against her swollen clit.

Hannah cried out, bucking against him. Bringing her hands to Ian's head, she wove her fingers through his hair. She closed her eyes and pressed her head against Jax's shoulder.

Jax turned her head sideways and took her mouth with his, his tongue thrusting in and out in fierce domination. She whimpered, weak with need.

He drew back. He flicked her nipples with his nails, and she jerked on his lap, rubbing against his bulge. She moaned and wiggled as Ian continued to suckle her clit. When he moved and jabbed into her sheath, she thrust her hips up to meet the slow fucks of his tongue.

With a groan, Ian abruptly stood and yanked off his clothes. Taking her wrists in his hands, he swept her into his arms. With Jax shucking his clothes and following right behind him, he carried her to the bed. Between one breath and

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the next, Ian was on her, in her, his hot, hard cock ramming into her sheath.

His face had such a look of intense pleasure it sent a thrill through her. His breath came in ragged pants. He took her wrists in his hands and held them above her head. She thrashed underneath him, taking everything he had to give, reaching for the climax that was just...over...the...edge.

He pistoned faster, slamming against her harder until she arched against him, crying out as her pussy tightened around him, clenching in a fierce orgasm.

Ian shouted and stiffened, his cock jerking inside her, his release jetting from him. He groaned and lay still a moment, then rolled to one side.

As soon as he did, Jax was on her, kissing her as his cock stroked in and out.

* * *

Jax watched her face as he slammed into her again and again. Watching Ian fucking her, seeing his thick cock slick with her juices, had about made him lose his load before he'd even gotten inside her. Now, as Jax stroked in and out of her sweet cunt, his taut balls slapped against the curve of her ass, the sound loud in the small room. He held off as long as he could, making sure his pelvis brushed over her clit with each in-stroke, until finally her cry of release made him lose control. He pumped hard and fast, his climax roiling through him, leaving him shuddering and panting above her.

When he had caught his breath, he rolled, holding her tight

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against him, keeping his cock buried in her. She rested her head against his shoulder, eyes closed as she took shaking breaths. He stroked the hair away from her face, his eyes meeting Ian's over her shoulder. He could see from the intensity in his friend's gaze that Ian wanted her again. That he *needed* her again.

Jax pressed a light kiss to the corner of her mouth. "Can you take both of us, Hannah?"

Her lashes swept up. In spite of the primitive, fearful reaction of being dominated by two men at once that he saw in her eyes, there was also a carnal excitement that couldn't be denied.

"Do you want it, *limlana*? My cock in your sweet little cunt, Ian's in your ass?"

She flushed but her gaze held his. "Yes," she whispered. Her shiver tightened her sheath around him, making his cock jerk and begin to harden again in response.

Ian retrieved the lubricant from the bedside storage table and slicked up his cock. Then he pressed one lubricated finger through her tight ring of muscles and stroked in and out, adding another finger, pouring lubricant on the puckered hole, stretching her, preparing her for his cock.

Hannah shivered and moaned, her little rump grinding against Ian's fingers, her drenched pussy clenching around Jax's penis. His flesh thickened with the stimulation, and he clamped his jaw to keep from pounding into her as his body demanded.

Ian withdrew his fingers and guided his cock to her

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rosebud opening.

Jax held himself still while Ian worked his way into her tight little ass. God. Nothing felt as good as taking a woman like this. Nothing. And he was beginning to think that it would never be the same, now that he'd had Hannah.

She leaned forward, her breasts dragging against Jax's chest, hard nipples with their cool rings pressing against him. She rested her cheek against his chest and moaned. Jax felt tears on his skin and went cold.

"God, Ian, stop!" Jax put his hand under her chin and tilted her face up to his. Her cheeks were shiny with moisture. "Sweetheart, it's all right. We don't have to do this. We'll stop."

Ian gave a nod and began pulling his cock free.

"No!" Hannah's eyes were bright with determination, though tears still fell. "It's all right. I want this."

"You don't have to do this just because we want it," Ian protested. He had one hand curled around her slender shoulder, and he squeezed gently. "Especially since it's hurting you."

She shook her head. "It's not that. Well, it is that, partly," she admitted with an adorable blush. "It's just... I've never felt like this before. It's so *much*."

Jax raised his eyebrows. He understood now what she meant. The emotions this kind of intimacy raised could be overwhelming. For some, tears were the outlet of all that upheaval.

He wrapped his hand around the back of her head and

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drew her down for a kiss. She sighed into his mouth, her hands coming up to cup his face.

“Hold on, baby,” he murmured against her lips. “I promise you it’ll get better.”

The slide of Ian’s cock over his with only her thin membrane separating them sent a jolt to Jax’s balls. As Ian started thrusting, long, slow glides into her ass, Jax pumped his hips, timing his strokes with his friend’s.

Hannah cried out, shaking, her hands gripping Jax’s shoulders with such force her nails dug into his skin. The small pain fired his arousal. His hips jerked as he lunged into her. With Ian’s cock in her ass, he didn’t have much room to maneuver, but he didn’t need much room. The stroking motion through the thin barrier was more than enough stimulus.

When her cunt clamped down on his cock, it sent him over the edge. He arched, his body stiff as his release jetted into her in scalding streams. He felt Ian’s cock jerking as the other man’s orgasm roiled through him.

They tumbled down in a collapse of arms and legs. After several moments, Ian carefully withdrew from her ass and padded into the small adjoining bathroom.

Jax heard water running, then Ian returned with a wet washcloth. Jax pulled his softened cock from her pussy and rolled her to her back.

Her eyes drowsy with sated pleasure, she lay sprawled, body completely limp. Ian sat beside her and gently cleansed her, smiling slightly at her moans of relief as the cool cloth bathed her swollen, heated skin.

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By the time he'd finished, she'd lapsed into a light doze. Jax drew the covers up over her, smiling when she murmured something and flopped over onto her stomach.

Ian returned the cloth to the bathroom and then started to dress. "I'm going to head back to the ranch," he said, not looking at the bed. "Make sure the dozen head we still have are still there."

Jax sat up and swung his legs to the floor. "I should go," he muttered. He stood and headed toward the bathroom. "They're my *bovina*, after all."

"No." Ian tipped his chin toward the bed, though he studiously avoided looking in that direction. "Let Hannah rest. You can make the trip in the morning."

Jax frowned. As he pulled on his jeans, he asked, "You all right?"

Ian gave an abrupt nod. "Yeah." He jammed his feet into his boots and gathered his weapon. "I just can't do all...this." He motioned toward the bed. His gaze held Jax's for a moment, and he shook his head. "I'm getting too close to her, and that's something I don't want. Hurts too much when something happens." He opened the door and paused. "You'd better lock this behind me." Then he left.

Jax padded over and pushed home the bolt to lock the door. The expression in Ian's eyes was one Jax hadn't seen in a long time—a desperate, hunted look. The one he got when his memories started to bombard him, reminding him of all he'd lost.

Moving quietly so he wouldn't disturb Hannah, Jax went

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into the bathroom. He stripped off his jeans and cleaned up. Leaving his pants where they were, he went back into the bedroom and crawled under the covers. Turning on his side, he slid one arm under Hannah and the other across her back, then threw one heavy thigh across her legs.

Christ. He'd never done this with a woman before, snuggling up after sex, listening to her breathing slow and even out as she fell asleep. He'd never really wanted to.

Oh, he'd let them snuggle with him for a while, figuring he owed them at least that much for a good fuck. But after a few minutes, he was ready to get up, get dressed, and get the hell out before the woman got any ideas about making the "relationship" permanent. His jaw clenched as he thought about what that said about him.

He shook his head. That was then, this was now. He closed his eyes, forcing his hands to stay where they were, lightly stroking up and down her back, instead of where they wanted to be—between her thighs, stroking slick, hot pussy.

Damn. "I've got to get you out of my system," he muttered.

If he didn't, the poor girl wouldn't be spending much time out of bed.

And he'd be snared for life.

CHAPTER 8

Hannah and Jax arrived back at the ranch just before the dinner hour the next day. It was already dusk; night would fall in less than half an hour.

When they'd gotten up this morning, they'd had every intention of leaving for the ranch immediately. But one thing led to another, and they'd spent the morning making hot, sweet love instead. And while she knew it was time to leave—past time—she couldn't bring herself to tell him good-bye yet, even though she had a feeling this...this *whatever* it was between them wasn't going to last much longer.

She'd heard his muttered comment the night before. He wasn't looking to make a commitment. And besides, a

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relationship built on sex never lasted.

Right?

Fidgeting with the borrowed dress she wore—which was too short, too transparent, and much too tight around the bust, although of course Jax seemed to like it well enough—Hannah caught a glimpse of Ian out in the pens with the *bovina*. Waving, she frowned when he ducked his head and strode into the barn. “Did I do something wrong?”

Jax put an arm behind her back to guide her up the stairs of the front porch. “What do you mean?”

“Ian. Just now, when I waved to him, he ignored me.” She felt a flush steal along her cheeks. “I thought maybe he was mad about, you know.” She couldn’t quite bring herself to describe him taking her in the ass. It was one thing to be carried away with passion and do it, it was something entirely different to discuss it in the calm of day. “That he...didn’t like it.”

Jax shook his head. “He enjoyed every second of you, *limlana*. It’s something else.”

“What?”

“I think he’s remembering his wife.”

“Oh.” Hannah stopped and took off her borrowed sandals and shook the dirt from them. Then she entered the house. She dropped the sandals on the floor just inside the door. When she got to the middle of the living room, she spun to face Jax. “Maybe I should go talk to him.”

“Leave him be, honey. He needs to work through this on his own.” Jax pressed a kiss to her cheek as he passed. “I’m

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going to go out and check on things, help him in the barn.” Over his shoulder, he asked, “Would you get dinner together?” He didn’t wait for a response, but went through the back door, letting it slam behind him.

Hannah stuck out her tongue in his general direction. He’d have been better off to let her go help Ian in the barn. But had the chauvinistic macho man asked which one she’d rather do?

She’d never done anything except open a prepared meal and heat it up in a food preparation unit. She couldn’t cook worth a damn. Guess he’d find that out when he came in to a pile of overcooked hard-to-determine-what-it-was.

Rummaging through cupboards, she found a bag of dried beans and what looked to be small scallions. Still digging around, she located a heavy pot. She looked but couldn’t see where there was a spigot for water at the kitchen sink. “What the...”

Talk about primitive conditions.

Just as she turned to go to the back door to hunt down Jax, he pushed it open and poked his head around the outer edge. “Oh, by the way, the access to the well is on the front porch. Bucket’s under the sink.”

Then he left again.

Muttering, Hannah fetched the bucket and stomped out onto the front porch. The wood decking was cool under her bare feet. With the slight breeze and the sun warming the air, it really was a pretty spot Jax had here. She might be more appreciative if she weren’t so irritated.

She slammed back the lid to the well and hooked the

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bucket to the chain hanging from the crossbeam. She lowered the bucket until she heard it plunk into the water. After giving it a few minutes to fill, she started hauling it up, fist over fist, until she raised it high enough to drop the lid back down. Then she lowered the bucket to rest on the lid.

“*Psst*. Hannah.”

She jerked around and saw her friend and fellow *bovina*-liberator, Goran Paoll, standing at the far edge of the porch. “Goran!” She lowered her voice and hurried over to him. “Are you crazy? What are you doing here?”

He tilted his cap back, and blond hair fell over his forehead. “I was about to ask you the same thing. We’ve been worried about you, since you didn’t make the rendezvous after you acted as decoy with the rest of the herd. But here you are, pretending to be Little Suzy Homemaker.” Goran’s upper lip curled in a sneer. “I guess this is better than the whore you played in the town square yesterday. But not much.”

She scowled. “I didn’t have much choice with that yesterday, as you’d know since you were watching.” She fought back a blush. She’d done nothing wrong. “I came back to try to free the remaining *bovina*, but once I got here I realized there wasn’t anything I could do for them without a ship to load them onto.”

His eyes narrowed. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder in an abrupt gesture toward the barn. “And you’re still with those two because...?”

Because I can’t tell them good-bye. “There hasn’t been an opportunity yet, Goran. They’re too suspicious of me.” Which

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wasn't exactly a lie. "They've tried to make me tell them where the *bovina* are, and I haven't." At his skeptical look, she insisted, "I haven't!"

He studied her a moment. "Fine," he said. "I need you to keep them busy once it's dark."

"What are you going to do?"

Goran gave her a look that clearly showed he questioned her intelligence. "We're taking the rest of the *bovina*, of course. I need you to keep those two big guys distracted." He looked her up and down, the beginnings of a leer evident on his face. "Which I don't think you'll have any trouble doing."

She glared at him. "Goran, they're not deaf. You won't be able to get the cattle out of the corral without them hearing their hoof beats. Or at the very least the lack of mooing. That's what brought them out the first time."

A grin tipped up his lips. "So turn on some music. But I gotta tell you, when a man's cock is engaged, baby, everything else shuts down. Believe me." He gave her another slow perusal and took a step forward. Tilting her chin up with two fingers, he started to lower his head.

Hannah jerked her face away and backed up a few steps. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

His eyebrows rose. "Taking what you're obviously puttin' out," he said. His eyes were dark with lust. "Come on, baby." He squeezed his crotch. "I got something you like right here."

"Go away, Goran," she rasped, so angry she could barely talk. She'd thought this man was her friend. Obviously she'd been wrong. When he started toward her, she warned, "One

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more step, and I'll scream. I mean it."

He stopped and tapped the bulky weapon strapped to one lean hip. "I'd hate to have to kill your boyfriends, baby. This ain't no little phase pistol. It's a plasma gun—a real weapon—and it's set to kill."

She swallowed. Knowing if she did scream Jax and Ian would both come running, she kept her lips clamped shut.

Goran stroked his erection. "I gotta tell you. Watching you get your pussy licked yesterday, then seeing it stuffed full of cock made me see you in a whole 'nother light. Then, later on when I peeked through the window at your room in the inn..." He let out a low whistle. "You're just a big slut, aren't you, Hannah? Taking it in the cunt and up the ass." He tilted his head to one side. "Tell you what. You let me suck those big tits of yours and give me some head like a good little whore, I'll let you stay here without harming your boys out there. Otherwise..."

"Otherwise what?" she spat out, despising him in this moment like she'd never hated anyone before, while at the same time mortified that he'd spied on her.

"Otherwise I'll make you scream and, when your lovers come running around the corner, I'll kill them. They won't stand a chance."

Looking into the lustful depths of his eyes, she knew he was right. Damn him. Jax and Ian had made her feel like a beautiful, highly desired and cherished woman. This man who'd called himself friend made her feel ashamed and dirty.

"Open up that dress, baby, and let me see your tits. I want

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an up close and personal look at those nipple rings.”

With shaking fingers, Hannah began unbuttoning her dress. “You know they could finish up in the barn any moment.”

“All the more reason for you to hurry,” he muttered.

As soon as her breasts were bared, he bent and drew one nipple into his mouth, sucking with hard, deep pulls, moving the nipple ring with his tongue. It hurt, making her gasp at the pain. When Jax and Ian had touched her, it had hurt then, too, but it was a pleasure-pain she’d welcomed.

Now, with Goran... It was pain, pure and simple, in more ways than one.

He brought one hand up and tugged on her other nipple, twisting the ring, then moved his head to suckle that one. Hannah closed her eyes and tried not to think about what was happening to her. What she was *letting* happen. But she’d do this if it meant keeping Jax and Ian safe.

After a few moments Goran drew away.

Hannah opened her eyes to see him unfasten his pants and draw out his cock—a red, angry looking thing that already dripped with pre-cum.

“Suck it, whore.”

This was so unlike how she felt when Jax or Ian was dominant with her. Their strong demands made her hot. This man, this former *friend*, made her sick to her stomach. Slowly going to her knees, she tried to think of something—anything—that could get her out of doing this. She was about to gag and hadn’t even touched him yet.

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“Quit stalling, bitch.” He fisted his hands in her curls and pulled her face into his crotch. “Suck my dick or I swear I’ll kill your lovers.”

Not knowing how else to get out of this, she pulled away far enough to take him between her lips. He groaned and thrust into her mouth, the head of his cock butting against the back of her throat, making her choke. She drew back, letting him leave her mouth so she could cough and catch her breath.

But he’d have none of that. “I said suck, dammit.”

Hannah had just taken him into her mouth again when she heard the snap of twigs. She jerked to her feet and hissed, “Someone’s coming.” She gripped the gaping dress across her chest.

Goran drew his weapon. Another of the ARAs came around the corner, a young man who’d joined them only a few months ago. Goran relaxed and holstered his weapon. Both of them.

As Goran fastened his pants, the young man stared at them. “What the hell are you doing?” he muttered, giving a furtive glance around the front yard. “We don’t have time for that.” He gestured toward Goran’s now covered groin.

Goran grabbed Hannah’s chin and crashed his mouth onto hers in a punishing kiss. When he drew away, she tasted blood from where her bottom teeth had cut into the inside of her lip. He stared down at her, eyes glowing with lust. “Next time, baby.”

She jerked away from him. “There won’t be a next time, Goran.” Knowing Jax and Ian weren’t out of danger, she

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promised, “I’ll keep them busy while you steal the rest of the *bovina*. But don’t you ever touch me again, or you’ll regret it.”

Hannah waited until both men left before she grabbed the bucket of water and went back inside. Pouring some of the liquid into a large glass, she rinsed her mouth again and again, spitting into the sink. Then she took a deep breath. She had to get hold of herself or Jax and Ian would still be in danger.

She filled the pot with water and dumped in several handfuls of beans. Leaving the kitchen, she started snooping. Knowing Jax and Ian, the phase pistol and rifle they had with them weren’t the only weapons in the house. She’d use sex to try to distract them from what was going on outside but, if that didn’t work, she’d hold them off with whatever other weapon she could find.

She’d keep them safe even if it meant she protected them from themselves.

* * *

After a dinner of hard, dry beans that both men choked down and complimented the cook on, Jax shared a glance with Ian. He saw in the other man’s face that he, too, realized Hannah was acting strangely.

Something had happened while they were both out in the barn, something to make her quiet and troubled, almost fearful. The wind had picked up, and every time a branch would thump against the side of the house she’d jump.

But when either of them asked her what was wrong, she’d smile and reply in her sweet voice, “Nothing’s wrong.”

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Now that dinner was over and they were ensconced in plump oversized chairs in the living room, she was looking at them like they were dessert. Ordinarily he'd be up for that, but with the way she'd been acting, he knew something else was up, and he didn't like it.

Hannah walked over to an old-fashioned disc player and pressed a button. Sultry music floated from the speakers. She turned and came over to him, plopping down in his lap. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she planted kisses along the line of his jaw.

"Hannah, what is wrong with you?" he asked, putting his hands on her shoulders to try to ease her away.

Ian sat in the other chair and watched the byplay with raised eyebrows.

"You've been on this planet too long if you think something's wrong when a woman initiates sex," she murmured, her lips trailing down his throat. When she reached the dip below his Adam's apple she lingered, her tongue darting out to taste him with dainty little flicks.

"There's initiating and then there's *initiating*," he muttered. Wrapping his hands around her upper arms, he pushed her away from him and got to his feet. She stood docile in his grasp, though her gaze was cast to the floor.

Trying to appear submissive, or trying to hide something from him?

She looked up at him from under her lashes, her brown eyes dark and shining with lustful determination. "Let me do this for you," she whispered. Unbuttoning her dress, she bared

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her breasts. She grasped the nipple rings between her fingers and started lightly playing with them. Shivering as she built her own passion, she looked over at Ian. "For both of you."

"Just answer me this: What happened while Ian and I were in the barn?"

Her eyes flickered, but she met his gaze head-on. "Nothing happened. I guess everything just finally caught up with me and made me a little jumpy. But I'm all right now."

"You're sure?" Ian stepped up behind her so she was bracketed front and back.

She looked over her shoulder at him. "I'm sure." Her voice was soft, throaty. Letting go of the nipple rings, she turned back to Jax and drew his face down to hers. "Let me do this for you," she repeated.

She placed gentle kisses on his lips, his eyes. When she moved back to his mouth, he groaned and yanked her closer, his arms wrapping around her. After only a few moments she drew away.

"Let's go into the bedroom," she murmured, taking him by the hand. She reached out to Ian, clasping his hand as well.

"Don't think I want to go that far." Jax stared down at her naked breasts, with their nipples dark and hard. "I think here's just as good."

Her eyes flickered, making him narrow his, but a smile curled her lips and she gave a dainty shrug. "Okay." Letting go of their hands, she went to her knees on the plush rug at his feet. She unfastened first his pants, then Ian's, and drew their burgeoning erections free.

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A fleeting look of sadness passed over her face, to be replaced by that dogged determination he'd glimpsed earlier. Before he could question it, her hot mouth closed over the tip of his cock.

CHAPTER 9

Jax looked down to see Hannah widen her mouth, taking more and more of his thick length. She wrapped the fingers of one hand around Ian's cock and stroked him, swiping her thumb over the weeping slit to rub his pre-cum over the head, and braced herself with her other hand on Jax's thigh.

He watched through burning eyes as her head bobbed up and down, his cock appearing and disappearing between her stretched lips. He brought his hands to her head and wove his fingers through her hair, holding her where he wanted her, and started gently shuttling in and out of her mouth.

She hummed and looked up at him. It made him wild. His hips bucked, driving his cock deeper until the fat tip hit the

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back of her throat. He immediately pulled back, afraid of hurting her. She gave him a wink and let him fall out of her mouth with a wet, slurping sound. Turning her head, she took Ian's erection in her mouth and brought the hand from Jax's thigh up to curl around his cock.

Her strokes were in time with her mouth moving up and down on Ian's penis. She moved her lips to Ian's sac and nuzzled him, licking across the lightly furred balls, and then turned her head and took Jax's cock between her lips again. She did this for them, back and forth, time and again, until their cocks were hard as pikes, their balls drawn tight against their bodies, their muscles shuddering as they fought to reach the pinnacle.

Hannah fisted both cocks and worked them with hard strokes. Within seconds, Jax and Ian stiffened, shouting their release as their cum spurted over her hands, her breasts.

She leaned in and licked around the tip of Jax's cock, her tongue dipping into the slit, drawing out the last of his semen. Then she did the same for Ian, her hands still gently stroking them.

Her gaze darted for just a second toward the kitchen, which was situated at the back of the house. It was the room nearest the barn and *bovina* pens that lay a hundred or so meters from the back door.

And that was when Jax realized what was going on. He jerked away from her and shoved his cock back into his pants. Fastening his fly with rough movements, he stalked to where he'd put his phase pistol. He picked up the weapon and

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scowled at her. “Your damned friends are stealing the rest of my cows, aren’t they?”

Her wide-eyed look confirmed it. Standing there with her breasts glistening with his and Ian’s cum made him curse. He stalked into the kitchen to grab a dishtowel. Walking back over to her, he wiped away the evidence of their passion and then dropped the towel on the floor. He jerked the front of her dress together and started fastening it, cursing harder than a freight hauler who’d just had his cargo hijacked. “They were stealing my cows,” he muttered, “while you gave me a blowjob.”

“Shit.” Ian fumbled with his pants, cursing when his cock got caught in the fastener. “I knew it. I told myself back at the settlement I needed to get out while the gettin’ was good. I should’ve listened to my gut and gotten the hell out of here before I got caught up in all this.”

“All what?” Hannah’s voice was soft.

“This.” He motioned between her and him and Jax. “I knew you’d sucker me in with your big brown eyes and your soft brown curls and your innocent enthusiasm.” He scowled, his expression turning deadly as he looked toward Jax. “What do you say we go get us some rustlers?”

“No, wait!” Hannah held out her hands. “They’ll kill you. They said so.” Her teeth came down on her lower lip, and her lids fell to shield her eyes as she seemed to realize she’d just said too much.

“So *that’s* what happened.” Jax swept his thumb across her lip, freeing it from her punishing teeth. “Did they threaten you,

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limlana?"

"Not me."

When she didn't say more, Ian said, "They threatened *us*."

Her lashes lifted, and she nodded.

A muscle flexed in Jax's jaw. He didn't know who he was angrier with—the rustlers, or Hannah for thinking he couldn't take care of himself.

No, not angry. Disappointed. Hurt.

And at the same time proud that she'd try to protect him.

Having such deep mixed emotions was a new sensation for him. And not one he particularly liked.

"You stay inside," he muttered. "We'll take care of them. Come on, Ian."

Methodically going through the house, they doused the lights. Once back in the kitchen, Jax eased open the back door. He slipped through it, Ian right behind him. Jax glanced back to see Hannah peering around the edge of the opened door, and he motioned her back with a violent slash of his hand.

"Damned little idiot's gonna get herself hurt."

"Or worse." Ian voiced the other big fear that tightened Jax's gut.

Jax glanced at him but, even with the light from the twin moons, he couldn't see enough of his friend to read his expression.

Not that he needed to. What he needed to do was catch these damn rustlers and then go paddle Hannah's behind for not trusting him. He put everything else out of his mind and focused on getting his cattle back.

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* * *

Hannah crept behind the two men. Once they'd left the house, she'd rushed back into Jax's bedroom, grabbing the weapon she'd hidden there, thinking she would get the two men into the bedroom. Best laid plans and all that.

Now, holding her weapon at the ready, she ignored the small rocks that kept rolling into her sandals. She knew Goran well enough to be ready for his tricks. As soon as he popped his blond head out from whatever rock he was hiding behind, the moonlight would make it shine like cheap gold on a worthless trinket. And she'd have him.

From up ahead she could hear the moos of the *bovina*. She figured the young man with Goran was loading them onto the ship, while Goran had hung back to see if anyone followed them. It was the sort of thing he'd do—get out of some work plus be sneaky at the same time.

Even as that thought crossed her mind, she caught movement from the corner of her eye. Her head swung to the left, and she squinted into the darkness.

Sure enough, she caught the glint of moonlight on golden hair. Just like a little desert rodent popping its head up from its burrow.

She turned and sighted through the scope of her phase rifle. As Goran lifted his own weapon, aiming at one of her men, she depressed the trigger.

And missed. The blast nicked the boulder he hid behind, sending small pieces of rock and dirt flying upward. She heard his low curse and one hand came up to swipe at his face, no

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doubt trying to get rid of the particles that got in his eyes.

She sighted again. This time, the plasma stream caught him in one shoulder and knocked him flat. She ran around the rock to see him lying on the ground unconscious, a burn mark sizzling on his shirt. Hannah kicked his weapon away. She knelt beside him and cautiously felt for a pulse in his neck. It was there, strong and steady.

Good. She didn't want him dead. She wanted him incapacitated so he could have his ass hauled off to jail. Standing, she jabbed him in the side with the toe of her shoe. "That'll teach you to threaten me with rape, you bastard."

"Hannah, look out!" Jax's voice rang out from behind her.

Instinctively, she dropped and rolled. The high-pitched whine of a laser went past her head and blasted the rock. If she'd been standing, it would have gone straight through her. Boy, with friends like these, who needed enemies?

She heard the rapid bursts of weapons fire, then silence. When she peeked around the rock, it was to see Jax and Ian striding toward her. Ian wore his usual look of amusement, now that the danger was over. While Jax...

He stalked toward her, fists clenched at his sides.

She held out her hands to ward him off. "Now, Jax, wait just a minute. Let me explain."

He stopped. "How can you explain this, Hannah?" He gestured to the two men lying on the ground. "How do you explain that you didn't trust I could take care of myself? That I could take care of *you*?"

She swallowed back tears. "I couldn't take the chance, Jax.

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You don't know Goran like I do. He doesn't play fair."

"And you think I do?"

Hannah nodded.

"You've got a lot to learn about me, *limlana*. When I'm in jeopardy of losing something that belongs to me, I can fight as dirty as I need to."

"Why don't we leave the *bovina* on the ship." Ian rested his phase pistol on his shoulder. "We can toss these two into the cargo bay right next to the cows, hogtied, of course, and I'll cart them all off to Nosfer. I'm sure Valorian would like to meet the two men who've caused his brother-in-law such trouble—making you go back on your word and all. Plus they deprived the king of most of his cattle."

A slow smile spread over Jax's sensual lips. "I'm sure you're right."

Ian glanced at Hannah. "And while you were initially involved, it'll be Jax's word against theirs that you had anything to do with it."

Jax nodded in agreement.

Hannah bit her lip, glad that the men seemed willing to let her part in the rustling slide. But, still, the poor defenseless *bovina* would still end up being slaughtered. "You can't give them to King Valorian!"

Jax and Ian looked at her as if she'd grown a second head and glanced at the men on the ground.

She frowned. "The *bovina*, I mean."

Jax shook his head. "They have to go, sweetheart." When she opened her mouth, he put one finger over her lips. "We'll

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talk about it later but, for now, these cattle are going to be delivered.” He wrapped the fingers of one hand around Hannah’s wrist, almost as if he was afraid she’d try to get away.

“I’m not going anywhere,” she said.

He looked as if he didn’t quite believe her.

“I promise, Jax. I’ll stay right here until you’re ready to head back to the ranch. And then I’ll go with you,” she said before he could think she was playing semantics with him.

He nodded and released her. “This should only take a few minutes.”

The two unconscious men were carried over brawny shoulders into the depths of the ship.

* * *

Inside the hold, Jax dumped his guy next to the other one and watched as Ian expertly hogtied them. “You sure you can handle this thing?” he asked.

Ian rooted around in Goran’s pocket and pulled out an ID chip. He flourished it with a grin. “With this bad boy, I can get the ship started, say hello to the computer, and have the autonav unit programmed to fly me to Nosfer. I’ll be at Nosfer in a couple of hours, no problem.”

“Good.” Jax stared down at the unconscious men. “You know,” he mused, “there’s no reason why we can’t keep things the way they are. With you, me and Hannah, I mean.”

Ian shook his head, then looked up from where he knelt beside the two captives. “Tell me something, Jax. If it had

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been you that had come back to the ranch, and me who'd stayed at the inn with Hannah, how would you have felt knowing that I was fucking her every way I could—mouth, cunt and ass—as much as I could? How would you have felt when you thought about how she looks in her passion, knowing she was looking like that with *me*?”

Jax started to respond and stopped. He would never have left Ian alone with Hannah. It was one thing to share her with his friend, quite another to allow them to be alone together, just the two of them. Without him.

His gut twisted. He shook his head.

“That’s what I thought.” Ian turned back to his task and finished tying off the last knot. He gave the still unconscious blond-haired man a rough pat on the cheek, then stood and stretched. “You’re in love with her, man. I recognize the signs.”

Jax started to deny it, but stopped. That explained why he was always so tied up in knots with her. He’d thought it was just lust, and there was a huge amount of that in the mix, but as he thought on it, there was more.

But how could there be more? They’d had a brief encounter a year ago, and this time around they’d been together for three days. Three days wasn’t enough to build a lasting relationship, even if they’d been intimate for much of the time.

Relationships built on sex rarely lasted. At least, that’s what he’d always been told. What he’d always believed.

But he was willing to take a chance—with Hannah.

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“Go for it, buddy.” Ian clapped him on the shoulder. His eyes held sadness that always lurked just under the surface, but was more pronounced now. “If I hang around here any longer, I’ll fall in love with her myself, and then where would we be? Forcing her to choose between us, and I’m pretty sure I’d come up the loser.” He drew in a deep breath and briefly closed his eyes. “After my wife died, I never thought I’d be able to feel like this again.” His lids swept up and his gaze bored into Jax. “Cherish her, man. Every single damned day of your life.”

Jax swallowed. “I will.”

As they left the cargo area, he fought back a surge of adrenaline at the thought of being the victor with Hannah. God. Two months on this barbarian planet, and he was turning into one himself.

If he were truthful with himself, there’d always been a bit of the barbarian in him—Hannah just seemed to bring it out full-force.

“Let me know when you land on Nosfer, will ya?” he asked. Pausing at the top of the gangplank, he caught Ian in a bear hug. He thumped the other man on the back a few times, feeling Ian doing the same to him, then let him go. He knew in his gut that Ian was doing the only thing he could and still preserve their friendship. “Keep in touch.”

The sadness deepened in Ian’s eyes, and he said without hesitation, “Sure thing.”

And Jax knew he wouldn’t hear from his good friend for a long, long time.

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* * *

Hannah stared at a nearby *limlo* tree and deliberately kept her mind blank while she waited. She couldn't tell what Jax had planned for her, although she was pretty sure he'd given up his idea of turning her over to the magistrate.

She bit her lip. Her mind went back to what Ian said, about Jax loving her. He didn't. He couldn't.

Could he?

God knew she felt more for him than just passion. What she felt when she thought of Jax was very different than what she felt when she thought of Ian. With Ian there was affection and, yes, deep, brutal lust. But with Jax there was something more, something *lasting*.

But was it enough?

Relationships built on sex rarely lasted. That's what she'd always believed, anyway.

Jax came down the plank and turned, waving to Ian as the other man activated the plank's uplift into the ship. Then Jax loped toward her with an easy stride. "Ian said to tell you good-bye," he said as he dropped his arm around her shoulders. They started walking back toward the ranch. "He's got to sort things out, so he'll be gone awhile."

"How long?" she asked, trying to hide the disappointment she felt. She liked Ian; she liked pleasing—and being pleased by—two men. But if she was left with just Jax, she'd gladly take that for the rest of her life.

He shrugged. "Don't know." He looked down at her, sadness in his blue eyes, as well as lingering anger and the

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stirrings of lust. And something else, something...more. "You do know you're in trouble, don't you?"

She looked away, biting her lip. The thought of being punished by him sent new heat to her pussy. "Jax, there wasn't a lot else I could do."

"You could have trusted me."

She couldn't say he was wrong. She'd trusted in what she knew about Goran more than what she knew about Jax. In her defense, she had known Goran longer. "We don't really know that much about each other," she finally said.

"Don't we? I know you." They came up to the barn and kept walking toward the house. Looping his arm around Hannah's waist, he went on, "I know you're loyal to a fault to your friends, that you sometimes leap before looking, and you're stubborn as hell."

"Look who's talking," she muttered, not liking his ticking off of her faults. "Isn't there anything you *like* about me?"

"Who said I don't like all that?" He opened the back door of the house and waited for her to precede him. Once inside, he kicked the door closed and swept her into his arms. As he carried her to his bedroom, he murmured, "I happen to like stubborn, 'cause it can lead to so many interesting outcomes." He dropped her lightly onto her feet by the bed and began unbuttoning his shirt, cuffs first.

She watched in silence as he methodically took off his clothes—a man with a mission who was in no particular hurry. Though, as he shucked his pants and her gaze drifted down to his groin, she thought one specific part of him seemed to be in

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a mighty hurry. His cock was already thick and hard, curving upward toward his belly, the tip glistening with pre-cum.

CHAPTER 10

“Why do you still have clothes on?” His voice was deep, raspy with desire.

Hannah swallowed and unbuttoned her dress. She pushed it off her shoulders and let it fall to the floor. She’d worn no underthings and stood before him in just her borrowed sandals and silver nipple rings.

She bent and drew off the sandals. When she straightened, she saw Jax had sat down on the edge of the bed. He patted his thick thighs. “Assume the position.”

Her heart jumped. She hadn’t thought he’d really do it. “You’re not serious.”

“I am.” His lips thinned, and he started ticking off a list on

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his blunt fingers. “One, you ran from me. Two, you won’t tell me where my cattle are. Three, you didn’t stay put in the house where it was safe, and four, you didn’t trust me.”

He *was* serious. She felt cream slide from her sheath to lie thickly along her inner lips. She’d never been spanked before, but the image of herself lying across his lap, his erection prodding her belly while his big hand swatted her ass, ramped her excitement.

Still, she didn’t want to make it too easy for him. He had to work for some of it.

So she shook her head and said, “You can’t punish me for something that happened when there were no ground rules.”

If his eyes narrowed any further they’d be shut.

“Five, you sassed me when you’re supposed to be presenting yourself for your punishment.”

A low thrill tightened her womb. “But—”

“That’s six.”

She pursed her lips and went over to him. Draping herself over his lap, she wiggled a bit to get comfortable, grinning when he moaned as her body slid over his erection.

He widened his legs, giving her more support. His big hand smoothed over the globes of her ass, fingers strumming in the cleft.

Her labia felt swollen, slick, her clit pulsing. She wanted to press her thighs together—not sure if she wanted to hide her arousal from him or try to bring herself some relief.

His hand came down in a sharp crack across one ass cheek. Her breath hissed in, then rushed from her lungs as he slid his

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fingers through her dripping folds.

“You won’t run from me again, will you?” One thick finger speared into her sheath.

“No.” Hannah shivered.

He withdrew his finger and brought his palm down on the other buttock. “That one was for not staying put.” *Swat*. “That one for not trusting me.” He spanked her twice more, stinging strikes that had her pussy gushing and her ass lifting for more. “That’s for sassing me and not doing what I’ve told you.”

His hand settled, resting on her hot skin, intensifying the heat.

It seemed like he was finished, and she wasn’t sure she wanted him to be. “Y-you forgot about me not telling you where your *bovina* are.”

That startled a laugh out of him. She hid her smile by keeping her head lowered.

“Well, since I don’t need you to tell me that now that Ian has your two buddies—believe me, Rhys will get the information out of ’em—I won’t punish you for that one.” He stroked between her thighs again, spreading her slickness but not touching her clit or her drenched opening.

Jax gave her one more spank. “Now, up on the bed. On your back, knees bent, legs spread so I can see this sweet pussy of yours.”

Hannah swallowed and pushed herself off his lap. Seeing the way his cock was ruddy with passion, the tip glistening with pre-cum, eased her in a small way. At least she wasn’t in this alone.

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She got on the bed and spread her legs, drawing her knees up until her heels touched the curve of her buttocks. He moved between her thighs, his hands pressing them even farther apart, exposing her to his gaze. He groaned and brushed his fingers over her labia. "God, you're so swollen, so wet." Leaning down, he flicked his tongue against her engorged clit.

She bucked against him with a small cry.

"Your flavor is amazing. Did I ever tell you that?" The words seemed dragged from him, as if speaking were an effort. She felt one thick finger slip into her hot center.

Moaning, she raised her hips toward him while he fucked her pussy with his finger, his knuckles pounding against her swollen folds. He sucked her clit into his mouth, still stroking into her with his finger.

Just as she moved her legs restlessly, feeling her climax about to crest, he withdrew from her soaked channel.

"No, not yet, *limlana*." Holding her gaze with his, he slipped his finger into his mouth. He closed his eyes as if savoring her flavor, as if it was the finest of wines instead of the evidence of her arousal.

"Jax," she pleaded.

"When you come," he said, and reared up over her, hard, thick cock in one hand. He positioned the fat tip at the entrance to her body and began pressing in. "When you come, it'll be with me inside you. I want to feel your sweet cunt milking me of my seed."

"Then hurry up and fuck me!"

He gripped her hips and surged into her, driving his full

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length inside her.

She cried out at the fullness. He kept a tight grasp on her hips and fucked into her, harder and harder, making her breasts bounce and forcing little gasping grunts with every thrust. Reaching down, she twined her fingers with his, rocking into his lungs with equal fervor.

Her orgasm exploded through her. She screamed and quaked underneath him. She heard his shout, then the hot jet of his release.

In the aftermath, he collapsed onto her, his breathing choppy, his cock buried inside her. Eventually his body completely relaxed, and his sated cock slipped from her channel. Rolling to his back, he flung his arms up across the pillows and exhaled. "I'll never get enough of you."

Hannah sighed. She loved this man, she knew it. But she had a real problem with him selling defenseless animals to be slaughtered when there was no need. "I wish..."

When she didn't finish, he turned his head to look at her. "You wish what?"

She searched his gaze. She didn't want to ruin the moment, but she had to say this. "I wish you didn't...that you weren't a cowboy."

He reached up and stroked a strand of hair away from her face. He didn't seem angry, merely thoughtful. "Technically, I'm a freight hauler—a space trucker. I was only doing this cowboy thing on a temp basis. But you do realize that if I don't supply *bovina*, somebody else will."

"That's what drugmongers say to justify selling poison to

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people across the galaxy.” Hannah turned on her side and rose up on one elbow. Angry at hearing the same old tired rhetoric that others used and afraid for the way the animals would be killed by the Nosfer prince and his people, she glared down at him. “It’s just an excuse to do something wrong.”

One dark blond eyebrow rose. “You’re equating me to a drug dealer?”

She frowned. “You’re deliberately being obtuse, aren’t you?” Not giving him a chance to answer, she said, “Of course I don’t think you’re like a drug dealer. It was just an example.”

* * *

Jax sighed. He really had no choice about this shipment—he’d already given his word the cattle would be delivered in time for the banquet. Kass was depending on it. “I have to see that this shipment gets to Nosfer, Hannah. They’ll be put down humanely, I promise. It’s not like Rhys and his people are going to attack them with their fangs.”

Her blush told him that was exactly what she’d thought.

He bit back a grin, sure she wouldn’t appreciate him laughing at her naiveté. “The cattle will be put down like they would anywhere else, *limlana*. The meat will be very rare when it’s consumed, to be sure, but the animals won’t be alive to feel it.” Leaning down, he pressed a quick kiss to her lips. “After this...” He placed two fingers over her mouth when she started to interrupt him. “After this, I promise I won’t ship animals any more. But if I give up the ranch, we’ll have to live

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aboard my ship.”

He could see she wanted more from him, that she wanted this shipment of *bovina* to be safe from slaughter. He just couldn’t give that to her and still maintain his reputation—and his livelihood.

“I understand.” She huffed a sigh. “I’m pretty organized, you know. I can coordinate our future shipments.”

He rubbed his thumb across her cheek. “So you’re okay with this?” he asked, just to be sure. “You really understand why I have to deliver this shipment?”

Her gaze rose to his. Her expression softened, and she cupped his cheek with her soft palm. “I do understand, Jax. You have people depending on you, and you’re not going to let them down. That’s...” She trailed off and bit her lip. Her eyes searched his, and she seemed to come to a decision. “That’s one of the reasons why I love you.”

He was completely defenseless against her, against the love shining so clearly in her eyes. Her love battered down all his barriers, leaving him more open and free than he’d ever been before.

Open to accept her love and free to admit his own.

“I love you, too, *limlana*.” Jax pressed his lips to hers, pouring all the love and affection he felt into the caress. “Ian was right.” Thinking of his friend, Jax pulled back from her enough to gaze into her face. “I doubt he’ll come around much, if at all,” he said, his voice low. “I think...he fell in love with you, too.” He swallowed back the sudden fear that one man—*him*—might not be enough for her. “It’ll be just you

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and me.”

A slow smile curved her full lips. “If I can have you the rest of my life, cowboy, I’m just fine with that.”

An answering grin covered his face. “Yippee-kai-ay,” he said, and bent to her mouth once again.

SHERRILL QUINN

Sherrill Quinn spent twenty years building her career in Human Resources, reaching the pinnacle as Vice President only to realize her life needed to go in another direction. After taking a “how to write erotic romance” course online in February 2005, she discovered her true calling and hasn’t looked back.

You can read about her current and upcoming books at her web site, <http://sherrillquinn.com>. She’d love to hear from her readers at sherrill@sherrillquinn.com.

* * *

***Don’t miss The Claiming, by Sherrill Quinn,
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Good thing she has Rhys...

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