

Changeling Press

B.J. McCall

SINFUL URGES



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Bodyguard Imara Baz is hired to work undercover for one of the richest executives in the galaxy. It's a dream job except for one hitch. Although she's posing as the executive's lover, it's his personal bodyguard -- a member of the Believers, sworn enemies of vampires -- who heats Imara's blood.

Believer Kel Tanner should despise the addition of a vampire to his security team, even if she is the most beautiful woman he's ever seen. His faith forbids contact with vampires, but his increasing desire for Imara is far too powerful to resist his sinful urges.

Chapter One

Without her blaster, flash discs and pulse spheres, Imara Baz felt naked, stripped of the tools of her trade. The silky material of her emerald-green dress swirled around her knees as she waited on the roof of the Talus News building. The high-heeled sandals she wore were totally impractical for a bodyguard, but going undercover as Maine Montroyal's lover demanded a flashy, sexy style. If her Vazan Shield co-workers got a glimpse of her shiny emerald-painted toenails she'd never live it down.

Within minutes an Experience Resorts corporate rover landed. A broad-shouldered man dressed in black and two droids, Montroyal's personal security detail, were first to deplane. The man scanned the area, gave her a detailed once-over, before Montroyal disembarked.

Shorter and slimmer than the bodyguard, Montroyal straightened the lapels of his gray suit, smoothed an errant lock of black hair, and headed toward her. His stride, confident as his smile, was quick without appearing hurried. Pretty boy handsome with eyes as blue as a tropical sea, the executive took her hands in his and checked her out from head to toe.

"Darling." His lips grazed both cheeks. "Imara Baz?"

"Reporting for duty, Sir," she whispered back.

"You look amazing."

He introduced the bodyguard.

"Mr. Tanner."

Brown eyes met hers, held, never drifting south to her obvious cleavage. "Ms. Baz."

Tanner knew his place and respected Montroyal's property but beneath that cool exterior Imara saw a warrior, ready to act with deadly force if necessary. Good qualities in a bodyguard.

Imara admired men like Tanner who were physically tough, action oriented and intense in every facet of their lives. Too bad she wasn't partnered with Tanner instead of his boss. His high cheekbones, strong chin, and imperfect nose were appealing. Streaked by the sun, his thick and slightly unruly brown hair grazed his collar.

If his mind was half as fit as his body the job just might be interesting as well as profitable.

Montroyal addressed Tanner. "Are we clear to speak?"

The bodyguard nodded.

"Imara is Vazan Shield. She'll be traveling with me until the Purists threat is handled. She'll remain undercover during the course of her stay."

Tanner's eyes went hard and his mouth thinned, his reaction so subtle most would have missed it. Why hadn't Montroyal informed his personal bodyguard of her arrival? Or had the boss failed to mention she was Vazan? Not everyone liked having a vampire on the team.

Montroyal took her arm. "Ready, darling?"

When Tanner raised his right hand to signal the droids, Imara caught a glimpse of the Believers crux, a cross patterned after a constellation visible in the Earth sky, tattooed on his inner wrist and understood the bodyguard's reaction. Throughout the galaxy she'd had to interact with people who disliked vampires. Tanner's religious affiliation might add a layer of difficulty to the job and definitely dispelled any possibility of intimacy.

Too bad. The bodyguard had something that sizzled her senses and Imara had a gut feeling he didn't spread it around as often as Montroyal. The press loved the handsome executive and often commented on his lovers. Imara had no intention of being a footnote in Montroyal's love life.

Turning her attention to business, she smiled at Montroyal and complimented his suit. Together they followed the attractive bodyguard into the Talus News building.

Chapter Two

Kel Tanner's gaze flicked over the broadcast set looking for anything or anyone out of place. A dozen technicians hovered around his boss. At the direction of an audio tech Montroyal gave a test count. Kel shifted his shoulders, felt the familiar butt of his blaster tucked under his left arm as he walked the short distance to the command room. He peered through the wall of glass and scanned the bank of screens lining the wall. The camera loved Montroyal. So did the ladies.

Out of the corner of his eye he caught a flash of green.

Finding out about the addition of a vampire to the team was a hard kick to the gut. After five years it burned Kel that Montroyal would hire Vazan Shield without informing him. She turned and smiled at him. Her teeth were pearl white and her lips painted red.

Her eyes were an amazing silvery green or perhaps their color was simply a trick of the light because of the color of her dress. Despite her pale skin and fit body, he hadn't pegged her for a vampire.

What he'd felt in the moment he'd spotted her standing across the landing pad, need so powerful it had shocked him, went against years of training. His reaction, his want of her, was the last thing he'd expected. Beautiful women were a part of Montroyal's lifestyle and until that moment Kel hadn't had a disloyal thought. He'd never coveted his boss's women or his money.

Montroyal could keep his money.

She lifted her arm and brushed a lock of hair out of her eyes, the movement slow, sensual and so utterly feminine. Deliberate? A couple inches shorter than Kel, the vampire was as tall as Montroyal. Straight black hair, streaked with dark red, hung halfway down her back.

Realizing his thoughts were not only disloyal, but unfaithful as well, Kel tore his gaze away from Imara Baz and focused on his job. Just as well she was a vampire. The last thing he needed now was to develop a lust for the boss's bedmate. Kel doubted that Montroyal and the vampire would maintain a strictly professional relationship.

Kel shifted his gaze back to the monitors. The female anchor leaned close to Montroyal and whispered something in his ear. Kel's boss laughed softly. The anchor smiled and touched her hair.

Circling the command room, Kel took his place at the edge of the set within feet of Montroyal. The live broadcast was highly publicized and the building's security wasn't to Kel's liking.

"Miss Lason." The tech raised his hand and began a silent countdown for the anchor. "Five, four, three, two."

The blonde anchorwoman turned toward the camera. "Good morning. I'm Geta Lason and welcome to *Business Spotlight*. Today my guest is Maine Montroyal, the Chief Executive Officer of Experience Resorts, the galactic leader in holographic experiences."

Kel listened to the usual introductory banter while keeping watch. He deliberately avoided making eye contact with the vampire. Taking out Montroyal during a live interplanetary broadcast would catapult the Purists from a radical wing of the Believers, barely acknowledged by the media until recently, into major players. Kel's job as Montroyal's personal bodyguard had taken a decided turn from stalkers, over-enthusiastic job seekers, irrational stockholders and admiring females to preventing the Purists from making good on the multiple death threats aimed at the executive.

If Montroyal didn't believe he was up to the task, why didn't he say so and why had he hired Vazan Shield? Vampires and Purists were sworn enemies.

While keeping watch, Kel listened to the interview.

The anchorwoman was speaking. "As a leader in the holographic escape industry popular throughout the galaxy, I understand Experience Resorts is launching a new and innovative product. Can you tell our viewers about it?"

Montroyal looked into the camera. "Our newest resort is called Spiritual Moments. Instead of climbing a mountain on Tagus 9 or lying on the beach on Solis 6 you can experience a religious episode. The Sidarians have a rich religious history and Experience Resorts has chosen to launch the first Spiritual Moments on Sidar. We've test marketed the concept and have received rave reviews. The official Sidar grand opening is in two days and we're booked through the next year. A sister resort is being built on Cipro. Five more resorts are on the drawing board."

"I've read the reviews, Mr. Montroyal. The public is receptive to this spiritual concept and I've noticed Experience's stock price has jumped significantly."

"It's going higher, Geta. Religious leaders on Sidar have seen a remarkable increase in church membership. The faithful are flocking to our resorts. We expect the same results on Cipro."

"But not all are happy. The Believers have denounced the Spiritual Moments. They view Experience as a group of greedy capitalists using mankind's soul to make money."

Kel pulled his sleeve lower to cover the cross marking him as a Believer. He found comfort in his faith, and given his choice of profession, chose to keep his religious affiliation personal and very private. All men, all faiths deserved respect. Even the vampires of Vazan were part of the galactic community.

Sensing someone behind him, Tanner turned. The vampire stood before him. His gaze dropped to her full, lush breasts. The thin material and plunging neckline of her dress outlined and emphasized their shape and size.

She cleared her throat. Caught, he looked into her green eyes.

Smiling, she reached out and grasped the wrist bearing the Believers crux. "If you have a problem with me, Mr. Tanner, take it up with your boss."

His faith taught tolerance and respect for others but the innocent blood spilled by vampires loomed large in the Believers' history. Vampires were a forbidden species, but still she stirred him.

"The Purists have issued a death demand against Montroyal. A vampire lover will only fuel the fire."

Leaning close, she whispered, "I can handle the fire. Can you?"

She released his hand, turned, and walked away. The captivating scent of her perfume lingered.

Kel inhaled and let a half smile slip across his face. He'd just been challenged by a vampire to perform his job. The private security business was full of aggressive, in-your-face types. He'd been a merc himself before linking up with Montroyal, but Imara had also taken a shot at him as a man and questioned his ability to handle her.

Imara. Her name was as sensual as her perfume.

Taking a deep breath, he dragged his mind away from the sexy vampire and back to his job.

"Mr. Montroyal --" the anchor's expression became serious, "-- have the Believers made death threats against you?"

"A radical wing calling themselves the Purists have chosen to target Experience and my name has been mentioned in their protests."

Kel had expected the church's fierce objection to Spiritual Moments. When Montroyal and the corporation's board members had assured the church's leadership their declaration of non-participation would be respected, Kel had hoped the issue resolved, but the Purists had demanded a complete cancellation of the resorts.

His boss looked directly into the camera. "Speaking for the board members, the stockholders and the employees of Experience Resorts, we respect and will follow the wishes of the Believers. No episodes from their Handbook will be offered at any Spiritual Moments resort. Let me assure everyone, the board and I have sought and received approvals from the counseling bodies of every religion in our data banks."

"I understand the Purists intend to protest all Spiritual Moments resorts even if no Handbook episodes are offered."

“Unfortunately, that is true. The Purists do not have the legal right to oppose our spiritual resorts nor do they have a divine right to decide for other religious groups. I believe an increase in church memberships is a good thing.”

As the interview concluded, Kel alerted the droid security unit stationed at the roof exit door and notified the pilot to ready the ship for takeoff. Kel walked in front of Montroyal as they hurried along the corridor to the elevators. The vampire walked beside Montroyal. Looking forward, Kel noted several open doorways and prepared himself for a possible strike from the side. Given the size of the building, checking out each room was impossible. He moved fast, expecting the vampire and his boss to keep pace.

Just as he passed two closed doors, directly opposite one another, the hairs on his neck stood. He’d missed something. He felt it in his gut. The door on the left, the one Montroyal was approaching, wasn’t fully closed.

Kel stopped, spun on his heel and pointed his weapon. “Hit the floor.”

The nozzle of a mini-blaster poked out. Then streaks of blue fire filled the hallway, blowing holes in the walls.

Kel fired.

His shot took out a chunk of the doorframe and hit the target. Fire alarms went off as flames licked the burning walls. A smoking hole was all that was left of the would-be assassin’s chest.

The rush of his pounding blood filled his ears, but relief flooded his body.

Just past the damaged doorway Montroyal was lying face down on the carpeted floor with the vampire splayed over him, shielding his body. Her dress was wrapped around her waist and a thin green strap crisscrossed the small of her back and disappeared between the taut cheeks of her ass. Long, bare legs were spread wide.

His heart rate jumped higher.

Her eyes fierce, the vampire glanced over her shoulder and looked at him. “Clear? Tanner! Clear?”

Her shout snapped him back into action. “Clear! Elevator! Move!”

She scrambled to her knees, giving Kel an image he'd never forget, then regained her feet and pulled Montroyal to his. Together they propelled him along the corridor toward the bank of elevators.

Bracketing Montroyal, Kel and the vampire forced their way through the gathering crowd and into a waiting elevator. No one challenged Kel's drawn weapon.

* * *

A few hours later the interviews and official police statements concerning the incident were completed. Montroyal's and Experience Resorts' legal representatives smoothed the process. No charges were filed and Kel's weapon was returned. He tucked the blaster in its holster, taking comfort in its familiar weight. The assassin had gotten close, too close.

To Kel's surprise Montroyal refused to meet the reporters waiting at police headquarters and Experience's corporate office. When his boss ordered the pilot to head for home, Kel was relieved. At the estate he had a controlled perimeter, scanners, cameras and detectors. Perhaps the attempt on his life had shaken Montroyal, but the executive's demeanor remained calm.

This morning's close call justified the addition of another bodyguard to the team. Vampire or not, Kel realized Imara's value.

Upon landing at Montroyal's private estate, Kel requested an audience with his boss. Within minutes he followed Montroyal into his private office.

"Sir, if you have any doubts about my ability or commitment to you and my job, I'd like to know now."

Montroyal removed his jacket and settled into his chair behind a huge desk with a full communication center at his fingertips. Since he hadn't been offered a seat Kel remained standing.

The executive looked Kel in the eye. "I didn't hire Vazan Shield. The board and the insurance company insisted on it."

"Because I'm a Believer?"

"I doubt they know." Montroyal unfastened the collar of his shirt. "Because of this threat and the vast amount of funds invested in Spiritual Moments, security has been increased. Every Experience office and resort is on full alert. Vazan Shield is a highly recommended security firm. In addition to her obvious assets, Imara has an excellent resume. Her boss says she's lethal."

"But placing a vampire at your side makes you even more of a target. Since Experience announced the plans for the Sidar resort, the press has made the Purists a household name, but they've existed for hundreds of years. They are the silent, righteous arm of the Believers ready to take action, willing to die."

"Do you support the Purists?"

"No. But if you want my resignation, you have it, Sir."

"I don't want you to resign, Kel. I want to know that Experience's new course doesn't conflict with your faith. That's a real situation I must address. My ass is on the line, literally."

Relieved, Kel assured his boss. "I'm a sworn Believer. I have no intention of abandoning my faith but I do not side with the Purists. I respect the right of others to experience their faith in any way they choose."

"And what of Imara? Her job might exceed the traditional boundaries."

Kel chose his words carefully. No matter her experience and abilities, this was his territory. "I can work *with* Ms. Baz."

"Then it's settled. Imara will accompany me to Hite Raza's birthday tonight, but I want you there too."

"I'll contact Mr. Raza's security officer." He turned to leave.

"Kel."

He turned and faced Montroyal.

"I know it's your job, but thanks. I appreciate what you did today."

"You're welcome, sir."

* * *

Imara located the estate's security center and took a look around while the bodyguard spoke with Montroyal. The equipment and the droids were expensive and well maintained. The only entry was a blast door. Tanner ran an efficient operation and his actions at the news building proved he was very good at his job.

The moment Montroyal had boarded the rover Tanner had requested a private audience. Was the bodyguard protesting her presence by threatening to resign?

She didn't think Tanner wasted time on threats. He'd act. She decided to wait and confront the issue head on. She didn't have to wait long.

"Ms. Baz."

"You can call me Baz or Imara, Mr. Tanner. And no, I don't like Vamp or Vampire bitch."

He pulled off his jacket and hung it by the door. The blaster followed. "Never gave it a thought, Baz. And you can drop the mister."

His black shirt clung to his body like a second skin. Although his shoulders were wide, his arms and back thick with muscle, he moved with ease. He didn't depend on bulk. Agile, his reflexes were quick and efficient. Today, he'd been impressive.

"You can change your religion, Tanner, but I was born Vazan. I drink blood. I live and breathe, age and die, just like you. The living dead thing is a myth, an Earth legend. I require blood to survive and I'm well aware how the Believers feel about my kind. I've brought an adequate supply so there's no need to worry about being attacked in the dark of night and having your veins sucked dry."

His lips thinned and his gaze met hers straight on. "My faith isn't disposable and I'm not worried. Do we have an understanding?"

All the more intrigued by him, Imara nodded.

He slid into the control chair. "How about I familiarize you with the system, Baz?"

While Tanner explained scanner placement and range, she moved close enough to inhale his scent. Imara loved the heated scent of human males and this one enticed her more than most. When his arm brushed her hip he didn't flinch. Leaning closer, she

wondered if he was as aware of her as she was of him. The hot thrum of the veins pulsing in his neck triggered a sensual thirst. She'd given him her word he was safe, but his heady scent enthralled her. Watching him in action was a rush and catching him looking at her ass a real turn-on.

Given his faith, she'd expected him to turn away, but Tanner had looked, twice.

Now he kept his eyes and hands on the huge screen. Images of the estate and grounds appeared as his fingers danced over its surface. "Security droids patrol the grounds and are present in the house. I've programmed the droids to recognize you. Now we need them to follow your commands."

He said a nonsense phrase in Arano and asked her to repeat it to provide a voiceprint for the system. Given all the peoples and governments throughout the galaxy, a commercial and diplomatic language, called Arano, was adopted. If you wanted to work or function beyond your own planet, fluency in Arano was a necessity.

She repeated the phrase.

"The system will recognize your voice. Any questions?"

"Any humans in residence besides you and Montroyal?"

He turned his head to look at her. "Not at the moment."

Their gazes locked for a heartbeat then he focused on the control screen once again.

She straightened. "You're well organized, Tanner."

"Before we leave for the party tonight, I want to set you up with a communicator. I'll be with the host's security team, but you'll be on the floor. Will you be wearing your hair down?"

"I'm not sure. Montroyal is providing my clothing. Once I'm dressed for the party I'll come here and we'll secure the device."

His gaze remained on the screen. "Okay."

Imara reached down and slid a fingertip over the tattoo on his right arm. This time he did flinch. "Thanks, Tanner."

He swiveled the chair around and faced her. "For what?"

"You're a Believer. I'm Vazan. You've been gracious."

"Our objectives are the same."

"How did you spot the assassin?"

"I didn't." He rubbed his fingertips over the tattoo. "Sometimes I get a feeling. Today I got it right after I passed that door."

"Great instincts. You're good."

"So are you. Montroyal hit the floor fast. You were willing to take a hit."

She accepted the compliment with a bit of levity. "I don't like my principal taken out on my first day. Looks bad on my record."

A heart-stopping smile curved his lips. "That it does."

"Have you ever worked with a vampire before?"

"No, but we both have a job to do."

Imara extended her hand. "If we can put certain things aside, we'll make a good team."

He stood and clasped his hand to hers, holding it a fraction longer than necessary. "Baz, I can handle the fire."

Heat spiraled through her middle, curling right down to her pussy. "I bet you can."

Chapter Three

Dressed for the evening in a black suit, Kel waited for Imara. In his private thoughts she was Imara, never Baz. He waited for her now, wondering what dress she'd wear tonight and if she'd share Montroyal's bed when they returned.

He silently cursed himself for thinking about her sleeping arrangements and checked the output of the droid security units, two internal and four external, sweeping the multiple level estate. Satisfied, Kel pushed away from his control screen and stood. The droids were reliable, the equipment the best money could buy, but Kel still made a full sweep before leaving the ultra modern estate. The entire upper story was perma-shield strong enough to deflect penetration by a multitude of projectiles, but so clear the gardens, pool and sports area were visible. The entire estate was swept every few minutes.

The security door slid open and Imara entered the room. She hadn't chosen a dress, but had poured her magnificent body into a silver lace concoction that left no curve to the imagination. She wore her hair swept up away from her face and fastened with a silver clasp. A glorious tail of red and black hair fell down her back. Her lips were blood red and her eyes simmered beneath a line of silver. Her pale green gaze met his.

"I chose silver. I figured you could attach a communicator on this and no one would notice."

The silver lace body suit covered her from neck to toe. The intricate design was very detailed over her nipples and at the apex of her long legs. The silver sparkled, a million tiny reflections, when she moved. One could see nothing, yet everything. The effect was dazzling and so utterly sexy a lusty throb began somewhere deep in Kel's groin.

He opened a drawer and removed a small silver-colored disc. The adhesive backing removed, Kel placed the disc on her shoulder. The tiny disc blended in with the shiny lace. He removed another disc and peeled back the sleeve of her garment. The material was gossamer thin, so fine she might as well have been naked. He pressed the disc to her inner wrist.

Her pale skin was soft, silky beneath his fingers. "The discs are listening devices. The one on your shoulder will pick up conversations. Use the one on your wrist if you need to tell me something you want no one else to hear."

"Shall we test it?"

Kel watched her walk out of the room. Whoever had designed the body suit hadn't bothered to detail the design on her backside. The effect from the rear was mesmerizing. If she bent over every cock in the room would stand at attention.

Her voice pulled him back to the job. "Testing wrist communicator. Testing shoulder communicator."

She walked back into the room.

"Clear on both discs," he said.

"But I can't hear you."

"Everyone must think you're the boss's date not a bodyguard. You're my eyes and ears tonight. And you'll be closer than I could be in this situation."

"But without a blaster."

Kel couldn't resist a grin as his gaze slid over her. "Even I don't have one small enough to hide in that outfit."

Green eyes shimmering, she moved closer. So close he caught her scent, something different, floral with a delicate touch of musk, sexy. "So don't fuck up, right?"

Why did she have to choose that word? He wanted to fuck her. Vampires were forbidden, but he was having difficulty, painful difficulty, remembering that edict.

With a smile, she strolled out of the room with her long hair swinging and her fabulous ass swaying.

* * *

Imara's feet were killing her by the time she stepped into Montroyal's rover near sunrise. Exhausted from smiling, making small talk and having her ass squeezed by unfamiliar and unwanted hands, Imara needed a long, tall glass of blood and a soft mattress.

Looking fresh and unaffected by the long night, Montroyal patted the seat next to his. "You were marvelous tonight," he said as she settled into the plush seat. "I'm the envy of half the city's powerbrokers." His fingers slid along her arm. "They liked you."

They *had* liked her. Some so much she'd been offered a considerable amount of money to fuck them. She wondered if Montroyal knew Kel had placed a listening device on her outfit and was privy to his words. Perhaps he didn't care.

"Because I'm a vampire? A new diversion to talk about the next morning?"

"You are more than a night's diversion." He leaned closer. "Do vampires really suck blood during orgasm?"

So he had overheard the conversation between her and an inquisitive paid companion. The woman had assumed Imara was in the same business. She didn't correct her. "It heightens the experience for the vampire."

"Fascinating. What about the human?"

"Depends on the human."

"We'll discuss this later, when we're alone."

Montroyal's voice had dropped but he'd spoken directly into the listening device. She wondered what Tanner had thought of the conversation.

As she exited the rover her gaze locked with Tanner's. His expression was unreadable.

Inside the house, Montroyal addressed the bodyguard. "I'll be resting until noon. Imara?"

Tanner walked away, leaving them alone.

"Sir." She'd called him Maine all evening but that was part of the cover. Montroyal left little doubt she was welcome to join him in his bed. "I'm sorry, but even a vampire requires rest."

She didn't want to insult the boss, but she needed nourishment and hadn't slept in almost two days. Although her energy was ebbing she wouldn't have turned down an invitation from Tanner.

"Of course. We've all had a long day."

After Montroyal had retreated to his private rooms, Imara made a quick stop in hers and drank a tall, replenishing glass of blood before joining Tanner in the security center. The bodyguard was all business, but the surprised look in his eyes told her Tanner hadn't expected her.

"If Montroyal raises his voice or moves outside the set perimeter we'll know it. The droids will sweep the grounds throughout the night."

"I'm exhausted," Imara said, thankful for the coolness of the tiled floor. "Those shoes were sheer torture. I miss my boots."

Tanner glanced at her bare feet and grinned.

She rubbed her backside.

"Go to bed, Baz." He removed his jacket and holster before sitting down at the console. "I'll perform the security check. It's part of my routine."

She watched as his fingers flew over the flat control screen. Images from the droids flashed. With a bare touch of his fingertip the image enlarged. Numbers flew across the upper section, verifying the scanners and the droids were operating at full capacity.

"Do you have visual in Montroyal's private quarters?"

"His office, yes, his private bedroom and bath, no." He swiveled around in the chair and met her gaze. "Is your inquiry work related or did you refuse him because you were afraid I'd watch?"

"You don't strike me as a voyeur."

"I'm not. What Montroyal does in his private time is his affair."

She slid her fingers over the lace and located the listening device. "Was he aware you were listening?"

Tanner stood and gently removed the disc. "No. I wanted him at ease."

Imara recalled her conversations with Montroyal. The executive had made his interest known, but she suspected his desire was fueled by what she was rather than who she was.

"Do you usually keep the principal in the dark?" she asked as Tanner placed the tiny disc into a drawer.

"If Montroyal had known he may have acted differently toward you. From what I observed and heard no one saw you as anything other than a beautiful woman."

His gaze settled briefly on her mouth. Imara's pulse leaped as he looked into her eyes. He'd said woman not vampire. *Beautiful?*

Heat sizzled in her middle. She waited, wanting him to drag her into his arms, willing him to act on the moment.

He took her hand. His fingertips brushed her skin as he pulled back her sleeve to retrieve the other disc. Unlike Montroyal's Tanner's hands were big and callused. Her breath hitched as he peeled the disc off her skin and rubbed his thumb over the area.

"Do I confuse you, Tanner?"

Her question caught his attention. Again, his gaze locked with hers, but he didn't answer. Before he released her hand she closed her fingers around his.

"You confuse me. Until now every Believer I've encountered has been less than polite." She moved close, so close only a breath separated them. "There's a history between your church and my kind, but that was long before either of us were born."

His hand gripped hers. "What do you want from me?"

"Something no one has ever demanded." His eyes narrowed. She'd piqued his interest. Sometimes it was best to let the pot sizzle. "Goodnight, Tanner."

When she stepped back, he released her hand, but Imara saw the struggle in his eyes. He wanted her. She knew it, felt it. Now all she had to do was break through a hundred years of suspicion and hate.

* * *

Kel prided himself on self-discipline. Letting Imara walk away tested him in ways he'd never encountered. He'd never ached for the forbidden.

Watching her massage her left buttock had set his heart racing and his blood pounding. He gripped the back of the chair, digging his fingers into the solid plastic, and forced his brain to concentrate on the pain. The door closed behind her yet the tremors of temptation racing through his blood remained.

Hard and aching, he ordered himself to breathe deeply. He glanced at the screen, watched as the sensors picked up her movement. She entered her room and he waited. That he worried she'd change her mind and join Montroyal tore at him. All night he'd had to listen to men subjecting her to everything from subtle hints to blatant offers of money. So many men wanted to fuck her.

And he'd hated them for wanting the very thing he desired, but shouldn't.

An odd relief slid through him when she secured her quarters. Every section of the mansion was locked down. Nothing moved. Outside the roaming droids continued their silent patrols.

Kel left the security center and sought his own bed. In a few hours the job would demand his full attention and skill. The Purists had vowed to prevent the Sidar resort grand opening and the clock was ticking.

In the privacy of his room Kel knelt before the crux on the wall. Usually, prayer helped him resolve his troubles and quelled the needs of his body, but tonight he found no relief.

Do I confuse you?

Imara's question had struck home. She did more than confuse him. She made him question, doubt and yearn.

He'd assumed he'd feel revulsion, reacting as he'd been taught when encountering a vampire, but Imara excited him. Maturity and experience had rejected the childhood images of fangs dripping with blood, but he hadn't expected beauty,

sensuality and eyes that promised passion. He'd never reacted so fiercely to a female, never faced such temptation.

Something no one else has ever demanded.

Mind, body and soul, she twisted him in knots.

Rising, he picked up the Believers Handbook resting on the altar beneath the crux. The guide was written long before the men of Earth had reached out into the heavens, before the discovery of other life forms, before vampires were known to exist.

The Handbook told him to resist temptation, to pray until the sinful urges passed. The desire for Imara wasn't a passing urge. It had slammed him in the gut, grabbed him by the balls and fisted his heart.

Kel returned the Handbook to its place of honor. Sitting down before his personal communication console, Kel contacted Essar.

The teacher and prominent church historian's face appeared on the screen.

"Essar."

The old man smiled and his dark eyes twinkled. "Kel, it's been a long time."

"I regret that, Sir."

"As I grow older fewer of my students seek counsel."

Kel shifted in his seat. "My job keeps me busy."

"You are troubled?"

"I killed a man today. A Purist."

The dark eyes went flat. "Mr. Montroyal and his corporation have set upon a path that many perceive as commercialization of their faith."

"And there are those who embrace Spiritual Moments. Many things in the universe exist and I must deal with them."

"You must pray. Find your inner peace."

Kel nodded. "I need information about Redis."

Essar's eyes narrowed. "Redis?"

Kel understood his questions would be unusual. The scholars rarely spoke about the Redis incident and never in detail.

"It's important. I wouldn't broach the subject otherwise."

"The vampires killed our colony. Feeding on them like animals."

"Why were Believers sent to Redis?"

"The population on Earth had increased beyond the numbers allowed by the World Assembly. Grants were offered to groups willing to colonize. The church sent colonies throughout the universe to spread the word and to ease the burden on Earth."

"Did the church profit?"

Essar didn't answer.

"I've traveled throughout the universe. I've visited several colonies. More is going on than merely spreading the word. Why Redis?"

"The incident took place well over a hundred years ago. Why do you ask?"

"Essar, why Redis?"

"The Assembly had started a mining operation for diantridrite. A small colony of miners started the operation. If successful, more would follow."

Easily mined, diantridrite supplied several planets with a viable energy source.

"Was Redis abandoned because of the vampire attack?"

Essar nodded. "A larger, purer deposit was discovered on Iolara. The church moved the operation. Less processing required."

"And more profit." The church maintained holdings throughout the universe. "Why were the vampires on Redis? Were they running a competing operation?"

"The vampires were buying diantridrite. The crew of a Vazan commercial freighter was responsible for the deaths."

"They killed the miners providing the diantridrite?"

"Yes. Their blood supply was contaminated. They fed upon the miners, draining them of their life's blood."

"But why kill them? Why kill your source of survival?"

"What does one expect of crazed blood drinkers? Preacher Obdit was the only survivor. Otherwise we might have never known what happened."

Imara, a crazed blood drinker? Kel had difficulty with that image.

"Is the Redis incident the only violent encounter the Believers have had with vampires?"

"We've avoided confrontation by forbidding contact."

"Thank you, Essar."

"If your job is conflicting with your faith, perhaps you should consider leaving Montroyal."

"Goodnight, Essar."

Kel signed off and the screen went dark. Instead of praying, he walked into his bedroom, stripped off his clothes and climbed into bed. He ordered the wakeup alarm set and the lights off. Lying in the dark, his thoughts tumbled from the vampires on Redis to Imara with the pale green eyes and lush curves.

Alone with his thoughts, desires rose and his body responded.

Given the situation, he should pray and will his body into submission. Instead, he welcomed her image and fisted his swollen cock. His flesh was hard and hot, needy. He stroked and tugged, reeling from the intense pleasure.

He saw her naked, all generous curves and gleaming skin. He imagined the two of them locked together, legs entwined, his cock buried inside her. Fast and furious, he moved his hand, giving in to the pleasure, savoring the intense release.

Chapter Four

Imara stood at the door of the rover waiting for Montroyal. While she performed a security check on the transport, Tanner had remained with the executive. Another rover manned by corporate security circled the roof of the Experience Resorts building. Montroyal's meetings had run late and finally he was headed for home.

Security work was filled with hours of waiting and watching, dozens of details to absorb, a constant state of readiness and preparation to prevent one moment of terror. Today, thankfully, had no such moment, but Imara remained tense and edgy. She suspected her state had something to do with Tanner. Despite her exhaustion, she dreamed about the bodyguard, imagining the feel of his skin and that hard muscled body pressed against hers. And sex, lots of sex. She'd awoken a little tired and very frustrated.

Perhaps she'd sleep better tonight. Tomorrow things were definitely going to heat up.

"Rover secure."

The executive appeared and approached the rover with Tanner in tow. Montroyal smiled at her as he boarded. Imara followed and Tanner observed as a droid secured the aircraft's door.

Within seconds they were headed for the estate.

She'd had little time to speak with Tanner during the day. While he'd maintained a vigil on the executive floor and made preparations for the journey to the moon of Sidar, she'd spent hours in Montroyal's office suite observing everyone coming into contact with the C.E.O.

Tanner slid into the seat beside hers at the front of the rover. Still working, Montroyal sat in the center taking calls.

"You understand the Purists and their agenda. What are the chances of an assault on the estate?"

Tanner slid his thumb along his jaw. Stubble shadowed his face, giving him a rugged, sexy look. "I know they are committed and will make an attempt to stop the grand opening. They can hit Montroyal tonight at home, tomorrow while we travel, or on Sidar." He turned his head, checked on Montroyal then looked at her. He dropped his voice. "If you wanted impact, which target would you choose?"

"Sidar. I'd go for maximum press."

"And on Sidar we are at a disadvantage. We're dependent on the Sidarians for crowd control and the only place large enough to handle the ceremony is outside."

"Will he wear armor?"

"Given the incident at the news station, he's agreed to a vest beneath his suit."

"As long as it doesn't show on camera, right?"

A smile touched the corners of his mouth. "Right. I've placed observers in the crowd and added several men to the press corps. Talus news was particularly cooperative. We'll have the usual scanners and sensors, but security will be a nightmare."

"Where do you want me?"

"Right behind Montroyal. I want you within arm's reach. A group of corporate and Sidarian officials will stand behind the podium. Use them as your cover."

His gaze slid over her, right down to her high heels.

Montroyal provided her sexy wardrobe. She wore a short skirt and a sleeveless blouse that hugged her breasts. The executive liked his girlfriends to turn heads and Imara did her best to maintain her cover.

"You should wear armor."

"I'll wear a suit to hide my blaster. I've felt naked without it."

She heard his breath hitch. Clearing his throat, Tanner checked his wrist unit.

"Any chance we could catch some down time? I'd love to put my feet up, relax in a bath before bed. Have a glass of wine."

He chuckled softly and leaned back in his seat. "Sure, take what's left of the evening. I can handle things."

"Thanks, but I meant together."

His head snapped around as the rover touched down.

Imara look directly in his eyes and smiled. "Looks like we're home, Tanner."

Thankfully, Montroyal hurried to his private office leaving Imara and Tanner to their jobs. While Tanner ran a full security scan, Imara performed a walk through of the house looking for anything out of the ordinary, small things the sensors or droids might miss. Leaving nothing to chance, she carried a blaster.

Since they'd landed, Tanner was all business. Imara had no idea what he might think of her not-so-subtle hint. After the grand opening had concluded she might well be on her way to another job if not another planet. Although nothing permanent would come of it, she wanted Tanner. Even if only for a few hours.

Task completed, she returned to the security center.

Tanner stood directly in front of her. Eyes blazing, he reached out and pulled her into his arms. Her breasts met hard muscle and his mouth slammed down on hers as if he intended to devour her.

Fire raced through her and her fangs extended. She grasped his neck, pressing her fingertips against the throbbing vein. Yes. This is what she needed.

His hands were in her hair, on her back, grasping her ass.

The kiss deepened, his tongue sliding over hers, skating the points of her fangs, his teeth nipped her lower lip. Something between a moan and a growl sounded in his throat. He fisted her hair and pulled her head back. His eyes were fierce, filled with fire. The air sizzled with his heat, his scent.

Her blood thundered in her ears. Her skin burned, her body heated, her pussy flooded with liquid fire.

"Imara."

Her name was a softly spoken request. This was the moment to accept or deny.

She grabbed his shoulders and held on.

Grasping her by the waist, he picked her up, slamming her back against the closed door. He jammed a hard muscled thigh between hers and shoved up her skirt. His big hand cupped her ass and his fingers gripped the tiny strap of her underwear. He slid his finger along the strap to the triangle covering her curls and yanked, shredding the fragile material. She dug her heels in his buttocks.

The back of his hand brushed her pussy as he tore at the fly of his pants.

Heat poured off his body. She went wet in anticipation.

Her heart leaped at the feel of him, big, hard, probing, seeking entry. Imara hooked a thigh on his hip. He seated, thrust home. Went deep. On fire, she clung to him, welcomed each hot, driving thrust. Again and again, he drove into her, pounding her slick flesh, giving her what she needed.

Breath ragged, her climax came in a hot, clenching rush.

Tanner groaned, the sound tearing from his chest as he thrust deep, and stilled. Chest heaving, he slumped against her, burying his face in her hair, crushing her chest between hard muscle and the blast door.

They remained together letting the air cool their bodies and time ease their heart rates.

He muttered something, either a prayer or a curse, in a language she didn't understand.

"Tanner, tell me you're not praying for forgiveness?"

Although she'd asked lightly, the possibility that he might regret their lovemaking hurt.

He lifted his head. His gaze slid over her face then he looked directly into her eyes. "I wasn't praying." He repeated the statement then translated. "I refuse to accept something so beautiful, so wonderful, is a sin."

Heart pounding, Imara searched his eyes. She saw no deception, only warmth and desire.

"My name is Kel." His lips brushed hers. "I want you beside me tonight."

She cupped his face. Perhaps they'd only get this one night, but she wanted it. In Kel's arms she didn't feel like a lethal weapon, she felt like a woman, half in love and very vulnerable. The feeling was new, unusual and odd. She had no idea how to deal with it.

When he lifted an eyebrow Imara realized he was waiting for her response.

"I can't wait to see you naked, Kel."

He laughed softly. "I was thinking the same thing."

She kissed him, lushly, solidly, thoroughly, then released him from the body clench she had around his hips. Kel shifted his weight and their bodies parted, but he didn't move away.

He rested a hand on her breast. "Your heart is pounding."

"I've been in situations where I thought my next breath would be my last, but this thing between us is..."

"Intense?"

Imara nodded.

A smile curved his lips. He stepped back and adjusted his fly. "Let's see if we can push it up a notch."

Kel opened the blast door. Imara pulled down her skirt and scooped her torn underwear off the floor.

His quarters were adjacent to the security center. In the living room she noted the crux and the Handbook lying on the altar. The worn material where he kneeled told her the tattoo on his arm wasn't just an adornment. Kel was a religious man. Yet, he'd sinned to be with her.

He led her into his bedroom. Like her, he lived simply, without clutter. Several print books sat upon a small shelf. They must have cost a fortune. A landscape of a mountain lake hung on one wall.

A display of weapons was mounted on the opposite wall. An insignia of an Earth-based intergalactic marine troop was stamped into the grip of a photon rifle.

"You were in the military. A sniper."

"I was young." He drew her to him. "I wanted to see the universe."

"You were born on Earth?"

"Yes." He slid his fingers through her hair. "When I was six my parents wanted to leave the modern world and chose the isolation of Nadin. The military was my ticket off that miserable hunk of rock. Are we going to talk or make love?"

"Do you mind my asking questions?"

"It's difficult to concentrate when I'm hard."

Imara reached down and slid her fingertips along his rigid cock. "I understand your problem."

He sucked in a breath and reached for the row of buttons running down the front of her blouse.

She caught his wrist. "No ripping or tearing. The boss paid for the clothes, but the panties were mine."

"Sorry about that."

"I'm not."

Grinning, he popped open the fancy buttons and pushed the material off her shoulders. His gaze fastened on her bare breasts, moving from one to the other. "Magnificent."

His head dipped and his mouth covered a nipple. A flash flood of heat raced through her, heating skin, muscle and bone, driving every question out of her head.

He suckled hard and lusty on one breast, kneaded the other. An aching fire spiraled through her middle, pooling between her legs.

Mindless and aching, she grasped his hair, tugging on the thick unruly mass.

Hooking his thumbs in the waistband of her skirt, he pulled the stretchy fabric over her hips and down her thighs. The skirt landed in a puddle at her feet.

He stroked her hips and thighs, squeezed her ass in his big hands.

She pulled at his shirt. He yanked it off in one quick motion and her breath caught. His chest was sculpted, thick with muscle, smooth and hot beneath her fingertips. She slid her hand down his ridged torso to the waistband of his pants.

He got the message, removing his shoes and pants. Naked, he reached for her. The skin-to-skin contact sent shock waves of need through her body. She ached everywhere.

They stumbled backwards then her back hit the softness of his mattress, and his hard body covered hers, crushing her breasts. Arms and legs tangled, entwined. The hard ridge of him dug into her belly.

Aching and eager, she lifted her hips. Instead of plunging into her he kissed a path of fire along her neck to her breasts, pausing to suckle.

With each lush draw, Imara heated and burned.

He moved lower, rubbing his face against her skin, skating his lips over her belly. Fingertips threading through her damp curls, he caressed her pussy. Dipping two long fingers inside her, he fucked her slowly until his hand was slick with her need.

"I want... need to taste you."

His mouth covered her, his tongue sliding inside, lush and unhurried, tender. Her body hummed with pure blinding need, the gentle laving taking her to a point of pleasure so intense her swelling heart skipped a beat.

Then his lips surrounded her clit, drawing, slowly building her need until her heart thundered and her pussy ached for his cock.

"Fuck me."

He suckled deep and thrust two fingers inside of her. Her slick walls contracted around his moving fingers and her hips bucked and rolled, pushing her aching clit against his firm lips.

Tugging and suckling with lips and tongue, he sent her over the precipice of pleasure. From head to toe Imara trembled as the climax rocked her, claimed her then slowly subsided.

Kel lifted his head and slid his fingers over her wet curls and traced a pattern over her belly, stroking and soothing her still quivering flesh. "The moment I saw you, I wanted you. Now I know I'll never get enough of you."

This man, this Believer, and this moment she'd remember forever.

Grasping a handful of hair, she urged him to his knees. She kneeled before him, anchored an arm around his neck and straddled his thighs. He seated the broad head of his cock and rocked forward, thrusting up and into her.

He hooked an arm around her waist, cupped her ass in one big hand and drove into her, penetrating deep and fast. His chest heaved and his hips rose with each pulsing thrust. Hot and slick, she rode him. Skin slapped skin. Muscles straining, fingers kneading, hands grasping, they moved together locked in a passionate elemental rhythm inherent to both human and vampire.

The air sizzled, searing each breath. His throaty groans greeted her heated gasps.

Fisting her hair, he pulled her head back and licked a hot path along the vein pulsing in her neck.

She answered in kind, resisting the urge to sink her fangs into his neck and take the ultimate erotic taste. Just the thought of his hot blood on her tongue brought her to the edge of climax. Rolling her hips, she clamped down on his hard length, tugging and squeezing, fucking him.

He lunged forward, driving up, pushing deep, and stilled. Imara opened her eyes and their gazes locked. Muscles trembling, he remained frozen, holding onto her as if his life depended on it.

The subtle contracting of his cock rippled through her pussy, initiating a lush reaction, a delicious slow clenching climax.

Hearts thundering they collapsed against one another. A pleasant exhaustion followed, flowing between them, extending the moment. The sweet warmth of it clutched at her heart. She never wanted it to end.

Imara slid her fingers through Kel's damp hair. He raised his head and smiled.

He touched a fingertip to her mouth and lifted her upper lip.

"They've retracted," she said.

"I hadn't really thought about you having them. Do they always extend during sex?"

"Fuck a vampire, you get fangs."

His gaze met hers, searching. "Is that what we were doing, fucking?"

It was more than fucking, but realistically their careers made an affair difficult. Add a Believer and a vampire to the mix and a relationship was impossible. "You want it to be more?"

He cupped her face. "It is more."

His lips touched hers, firm and unyielding, lingering and sweet. A kiss meant to express all the words unsaid. She'd never loved man or vampire until now, but the passion and the emotions were still too new, too raw to speak.

Chapter Five

Kel's eyes popped open at the sound of the wakeup alarm. He blinked as the lamps lit the room. Although he'd had only a few hours of sleep, a feeling of bliss, both mental and physical, settled over him as he rolled over. His chest swelled at the mere sight of Imara. At a distance she was stunning, curvaceous and long-legged, toned and fit. Up close she was softness and warmth. Her eyes reached into his soul. She took his breath away.

She ran a fingertip along his lower lip. "How much time do we have?"

"Just enough to shower and dress."

She reached out and ran her hand over his thigh. "Then we'll have to skip the shower or go naked."

He cupped one lush breast, thumbing the nipple to a firm point as he settled between her soft thighs. "There's a dressing room with a cleansing tube on the corporate ship and hours of boring travel time to fill."

She palmed his cock and stroked him, once, twice from root to head. He loved her hand on him, the sweet friction of hot skin sliding against skin.

Blood pounding and balls humming, he sank into her sweet warmth. Her pussy clamped around him, holding him, accepting him.

Beneath him, her soft, warm body cushioned his chest and belly. She embraced him, curling her arms around his neck, wrapping her long legs around his hips. He pushed deep and palmed her breast. With each slow stroke he caressed her flesh.

Moaning, she arched her back, taking him deeper. Her pussy fluttered, undulating along his length. Instead of a sharp release, his climax moved through him like a slow, thick wave, flooding his senses, suspending him in an endless moment. Something new and compelling encircled his heart, stripping his feelings naked,

exposing a forceful combination of the spiritual and the physical. Kel hadn't felt anything like it before.

He slumped against her, drained from the powerful climax and the emotional epiphany.

She slapped him soundly on the ass. "Let's get moving, Tanner."

The slap jerked him back to reality. She pushed at his shoulders and Kel shook off the effects of the orgasm and rolled out of bed. She followed.

Hair tumbling down her back, Imara blew him a quick kiss before marching out of his bedroom in all of her naked glory.

* * *

If Montroyal had an inkling of their activities he didn't show it during the short rover flight to corporate headquarters. Joined by several Experience Resorts executives along with a dozen assistants, they transferred to the executive corporate ship for the flight to Sidar. The corporate group gathered in the plush executive center leaving Kel and Imara sitting in the forward compartment along with a dozen security droids. On Sidar, half of the droids would remain on the transport ship and the rest would work the event. Experience Resorts wasn't taking any chances.

Kel preferred the company of droids and the pleasure of having Imara all to himself to the executives. She reached over and placed her hand over his. Compared to his, her hand appeared delicate, but Kel understood that used properly she was capable of killing with one blow. Having her beside him pleased him but also worried him.

Although she was a trained professional, a weapon as lethal as he, she'd entered his heart and everything had changed. The need to protect her grew with each passing hour. Odds were the Purists would make an attempt on Montroyal's life during the ceremony and that meant Imara was in danger. For the first time in years, blinding fear gripped him.

Instead of a suit and a weapons vest, she wore a black dress that showed off her pale skin, lush figure and long legs. "I thought you were wearing a suit and a blaster vest?"

"The dress was for show at headquarters." She pointed to a bag on the seat across the aisle. "I'll change into a suit and vest before we land."

He stood, removed his jacket and draped it over an unoccupied seat. His blaster and vest came next. He secured them within easy reach and sat down next to Imara.

She touched his cheek, running her thumb along his chin. "I'll be fine, Kel."

"Am I so transparent?"

She smiled and his heart thumped. "That day at the news building, you were cool and controlled. I was impressed. Don't lose that cool."

"You were striking and sexy. I was shocked when Montroyal introduced you as Vazan. Why me, Imara? Montroyal wanted you."

Montroyal and a dozen other rich men had begged for her favors. "You were attracted to the woman, not the vampire." Her fingers entwined with his. "And you're one delicious hunk of man."

"That thing you and Montroyal were talking about, the sucking of blood during orgasm."

Her green eyes widened.

"I want to experience it."

"It's addictive, Kel. For the human. Our saliva and blood enters the human's bloodstream. It's a rush, but it's dangerous. The more the blood mixes, the better the high. Rich men like Montroyal and his friends treat us like the latest designer drug. Several of them have died from heart attacks."

"I'm already addicted to you. I can't change how I feel, what I desire."

"I know sex is forbidden between us but blood taking is a sin. If only your church would tell its followers what really happened on Redis."

"You know about Redis?"

"I know you've been told the vampires' blood supply became contaminated and they killed the entire colony. Am I right?"

Kel suspected he'd finally learn the truth about the events on Redis. "That's the story."

"There was no contaminated blood supply. And if there was, why kill the only source of nourishment?"

Kel recalled asking the same question of Essar and getting a foolish response.

"Why would a crew of four destroy twenty-three men and four women to survive when the Vazan military made regular patrols through that quadrant? All the crew had to do was request a blood supply. That many humans could keep them alive for months."

Why indeed? Women? "There were women on Redis?"

"There were no droids on Redis. The women cooked the meals and cleaned the miners' quarters."

"Tell me the vampire version."

She started to move her hand away, but Kel held on. "Tell me."

"The leader of the colony was also the religious leader, a Purist who led his flock with an iron fist. The freighter captain thought him deranged."

"Preacher Obdit."

"A young and very beautiful young woman, a member of his flock, fell in love with one of the male Vazan crewmembers. The couple met secretly and eventually she became addicted to the blood taking.

"One night while they were so engaged the preacher and two miners attacked the couple. The preacher killed the young woman. The vampire was stabbed several times, but he managed to fight off his attackers and seek refuge in the loading platform. The crew came to his aid.

"The preacher rallied the colony, arming the miners, and positioned them between the platform and the Vazan freighter. The preacher confronted the freighter captain and his crew. He accused the vampire of rape and murder and demanded the crewman be turned over to the colony for punishment. The captain refused and the miners attacked the vampires. Several miners were killed and injured before the crew retreated into the freighter.

"The captain left Redis and returned to Vazan. When the Vazan military landed at the mining site a couple of months later only Preacher Obdit was alive."

"So no one but Obdit knows what happened after the freighter left Redis?"

"The Vazan mining freighter also ferried food supplies to the miners. That was the reason the Vazan military returned to check on the colony, to work out another source of supplies."

"Not to punish them?"

"No vampire was killed and the freighter captain held the crewman responsible for improper behavior."

Imara's version had more substance and seemed far more reasonable than Essar's recounting.

"After that the Vazan government closed the books on Redis and turned elsewhere for their source of diantridrite."

"Iolara?"

"Vazan's never had a problem on Iolara, but we don't do business with the Believers, we buy from another mining consortium."

"I still want to try the blood taking."

Kel stood. Montroyal and his subordinates would remain in the executive area for the next few hours without a thought given to the security team.

"The boss doesn't mind if we use the shower and the droids have no need of the facilities."

"You're not serious. I can't predict your reaction and today is too important to take a chance. Let's wait until after the ceremony when we're back on Talus."

"Agreed, but we can still take advantage of our few hours of privacy. It'll help me relax."

Kel guided her to the forward facility. He closed the door, pulled her into his arms and kissed her. Since their physical separation this morning, the thought of making love with her hadn't left his mind for more than a few seconds. Her mouth was sweet and hot, her body soft and supple.

Running his hands over the soft material of her dress, heart racing and blood pounding, he searched for a button or a seam. Finding nothing, he pulled it up to her waist and cupped her ass. No straps or lacy triangle, utterly bare. Groaning, he lifted his head. "Nothing to rip and tear?"

"I had to dress quickly. We were late getting out of bed, remember."

He remembered. His balls hummed and his cock jerked at the memory.

She pulled the dress over her head and stood before him, stunningly sensual in nothing but her sexy high-heeled shoes.

"Just looking at you can cause a heart attack." He filled his hands with her breasts and leaned down to capture a taut nipple. The firm tip slid between his lips and over his tongue. He suckled, deeply. Her soft moan was music to his ears.

"Kel."

Reluctantly, he released her nipple.

She licked her lips and slid her tongue over the points of her fangs. Kel wondered if she'd changed her mind.

Her nails raked down his torso as she slid to her knees. His heart lurched in fevered apprehension at the thought of his cock in her fanged mouth.

She unfastened his waistband and opened his fly, freeing him from the confining restraint of pants and underwear. Fisting his cock, she licked the tip, circling the crown with her tongue. Her lush mouth covered the head, suckling gently. Aching for more, Kel rocked his hips. The point of a fang skimmed his sensitive flesh. He had to end the torture.

He sucked in a breath. "Now."

She swirled her tongue slowly around the crown then swallowed him to the root.

Gasping in agonized delight, he nearly came.

Hot and wet her mouth moved over him, suckling and caressing with lips, tongue, teasing with fangs and teeth, torturing his straining cock. The sharp points skating over his hard flesh gave him a rush, a flash of danger and excitement. His heart

banged against his chest wall and his blood heated as she sucked him hard, took him deep.

Perspiration beaded his forehead and dewed the small of his back. Chest heaving, Kel planted a hand against the wall, bracing his weight while she tugged and sucked, taking him quickly, fiercely to the edge.

Hips bucking, he ached to climax, to end the carnal agony. Yet, he never wanted the magic to stop.

She kneaded his ass. When she slid a fingertip along the crack, his climax gathered tighter, hotter in his balls. Fangs skimming his flesh, she took him deep, suckled hard and pushed her fingertip between his buttocks. That erotic stroke was Kel's undoing.

He wanted to scream and his knees threatened to buckle. Instead he groaned and gave into the climax ripping through him like a thunderbolt. Her sweet mouth tugged him dry and after giving him one last lick, she released him and rose to her feet.

Kel sucked in several deep breaths.

Reaching for her, he said, "That felt so amaz --" Before Kel finished his sentence, she kissed him. She suckled his tongue as erotically as she sucked his cock. He slid his tongue over her fangs, her tongue, tasting his climax.

She grasped his hand and guided it to her breast.

He loved her need of his touch, the feelings and the sensual wildness she provoked.

She eased the sweet hold on his tongue. "I want you naked. I want you hard."

Kel yanked off his shirt and tossed it. Imara caught it in one hand and grabbed his arm with the other. "Easy, no ripping or tearing. Let me undress you, give you time to recover."

He hadn't given a thought to the damage he might inflict on his clothes. In anticipation of what was to come, his heart pounded too hard to care, but as long as her hands were on him, he'd give over the chore.

She knelt down and removed his shoes, careful to avoid activating the laser knife built within the soles. As he stepped out of his pants and underwear she nipped the inner flesh of his thighs with her sharp fangs then rose and hung the garments on hooks inside a narrow open closet by the door.

The facility was set up to accommodate corporate personnel on long flights and Kel had showered, shaved and changed clothes in this or a similar room on several occasions. He'd never used it for a sexual interlude.

He'd prefer to make love to Imara in better surroundings, but the need of her overrode the want of comfortable amenities.

Wanting every moment, he pulled her into his arms. His pulse leaped at the touch of her skin. The wanton look in her eyes heated his blood. "You amaze me."

"I do? Why?"

He trailed his hands over her back and hips, squeezing and rubbing her soft flesh. "You give me an amazing climax then bring me back to life with just a look."

"Looking at you naked makes me wet. All I think about is fucking you."

Nudging her belly with his stiffening cock, he glanced at the counter beside the sink. The entire wall was mirrored. "Any ideas?"

She twisted around and placed her hands on the counter, pushing her rounded ass higher than her shoulders. "I could watch."

Imara rolled her hips and eased her feet farther apart. The invitation sent a shot of hot need from his balls to his cock. He gripped her hips, digging his fingers into her flesh and pushing the thick sensitive head inside her wet heat.

He rocked his hips, driving in-and-out, burying his cock deeper and deeper.

Aching with each added inch, Imara watched him in the mirror, her pleasure enhanced by his physical reactions. Dark lashes fanned his cheeks and his jaw was clenched. His breath came in harsh gasps. The muscles in his arms were bunched and glistening with sweat.

Flesh pounded flesh and skin slapped in a wild, lusty mating. He filled her again and again. She wanted more.

“Love me, Kel. Fuck me.”

His eyes opened and their gazes locked. He drove into her, faster, harder, and his breathing became ragged and erratic. His palm connected with her ass, one erotic slap that took Imara over the edge. Her climax slammed into her and with one final thrust Kel shuddered and slumped against her.

His lips curved in a slow, satisfied grin.

“This just keeps getting better.” He gave her ass a gentle squeeze and stepped back. “When Montroyal’s home and safe, I’m going to request a holiday. I’m way overdue and I want more of you, fangs and all.”

She straightened and turned around to face him. He cupped her face in his big hands. “I hope you want more of me.”

Chapter Six

By the time the ship landed on Sidar both Imara and Kel were armed and ready for action. Two hours later Imara stood among a group of dignitaries while Montroyal faced a cheering throng of shareholders, Sidarian residents and visitors. The executive appeared at ease and in his element. Because of the threats to his life, the event was receiving major coverage by the media. Just running the gauntlet of reporters trying to interview Montroyal before the ceremony presented a security nightmare. The rich and the famous throughout the galaxy had traveled to Sidar for the ceremony. Imara wanted it over.

The bright sun forced most of the audience to wear hats or dark glasses, making the identification of potential threats all the more difficult. Kel stood just below the podium between the spectators and the stage.

Imara kept a close eye on the area surrounding the stage. Built on the resort's central plaza, the temporary structure stood beneath a massive blue canopy bearing the Spiritual Moments logo. Security agents regularly assigned to the Sidarian governor were placed around the stage. Experience Resorts droids scanned the crowd from several vantage points and were programmed to alert her and Kel if a weapon was detected. Twenty undercover Vazan guards were working the crowd.

Montroyal thanked the governor and held out his hand to the white-haired man standing a few feet to her left. When the governor stepped toward the podium, the locals cheered and the visitors applauded.

A bright flash blinded Imara and the man standing beside her spat out a curse. Imara's hand shot up to shield her eyes. The cheering morphed into a cacophony of screams and cries, but Kel's warning shout was clear in her earpiece.

"Blue shirt! Knife!"

Blade glinting, a blue blur streaked toward Montroyal. Imara lunged forward, aiming for the blue spot. Her chest connected with a solid mass, knocking it sideways. Her foot faltered. Stumbling forward, she regained her balance, pushed the governor down and to the side, hitting Montroyal with a body block. They both went down, crashing into the stage floor, the momentum knocking Montroyal on his ass.

Imara's knees smacked into the floor between Montroyal's knees and her chest slammed into his, blaster vest hitting blaster vest.

Behind her the familiar sizzle of a blaster rent the air.

"Principal covered! Kel, are we clear?"

He didn't respond.

"Are we clear?"

She screamed Kel's name then shouted for the droids to report.

"Target eliminated. Security one is stationary. Med-tech alerted."

Kel!

She pushed off Montroyal and scrambled off the stage. Forcing her way between the curious and the useless, she ordered the droids to clear the area and knelt beside a motionless Kel. He was alive but unresponsive, visibly uninjured except for a cut on his hand.

Gleaming in the sunlight the silver weapon, a sharpened Purist crux about the length of a man's hand, lay on the stone plaza.

Poison.

Within seconds the stand-by emergency glid landed. Imara grasped a tech by the arm. "Bag the weapon, I think it's coated in poison."

The tech scooped up the weapon and spat out orders in Sidarian. Another tech knelt beside the assassin and examined the fist size hole in the man's chest. The lifeless eyes and Purist crux tattooed on his inner wrist said it all. She turned away.

Imara didn't want to leave Kel, but she'd committed the ultimate sin by deserting Montroyal. She'd left him exposed and unguarded. He might be dead for all she knew.

He wasn't. Surrounded by worried employees and reporters, he made light of the situation and refused the offer of medical assistance. When he spotted Imara, his tropical blue eyes went hard.

"How are you, Sir?"

"I've been better." He addressed a reporter who had requested a statement. "I'll issue one after I've conferred with the Sidarian authorities. Right now it's Experience Resorts' responsibility to see that everyone is safe."

Those blue eyes settled on her. "Can you secure the conference room?"

Before the ceremony the executives had avoided the press by waiting in the resort's conference room. "Yes, Sir."

Imara directed one droid to sweep the room and another to bar the entrance. A fist tightened around her heart at the sight of the med-tech emergency glid speeding away.

Stay strong, my love.

"Do you require medical assistance, Sir?"

"No, but you hit like a battering ram."

"Sorry, Sir."

"Where's Tanner?"

"Wounded. The emergency glid just left."

"By the explosion?"

"That was just a flash disc to blind us. The Purist cut him on the hand. Kel's unconscious. I suspect the weapon was coated with poison."

"Poison meant for me."

"The conference room's secure, Sir."

* * *

Twenty-four hours later Kel's eyes fluttered. Imara jumped out of her chair and stood by his bed.

She touched his hand. "Kel."

His eyes opened.

"Imara. Are you okay?" He gripped her hand tight.

"As you can see, I'm fine."

"Montroyal?"

"He's fine." She lifted his hand and kissed his palm. "It's you we were worried about. You gave me a bit of a scare, Kel."

He looked around.

"You're in the hospital."

His brow furrowed. "What happened? I remember the man in blue with the knife in his hand, firing my blaster, nothing after that."

"It wasn't a knife. The Purist's weapon was a wooden cross. The base was sharpened to a point and coated with a poisonous compound extracted from diantridrite. You were cut."

He lifted his bandaged hand. "I was poisoned with diantridrite?"

"Fortunately, the Sidarians had an antidote. A Sidarian consortium operated diantridrite mines on Iolara and discovered the danger after cut miners became ill and suffered horrific headaches. Some actually went insane and many died before the extraction process was turned over to droid crews."

"I should have predicted it. The scanners weren't programmed to pick up a wooden weapon and the Purists would use the cross as an instrument of righteousness." He sighed. "Poison. I never considered it."

"An old, but effective weapon. The poison attacks the nervous system, paralyzing the victim. Luckily, you received only a glancing blow. A stab to the torso would have been fatal."

"The poison must have affected the miners of Redis. They were one of the first groups to mine diantridrite and I doubt they realized the dangers."

"Nor would they have had an antidote."

His eyes widened. "How did the assassin get a flash disc through security?"

"It was hidden beneath a loose stone in the plaza. It was a good plan. It almost worked."

A smile tugged at the corners of his pale lips. "I'm glad you were on that stage. I would have never reached Montroyal in time."

Imara leaned down and kissed his forehead. "A vampire and a Believer, we make a good team. Who would have imagined it?"

A grin curved his lips. "On and off the job."

When he started to sit up, Imara placed a hand on his chest. "You're not going anywhere. Montroyal has returned to Talus with two Vazan Shield agents to guard him."

"We've been replaced?"

"Until you've recovered and taken a mandatory holiday. Boss's orders and all expenses paid at any Experience resort."

He shook his head and winced. "I've spent a good part of the last five years at resorts while traveling with Montroyal. I have another place in mind, quiet and peaceful. It's just a few hours outside Talus City. Will you come with me?"

"I'd love to go with you."

* * *

Imara gasped when she saw it. A lake. Surrounded by forested mountains, the beauty and the serenity of it took her breath away.

She swiveled in her seat and looked at Kel. "It's the lake in the painting. The one in your bedroom."

"The painting doesn't do it justice."

"It's amazing."

Kel opened the glid's doors and they climbed out of the sleek vehicle Montroyal had loaned them from his personal fleet. Imara inhaled. "The air is so clean I can smell the trees."

"So what do you think of my retreat?"

Imara turned in a slow circle. Near the lake's edge was a small two-story house with a wrap-around deck on the lower level and a narrow deck running along the side facing the lake on the upper level. The view from upstairs must be stunning.

"Like it? I was born in the city. Traffic. Noise. Millions of people shoulder-to-shoulder everywhere you turn. I've never seen anything like this. We're completely alone!"

"There are a few houses. You can see them from the water." Kel wrapped an arm around her waist. "I'm glad you came. I can't imagine a better holiday."

She reached up and cupped his cheek. His face had lost its gray pallor and the gleam had returned to his eyes. "Thanks for sharing your special place with me."

His lips brushed hers. "Stop worrying about me. I'm fine."

His hand cupped her ass as he guided her along the walkway to the house. "Now for the real reason I invited you."

"Witty conversation?"

"I was thinking hot sex and blood sucking."

She chuckled. "Are you sure you're well enough?"

"What do you think motivated my quick recovery? Getting back to work or making love to you?"

Pleased by his compliment, Imara thought about the days of lovemaking before them. "You're still recovering. We'll take it slow."

"We'll start with a small sip and work our way up to lusty suck."

The front door opened and an older model domestic droid greeted Kel. "It's good to see you, Mr. Tanner."

"Jessup. This is Imara."

"Welcome, Imara. Please enjoy your stay." The droid turned toward Kel. "With your permission, Sir, I'll retrieve your bags."

"Thank you, Jessup."

The droid headed toward the glid.

His eyes gleaming, Kel pulled her into the house and headed for the stairs.

She glanced around the lower level as he propelled her up the staircase. Floor to ceiling windows offered a breathtaking view of the lake and filled the open floor plan with light.

At the top of the stairs Kel guided her into the bedroom and kicked the door closed. Another wall of glass arched beneath the vaulted ceiling. Double glass doors opened onto the narrow deck with two lounge chairs. Between the chairs was a table bearing a bottle of wine and two glasses.

“Wine, and sex.”

His kiss blotted out all thoughts of drinking wine.

The need to touch him, love him brought tears to her eyes. For days she’d feared for his life.

Heat coiled around her heart, flashed through her veins as the loving kiss turned lusty and hot.

He slid his hand beneath the hem of her top and pushed the stretchy material up and over her breasts. His thumb raked over a nipple, sending a streak of fire straight to her pussy.

She pulled off the top and tossed it aside. He yanked off his shirt, flung it across the room and toed off his shoes. Hooking her thumbs in the stretch waistband of her skirt, she pushed it off her hips. His gaze followed her skirt momentarily as it slid down her legs, only to snap back to the juncture of her thighs.

“Imara.” Groaning, he reached for her. He held her tight, so tight, that the hard muscles of his arms dug into her back. He kissed her hair, her forehead, her eyelids, and her cheeks.

She cupped the back of his head and buried her face in the crook of his neck. Beneath her lips, his vein pulsed, hot and arousing. She ached to taste him, savor the richness of his blood on her tongue. Her fangs extended.

When she reached for the waistband of his pants, he pushed her hand aside and stripped. She palmed his cock, marveling at the silkiness of his skin and the thick veins lacing his length.

He grasped her hair, wrapping the length around his hand. Desire burned in his eyes and his anticipation was evident in the rapid shallowness of his breath. But beneath the excitement was trust. Despite his faith and the horror stories of his youth,

Kel wanted to experience the blood lust of vampire sex. He stepped backwards, bumped into the bed and sat on the edge.

Placing her hands on his broad shoulders, Imara climbed onto his lap. Leveraging her weight on her knees she sank down on his hard cock. She loved this man and the feel of him inside her.

He palmed her ass with one big hand, delving a finger between her moving cheeks. A groan tore from her throat as she lifted her hips then pushed down. He filled her, hot and urgent, hard as stone.

She rode him, slow and steady, rolling her hips forward, rubbing her clit against the thick root of his cock.

He tightened his grip on her hair, pulled her head back and licked her throat. His tongue traced a wet trail to her breast as his forefinger slid down the small of her back to tease the valley between her buttocks.

She gasped as his mouth covered her nipple and his teeth nipped her sensitive flesh. Increasing the tempo of her hips, she rode him fast and hard, pounding her pussy until she reached the edge of climax. Fisting his hair she yanked his head back and to one side, exposing the column of his neck.

The steady throb of his vein stimulated her thirst.

She slid her tongue over her fangs and eased the pace to a measured undulation. His fingers dug into her buttocks. She licked his skin, suckling gently on the vein. His heart rate leapt and blood raced through his veins, throbbed beneath her tongue.

She sank her fangs into his pulsing vein.

Hot and sweet, his blood exploded on her tongue in an erotic rush. Her pussy clenched and her mouth filled. Caught in the grip of their mutual climax, the temptation to take more blood rushed through her.

Kel's strangled cry cut through the dangerous pleasure. Snapping her head backwards, she removed her fangs then licked his wounds.

His head slumped on her shoulder. She fisted his hair and pulled his head back. His eyes were closed and his grin bordered on silly. He whispered, "I love you."

Then he passed out.

Chapter Seven

While Kel slept, Imara basked in the glow of excellent wine, great sex and his profession of love. She explored the house, admiring the clean lines, the efficiency of the space, including an impressive com-unit, while marveling at the warmth of the rooms. Unlike Montroyal's ultra modern mansion the house was inviting, the sofa and chairs comfortable with the staggering view as the focal point. Walking along the lower deck she noticed a sunroom. She peered through the glass and saw a partially completed landscape on the easel. The scene was of a meadow of wildflowers before a backdrop of mountains.

The painting in Kel's bedroom at the estate, he was the artist. Bodyguard, lover and artist, he was a man of many talents.

Imara returned to the upper floor and poured another glass of wine. In a small alcove was a cross, beneath it an altar with a Handbook. A man of faith, a Believer who loved a vampire, Kel was a man of unusual depth. She loved him, more than she'd loved anyone in her life.

Wanting to hold onto this moment of peace, love and beauty, Imara stood on the deck, watching the ducks glide over the smooth surface of the lake.

Orphaned at a young age, she'd learned to deal with loss and loneliness. Loving Kel and almost losing him scared her more than facing death. And unless the blood drawing had scrambled his brain, he loved her.

But nothing would come of the impossible situation except pain and separation, but until that moment arrived, she'd fill her heart with memories to hold onto when reality forced them to part ways.

Imara opened the front seam of her loose blouse to the cooling breeze. The light wind rustled the trees, rippled through her hair and caressed her skin like a lover's touch.

"You belong here."

She glanced over her shoulder. Naked with his hair tousled, Kel stood in the opened doorway.

"It's so beautiful, so quiet. I keep thinking it's an Experience hologram and at any moment it will dissolve before my eyes."

He stepped onto the deck. Standing behind her, he wrapped his arms around her waist. She leaned against his hard chest.

"It's real. Until now I thought it was the most beautiful thing in the universe." He nuzzled her neck, kissing her below the ear. "I was wrong."

Imara's heart swelled. She reached up and slid her palm along his cheek.

"The sex was great, amazing, beyond description." His fingertips traced the underside of her breast then slid down to skim her curls. "Want to do it again?"

"I do, but no blood taking until tomorrow."

He groaned.

"I'll make it worth the wait." The breeze picked up, ruffling her hair. "Isn't the breeze wonderful?"

"We could make love out here, feel the wind on our bodies. Later we could fuck beneath the stars."

"I'd like that. It's so quiet here. No noise or traffic. It's like we're the only people in the universe, but not out of touch. Did you install the com-unit downstairs?"

"I did. That's what I like about the place, the quiet and isolation, but Montroyal can reach me if necessary. I have a secure uplink to the corporate com-sat system."

She recalled the sunroom with the unfinished painting. "Does Montroyal own this place?"

"He owns the lake and a good portion of the surrounding area, but for him it's an investment. Pure mountain water and lumber are valuable. Three years ago I visited

this place with him. He didn't use the house so I talked him into selling it. I love it here."

"Talked him into it? You have something on the boss, don't you?"

"Like you, I could tell volumes about the rich and the famous, but I'll bet you haven't spoken a word."

She chuckled. "Not if I want to keep working. You can make some dangerous enemies by telling secrets."

"Montroyal didn't care about the house, but he understands the human desire to have a place to call home. His origins are humble and he's a decent man."

Imara watched two ducks land on the lake's glassy surface. "You're very fortunate."

"And still in debt, but one day I'll live here year round."

"I don't own a thing, except my personal weapons and equipment. Home for me is a rented room in the apartment of a co-worker."

"Then make this your home."

She didn't know how to respond. Instead of a few days, he wanted her to share this wonderful house in this amazing place.

"Imara. It can work."

"I have no idea how long I'll be assigned to Montroyal."

"We'll purchase a vehicle and install an uplink to Vazan Shield. Between assignments you can live here, come and go as you please. I'll meet you as often as I can. Jessup will take care of the place while we're gone."

Her heart banged against her chest wall. "You'll remain with Montroyal?"

"My plan is to remain with him until this place is paid for. After that, I plan to live here and accept short-term assignments."

"Sounds like a good plan."

"I discovered the perfect place to live and the person I want to share it with. Live with me, marry me."

She turned in his arms and looked into his eyes. "But you're a Believer. Believers don't marry vampires."

"I love you. My faith is part of me and nothing in the Handbook says I can't marry a vampire. It teaches love and commitment. I love you, Imara. Marry me."

"If the Purists find out, they'll target you. I love you, Kel. I love you more than anything or anyone but I can't let you live your life looking over your shoulder because of me."

"I've already sinned beyond redemption. I killed two Purists to protect Montroyal from assassination. We put our lives on the line daily for money. Let's put them on the line for each other."

"Your church will never sanction a marriage between us."

"I refuse to live my life by the dictates of others. They can't take my faith away only my right to walk inside their churches. I haven't been inside a church for years." He cupped her face. "I will die a Believer, but I will live my life loving you."

Tears of joy filled her eyes as his lips touched hers. She wouldn't have thought it possible but now she knew that together they'd defy the odds and make it work.

B.J. McCall

A multi-published author of contemporary and futuristic sensual romance, B.J. McCall is a West Virginia native now residing in Northern California. Thanks to an older sister who was a librarian, reading became B.J.'s favorite pastime. B.J.'s idea of the perfect way to spend a rainy afternoon or a day at the beach is reading a romance novel. The phrase "Do what you love," applies to B.J. -- she loves to write and each story is special. She hopes her readers will enjoy each and every one of them. Visit her website at www.BJMcCall.com.