



Changeling Press

# Price of Pleasure

Aubrey Ross

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After escaping servitude and exploitation, Kade changes his name to Kenton Ward and prepares for the predictable monotony of a “normal” life. He is hired as a private security agent for Ambassador Mason Fintel, mysterious advisor to the Sabroline Federation. Having just begun to explore the full range of his sexuality, Kenton is shocked when the ambassador stirs his darkest desires. This isn’t the first time Kenton has found another man attractive, but he was convinced he was meant to bond with a submissive female.

Mason has guarded the fact that she is a shape shifter, knowing the Sabroline Federation will not offer the same respect to a woman they extend to a man. Her new bodyguard arouses her as no other lover ever has, but can he accept her complex nature?

## Chapter One

"You want me to go in *there*?" Megan Fintel looked at Starlight Station with loathing before she turned back to her friend. "People come to the Station for one reason, and one reason only, recreational sex."

"That's not true," Sabina objected. "They have fabulous music and the best multi-media simulators in the entertainment district. Recreational sex is icing on the cake." With a characteristic toss of her bright purple hair Sabina continued, "Kenton teased and flirted until I wanted to scream down the moon, but he refused to deliver on his promises. He's just plain cruel."

Sabina wasn't used to being rejected. Anyone she set her sights on usually ended up in her bed. And she'd obviously set her sights on Kenton Ward.

When Sabina commed her that afternoon Megan had been reluctant to indulge her friend's rash behavior. Sabina's impetuosity had gotten them into trouble more times than Megan could count, yet Sabina's impulses could also lead to wildly entertaining nights. Megan couldn't decide which direction this adventure was going to take. They stood on a public walkway across from the popular nightclub and Sabina's convoluted explanation was making her more uncomfortable with each passing word.

Megan turned toward her friend and shrugged. "Maybe he's just in it for the chase. If this guy is as attractive as you say, he likely --"

"That's the point. He's a heartless tease! I want him to know what it feels like to want something he can't have." The gleam in her gaze told Megan all she needed to know. Sabina had made up her mind about Kenton. "No one deserves to be treated the way he treated me. If he wasn't interested, why did he come on to me?"

"Did he come on to you or was it a mutual flirtation?" Megan had known Sabina too long not to consider the possibility.

"How can you ask me that?" The hurt in Sabina's expression appeared genuine. She even managed to make her eyes tear. "I'm not the only one he's upset. He flirts with everyone, then tosses them aside when he's finished amusing himself."

"What's to keep me from falling under his spell?" She arched her brow as she waited for Sabina's reply.

"Mason," Sabina said simply.

A twinge of resentment made Megan look away. "I might spend a good deal of time shaped like a man, but that doesn't make me any less a woman."

"I only meant that you're able to think like a man. Your determination and logic wrapped in a desirable package. If anyone can beat this asshole at his own game it's you."

"Am I supposed to thank you for that assessment?" Being able to move freely between the genders offered Megan a unique perspective. Though there was truth in most stereotypes, life seldom fell into neat categories.

"Just catch his eye," Sabina coaxed, "then slip away. Cat and mouse. Never let him get too close, but keep him interested."

"I understand what you want me to do."

"And when he's desperate to fuck you, disappear. Shift into Mason and retreat to your country estate. I'll make damn sure he can't find you."

"You know for a fact he's in there?"

"He's in there."

Megan hesitated a moment longer. Sabina had been her friend since childhood and Megan had encountered Kenton's type before. She'd ask around first. Make sure Sabina's pride hadn't completely distorted the events. If Kenton was playing games with people's affection, she'd teach him a lesson he'd not soon forget. It had been a long time since Megan had exercised her feminine wiles. She fluffed her hair and smoothed down her curve-hugging dress.

"I don't know why I let you talk me into these things."

Sabina squealed in excitement and gave Megan a firm hug. "He's got shiny black hair, powder blue eyes, and a body to back up his arrogance. He'll be the center of attention. Trust me, you can't miss him."

Megan crossed the street, her mind whirling on ahead. She hoped Sabina's confidence in her wasn't overrated. It had been three years since she'd intentionally attracted the interest of a lover, much less competed for the most popular person in the room. This club was so far out of her comfort zone it might as well be on another planet.

After the security scanner passed over her face, the doorman let her into Starlight Station. She paused on the wide, railed landing overlooking the interior of the club. The dance floor was directly ahead with a small stage situated against the far wall. To her left was a large seating area with tables and semi-private booths. The simulators and credit-operated hologames had been arranged on a slightly raised section to her right. Tucked away in the corner, she spotted the stairs leading to the balcony. Above it all arched a simulated sky with hundreds of twinkling stars.

Skirting the dance floor, she made her way to the bar. She wasn't much of a drinker, but no one loitered in a nightclub without some sort of beverage. The stage was empty except for a holographic DJ mixing audio files and corresponding flashes of light. Couples and small groups of people swayed and gyrated to the music's driving beat. They touched and ground against one another, numerous hands boldly caressing bare flesh. Megan licked her lips as her body responded to the sexually charged atmosphere.

"What can I get you?"

Megan hadn't realized the bartender was an android until he spoke. His tone had the synthesized resonance required for AI identification. "Sabrotine Starburst."

"Good choice, foxy lady."

The antiquated term made her smile. He moved off to prepare her drink and she looked out over the dance floor. The ever-changing colors made it hard to tell exactly what the dancers looked like. Instead, she shifted her gaze to the seating area. Several tables were devoid of chairs, while a crowd had formed around a table near the back. The center of attention, indeed.

A man with silky black hair and breath-stealing features lounged against the wall. The others formed a half circle around him, like a king holding court. He smiled at one of his fans and Megan shook her head. No wonder Sabina had been powerless to resist his charms. He had either spent a fortune in the beautification clinics or he'd been genetically altered. No one was this perfect without assistance.

The bartender set down her drink and scanned the chip implanted in the back of her hand. She muttered her thanks and he went to serve the next customer.

How in hell was she going to get Kenton's attention? He was surrounded by people trampling each other to... A sly smile curved her lips. She'd ignore him. She'd make eye contact then walk away. He was a hunter. If he didn't pursue her, he'd lose interest before the night was through.

She took her drink in one hand and finger combed her hair away from her face. Barely reaching mid-thigh and dipping low over her breasts, her dress had never failed to turn heads. As she strolled through the seating area the DJ chose an especially riotous song. A bright light silhouetted her figure against the colorful backdrop. Had Kenton noticed? She dared a sidelong glance and collided with his penetrating stare. She flashed her best come hither smile, but kept right on walking.

Keeping her steps leisurely, she crossed to the stairs. She could feel his gaze following her, yet she pretended not to notice. He'd have a spectacular view of her legs as she climbed to the balcony. Would this temptation be enough to lure him away from his adoring fans?

Caves lined the balcony, tiny rooms where people came to fuck. Each time the lights from below passed over the curtains they became translucent, offering anyone who cared to look a teasing glimpse of what was going on inside.

Megan found a quiet corner without a cave directly behind her. The position gave her an unobstructed view of both sides of the balcony. The lights hit the curtains and she instinctively glanced away. Every imaginable sex act was being performed in those caves. Each figure was little more than an animated outline. Still, the flash of motion left nothing to the imagination.



Keeping a view of the stairway in the corner of her eye, she watched the dancers. Only a few minutes went by before Kenton appeared at the top of the stairs. She fought back a smile and kept her gaze fixed on the dance floor.

An especially loud cry drew her attention toward the caves on her right. One of the spotlights hit the curtain revealing the occupants. A woman straddled one man, while another fucked her from behind. The graphic image lingered in Megan's mind long after the spotlight moved on. What would it feel like to be utterly overwhelmed, stretched to capacity and beyond?

Kenton stood beside her for a moment, his body angled toward her, elbow resting on the railing. She sipped her drink and did her best to act as if he wasn't there.

"Please tell me you're here alone." He waited for a lull in the music so he didn't have to shout.

"Why would it matter? It looked like you had companions enough for both of us." She turned her head and looked into his eyes. From a distance they appeared light, almost colorless. Now she could see the pastel blue shimmer of his mesmerizing gaze. Damn! She had her work cut out for her with this one.

"Who are you?" He reached for her hand, but she moved it just out of reach.

"Names aren't important in a place like this."

"All right." He took a step toward her and she took a step back. "Would you like to dance?" She shook her head, backing up even more. "Are you waiting for one of the caves?"

With a seductive smile she darted toward the stairs. He let her reach the bottom before he caught her wrist. Her heart leapt in her chest as he pulled her into a shadowy hallway and pushed her up against the wall. He caged her with his arms, yet kept a small distance between their bodies.

"If I can't know your name, I'll know your taste." He growled the words as he lowered his face toward hers. Megan turned her face to the side and he nipped her earlobe. "Give me your mouth."

The command ignited a cluster of hot tingles deep in her body. Her nipples hardened, then the sensation curled through her abdomen and lodged between her thighs. "I didn't come here to fuck."

"And I'm not asking to fuck you. I just want a kiss." She shivered, unable to conceal the reaction. He cupped her chin and raised her face until their gazes locked. "I won't go where I'm not wanted, but you're the most intriguing woman I've seen since I arrived. One taste, then I'll let you go." His gaze searched hers for a moment and then he added, "For now."

She closed her eyes and parted her lips. *He's a ruthless bastard. Don't fall for this bullshit.* The words became a mantra as his mouth covered hers. Warm and soft, his lips caressed hers, slid against hers without rushing the kiss. She grew restless, angling her head and lifting her hands to his shoulders.

His fingertips teased the upper swell of her breasts, never delving beneath the fabric of her dress. Her pussy melted, throbbing with anticipation. Could he make her come with just a kiss? The thought made her groan as his tongue brushed over her bottom lip.

She tangled her fingers in his hair and curled her tongue around his, encouraging his penetration, needing his aggression. Faultlessly reading her reaction, he pressed her against the wall and dragged her hands from his hair. He raised her arms above her head and captured both wrists with one hand. His mouth claimed hers, his tongue bold and possessive.

He rocked his pelvis against her belly, his hardened cock well above where she needed the pressure most. With a strangled cry, she parted her legs and rubbed her mound against his thigh.

Damn it! She couldn't give in the first time he touched her. He'd have no reason to continue the chase. Ignoring the aching demand of her body, she abruptly ended the kiss. "Enough," she gasped. "You said one kiss."

Panting every bit as hard as she was, he stared into her eyes. "You really want me to stop?"

"What I want is not the issue." She tugged her hands out of his grasp. "I can't do this." She ducked under his arm and disappeared into the crowd.

\* \* \*

Kenton supported Megan's back as he lowered her to the padded bench. Her long legs arched over his lap and her curly hair created a crimson cloud surrounding her lovely face. "You're driving me crazy. You know that, don't you?"

She just smiled up at him, her bright green eyes wide and guileless.

For two weeks he'd pursued this curvaceous beauty, using every weapon in his sensual arsenal to wear down her defenses. Subtlety allowed her to remain distant, yet candor drove her away. Each time he convinced himself she wasn't really interested, she drifted back into view.

His stay aboard the *Retribution* had left Kenton ready to test his sexual boundaries. Despite extensive training, he'd never had a partner of his own choosing until he'd escaped his home world. A few nights at Starlight Station were all he needed to realize he wasn't cut out for recreational sex. Without some sort of emotional connection he might as well be fucking a simulator. He'd been about to leave the club for good when Megan wandered into his life.

"Why do you come here?" He tried a new approach.

She raised her arm and brushed the side of his face with her fingertips. "I'd heard about the club for years and wanted to see if it was as wild as they say." It was either the truth or she was the best liar he'd ever encountered. "If I hadn't met you that first night, I never would have returned."

He licked his lips, hungry for her kisses and aching to touch her sleek, soft body. She'd allowed him to kiss her, but little else. And she refused to meet him anywhere but at this wretched club. They were never alone. This was the first time he'd been able to lure her into one of the caves. Most couples used the caves to fuck, but Kenton had no intention of taking her while others looked on. He wanted a wide bed and endless hours to explore their mutual pleasure.

"I want to spend time with you, but you won't let me." He kept his voice soft and caressed her face with the back of his knuckles. "I don't even know your last name."

"Names are irrelevant. People either connect or they don't. It's elemental."

His cock grew even harder and he closed his eyes against the pain. His balls had been blue for days. If he wasn't with Megan, he was thinking about her, imagining all the things he wanted to do with and to her.

"Do you feel a connection to me?" He opened his eyes as he forced the words out. "Or do you just enjoy this infernal game?"

"Why don't you find out?"

Holy fuck! Did she mean what he thought she meant? His heart leapt into his throat and he fought for breath. Her wide scooped neckline left the upper curve of her breasts bare. He traced the delectable dip and swell with his index finger. Her skin was incredibly soft and warm. Her nipples formed distinct peaks against the clingy fabric.

He slipped his forearm beneath her neck and lowered his face. "No more games. Either you want me or you don't."

With a siren's smile, she guided his hand to her breast. "My heart's pounding." She parted her lips and curved her other hand around the back of his neck.

Kenton needed no other encouragement. Teasing her lips with his tongue, he waited until she made a needful sound before delving deeper. Could she possibly be a virgin? Was that what held her back? On Palonti females lost their virginity shortly after they reached physical maturity, but this was not Palonti.

Megan's sweet taste swept all speculation aside. She returned his kiss with equal fervor, sending a shiver down his spine. He didn't want to frighten her, but his resistance had been taxed to the limit. Pressing his fingers against the underside of her breast, he rubbed his thumb over her nipple.

She dragged the tie from the back of his hair and freed the strands to her seeking fingers. Her mouth moved against his, her tongue stroking boldly. A fiery tornado spun

within him, his cock the storm's demanding tail. He had never felt this frantic, never ached with every fiber of his being.

He dragged his mouth away and gazed into her eyes. "Don't deny me tonight. I..."

Her fingers closed around his wrist and she drew his hand downward. She didn't say a word, but welcome glowed in her eyes. His fingers skimmed across her thigh as he reached the hem of her dress. She parted her legs in silent invitation, then let go of his wrist. Helpless and breathless, he eased his fingers between her thighs and brushed her damp panties. Just one touch, then he'd insist they leave.

Slipping his fingers beneath the thin material, he stroked her delicate folds. So soft. So *wet*. She made more room for his hand and he ventured deeper. His cock twitched and his balls tingled. He needed to be inside her, really inside her, and that wasn't going to happen in this pathetic cave!

"Oh, Kenton," she whispered against his lips and arched into his touch.

He pushed two fingers into her snug passage, his groan as loud as hers. Her inner muscles rippled, caressing his fingers like he wanted her to caress his cock. He found her clit with his thumb and circled the swollen bud, thrilled by her breathless gasps. If he let her come, she might prolong this nonsense. Enough was enough. He would have her tonight or not at all!

"Not here," he growled out the words and forced his hand away from her throbbing pussy. He was confused by the intensity of his desire. She was beautiful, but he'd fucked beautiful women before. What he felt for Megan was consuming, overwhelming... elemental.

"Get your shuttle." She swung her feet to the floor and sat up. "I'll meet you out front."

Joy surged through him. Finally! He swept her into his arms and kissed her deeply.

With a throaty chuckle, she wiggled out of his embrace. "Go." She urged him toward the doorway.

Kenton rushed through Starlight Station and sent the valet for his rented shuttle. Where should he take her? His hotel room was adequate, but everything about Megan was elegant and luxurious. Would she finally tell him where she lived? He smiled. Learning her last name would be a damn good start.

The valet returned with his shuttle a few minutes later. Megan had yet to emerge from inside the club. It took over an hour and two humiliating attempts to find her before Kenton accepted that he'd been duped.

## Chapter Two

"I have a present for you."

Mason Fintel moved across the lavish presence chamber, unsure how to respond to Empress Amoli's casual announcement. The empress stood in front of her throne, an enigmatic smile bowing her lips. Honey blonde hair framed her oval face and tumbled halfway down her back. She wore a floor-length dressing gown and her green eyes simmered with languid heat. Her tousled appearance left Mason with no doubt the empress had just emerged from the adjoining bedroom.

Amoli made a sweeping gesture toward the vidscreen on her right and the image of a man appeared. "This," she paused dramatically, "is Kenton Ward."

Dread washed over Mason. How had Amoli found out about Kenton? The image was life-size and motionless, yet the likeness had obviously been captured from a video stream. Pastel blue eyes dominated Kenton's elegant features, their intensity mesmerizing even in the still-life image. His copper tinted skin denoted his offworld origin and his raven black hair gleamed like the finest silk.

A pair of loose, white linen pants rode low on Kenton's hips. Mason imagined tugging on the simple drawstring until the waist released and the material pooled around his ankles. He'd explore the breadth of his shoulders and the rippling definition of his abdomen as he'd longed to do so many nights at Starlight Station. The pants hid the details of Kenton's lower body, but what Mason could make out through the flimsy material made him anxious to see the rest.

Could this be a bizarre coincidence? Attempting to make his tone sound casual, he asked, "Who is he?"

Amusement lit Amoli's gaze as she watched Mason closely. "Are you sure you've never met?" Nothing transpired on Tranocous Nine without the empress finding out.

"*I've* never met him." Mason glanced away. "Megan ran into him a couple of times at Starlight Station. We danced and shared some drinks, but I went home alone."

"I'm shocked. Megan usually gets whatever Megan wants." Amoli chuckled. "And when did you start frequenting Starlight Station? I thought those sorts of places were beneath you."

"I'd heard about it for years, thought it might be fun." A wistful smile curved Mason's lips. That was almost exactly what Megan had told Kenton.

"And was it fun?"

Mason squared his shoulders and looked into Amoli's eyes. "Have I displeased you in someway? Why am I here?"

"Kenton met my baby sister shortly after he arrived on Tranocous Nine." Amoli strolled closer to the screen, her green gaze caressing the image. "As you know, Sabina's lack of judgment in the past has made it necessary for me to protect her from herself."

In Mason's opinion, continual surveillance took the concept of protection several steps further than it needed to go. Still, he wasn't going to argue with the empress. In several cases Amoli's caution had proved justified.

He clasped his hands behind his back and tried not to let his impatience show. "What does this have to do with me?"

"Resume playback." Ignoring Mason's protest, the empress stepped aside.

The view shifted, pulling back and rotating to the left. A couple stood on a large, foam pad, a purple-haired woman in front of a man. It took a moment for Mason to recognize Sabina. He'd been distracted by her outlandish costume.

A tightly cinched corset supported her breasts and high-heeled boots climbed to mid-thigh. Both combined shades of purple with black and appeared to be constructed of synthetic leather. Her areolas were lavender and concentric rings of progressively



darker purple circled her nipples. Mason wasn't sure if the decoration had been tattooed into her flesh or if it was part of her outfit. Closely shaved and died violet to match the hair on her head, Sabina's bush was shaped to accent the folds of her sex.

Cushions were scattered about the "pleasure mat" and several portable carts sat within easy reach. Mason licked his lips. He'd seen rooms like this before and not just on surveillance feeds.

The man was mostly hidden by Sabina. All Mason could see was the top of his blond head. The man stroked her boldly, never lingering in one place long. He rolled her nipples and she murmured. He tweaked her clit and she gasped. Faint unintelligible words escaped her mouth as he ground his hips against her ass. Was he rubbing *against* her or was he already inside her? The angle wasn't quite right for Mason to know for sure.

Shaking away the sexual lure, his gaze flew back to Amoli. "When was this recorded? Sabina told me..."

"That Kenton rejected her?" After a pause, Mason nodded. "I thought that might be the case."

As if on cue, Kenton stepped onto the mat, naked and fully erect. Mason's gaze gravitated to Kenton's cock and refused to budge. He was long, slightly tapered, and crowned with a massive head. Mason swallowed hard and crossed his arms over his chest. Lust boiled up through his body, then slammed downward, making his cock harden and his balls ache. Guided by the painful sensation, Mason's gaze shifted to Kenton's balls. Heavy and completely devoid of hair, he was ready for Mason's hands, his tongue, or the gentle suction of his mouth.

"Oh, my," Sabina said in a breathless voice and Mason silently agreed.

*Oh my, indeed!*

The empress chuckled again and patted Mason on the back. "He could make a fortune with that beauty."

"Pause the recording." The empress did and Mason turned to face her. "Was this before or after Sabina sent me to Starlight Station?"

"Before. I'm not sure what you did to piss her off, but she set you up."

"I'm going to kill her!" Mason raked his hair with both hands. "I feel like such a fool. Playing the tease is bad enough when the person deserves it, but this..." His gaze swept back to the screen and focused on the back of Kenton's shoulder. "What is that? Zoom in on his right shoulder blade." Portions of the scar were bright red as if the wound were recent, while other sections appeared much older.

"Maybe he had a tattoo removed?" the empress suggested.

"Most tattoos come off clean. This is something else, something deeper." Mason stepped closer to the vidscreen. "Does he have any other scars?"

"Let's find out." Amoli tucked a lock of hair behind her ear and told the computer to continue. The surveillance pod swung around, offering them a high, side view. Kenton held Sabina's face, while his mouth moved against hers. An occasional glimpse of their tongues sent fresh waves of longing through Mason. He didn't need to close his eyes to remember what that felt like.

The man moved out from behind Sabina and Kenton pushed her up against the wall. The familiar position accented the pressure in Mason's groin. The kiss deepened and Kenton's hands roamed over Sabina as the other man retrieved a butt plug from one of the portable cases. Kenton knelt and Sabina parted her legs. The pod adjusted again, but all Mason could see was the back of his dark head as he pressed his face against the juncture of her thighs. It didn't matter. Mason could easily imagine his tongue stroking her folds, teasing her entrance and circling her clit. His head angled this way and that as he savored her cream-slick pussy.

"I don't have time for this." Mason squirmed, desperate to touch himself or better yet find someone willing to suck him off.

"Just watch."

The blond man knelt behind Kenton and parted his firm ass cheeks. Just enough distance remained between the two for the transmitter to capture their actions. Kenton arched his back and moved his legs farther apart, obviously eager for the fullness. Smearing his anus with lube, the man pushed into Kenton with his middle finger.

Mason heard a deep, muffled groan. Had Kenton made the sound or had it come from the blond man?

"Look at the inside of his thigh," Amoli prompted, pausing the playback at the needed angle. A second scar was situated high on Kenton's leg. It was smaller than the first, yet shared the uneven discoloration. "Is that what you meant? Why did you ask about scars?"

"It's probably nothing and I have no reason to watch this. His privacy has been invaded enough."

"I disagree." Amoli nodded toward the vidscreen. "Consider it a command if you must. I think you need to see this." She reactivated the image.

With slow deliberation, the blond man prepared Kenton for the toy. He caressed Kenton's balls and slid his finger in and out for what seemed like an eternity. By the time he moved the butt plug into position, Mason's balls had drawn up tight against his body. This was ridiculous. He had never been this turned on by watching others fuck. Knowing he'd deprived himself of these pleasures because of Sabina's lies only added to the frustration.

The plug was tapered, smooth, and shiny with lube. Kenton held perfectly still as his body spread wider and wider for the toy. Mason knew that feeling, the intense fullness that bordered on pain. He needed it, had craved it longer than he could remember. Kenton's sphincter contracted snugly around the indentation below the handle and Mason trembled.

He clutched the sleeves of his tunic and glanced away from the vidscreen, only to turn back a moment later. He felt powerless in the face of temptation. Once the plug was firmly seated, the man stepped back and waited as Kenton concentrated on Sabina. She stroked Kenton's hair and tossed her head from side to side, her breasts quivering above the corset. Despite the other man, Kenton didn't rush her. He moved one of his hands between her thighs and Mason cursed their proximity. He wanted to watch Kenton's fingers disappear into her cunt and see her cream run across his hand. With a sharp cry, Sabina came, her breasts heaving, eyes closed. The man helped Kenton to his

feet and she rubbed her pussy, savoring the aftershocks as the men worked out the next position.

"You promised you wouldn't hold back." The man sounded uneasy. "I need --"

"I know what you need."

Sabina dragged herself away from the wall and released cuffs from a compartment in the ceiling. She snapped them shut around the blond man's wrists as Kenton found a thin, flexible rod in a compartment near the door. Mason knew from experience such devices could trigger pleasure, pain, or an intoxicating combination of both.

Selecting a massive dildo and a tube of lubricant from the cart, Sabina returned to the restrained man. Kenton had just feasted on her pussy. Why did she need the lube?

She moved behind the man and pushed the tube into his ass, squeezing out the entire contents of the disposable container before tossing it toward the rubbish droid. More confused than titillated, Mason continued to watch. Sabina grabbed a cushion and arranged herself on her back in front of the men. Reaching between her legs, she pushed the dildo deep into her pussy. Her folds spread for the thick shaft and cream coated her inner thighs. She raised her hips, moaned dramatically as she fucked herself with long, steady strokes.

Kenton snapped the rod across the blond man's ass and he screamed, his body bowed by the intensity of the pain. A vivid red welt formed before Kenton could deliver the next blow. Desire gripped Mason with an iron fist and refused to let go.

"Enough!" Mason had denied his need for pain, had fought the clashing impulses until he thought he'd go insane. Only by completely suppressing that side of his nature had he found anything resembling peace. Amoli understood the conflict raging within him, so why was she fueling the fire?

Even as his heart thundered and his gut cramped, Mason couldn't look away. After five vicious snaps, Kenton dragged the end of the rod up between the blond man's ass cheeks. The man twisted and moaned. Another sharp snap and Kenton

pushed the rod between the man's thighs, teasing his scrotum and caressing his perineum. Pain, pleasure. Pain, pleasure. Over and over the cycle continued. All the while Sabina used the dildo with progressively more violent thrusts.

"Now! Please, Master, now," the man begged.

In an instant Kenton released the cuffs, Sabina tossed the toy aside, and the man drove his cock into her dripping pussy. Kenton went down on one knee behind the man and separated the halves of his ass. His anus winked and a trace of lube trickled out. Kenton didn't hesitate. He pressed the wide head of his cock against the other man's hole and drove inward with ruthless pressure.

The man tossed his head and arched his back, moaning, panting, *wild*. Mason understood that feeling too, needing everything all at once, yet wishing it would never end.

It took them a few moments to synchronize their thrusts. The man drove into Sabina and Kenton elongated each outstroke with his near withdrawal. Graphic, aggressive, unabashedly sexual, they took and were taken.

Mason trembled, fighting for breath. Aching as he had never ached.

"End replay," the empress said and the screen went blank.

Mason blew out a shaky breath. Why was Amoli doing this? The one and only time Mason had entrusted a lover with his secret, it had ended disastrously. Besides, Mason couldn't afford a sexual distraction right now. It was unwise to lose focus during any negotiation and his current assignment was especially challenging.

"He's perfect and you know it," the empress said emphatically. "Part Dom, part sub, equally comfortable with men and women."

"It doesn't matter!" Mason rubbed his arms, determined to regain control of his throbbing body. Some things were more important than sex. Amoli would be the first to disagree. The empress had three husbands, fourteen consorts and countless lovers. She basically fucked anyone, man or woman, who caught her wandering eye.

"I wondered why you'd been hiding out at your estate. Your apartment is far more convenient and rooms are available at the palace anytime you choose to use them.

I haven't seen Megan in weeks." She swept her hand toward the blank vidscreen. "You're avoiding Kenton."

"That's ridiculous."

"Really?" Amusement softened her tone, yet challenge sharpened her stare. "My researchers are very thorough. Kenton arrived on the *Retribution* eleven weeks ago. He spent the first few days acclimating himself with the city. After putting in his application at numerous businesses, he was sent to Starlight Station by one of the bellhops at his hotel."

"I don't want to hear this."

"He met Sabina the third night and fucked her twice, once by herself and the other... Well, you just watched what happened the other time." The empress rattled off the facts despite Mason's protest. "Megan showed up at the Station four days after Sabina's last visit."

"Sabina completely misrepresented what happened."

"She knew you wouldn't go near him if she told you the truth."

"People go to Starlight Station to get fucked, not develop meaningful relationships." Mason heaved a disgusted sigh. "Why was Sabina surprised by the outcome?"

Amoli laughed. "You're asking me to explain my sister's thinking? The universe revolves around Sabina, that's all you need to know."

Regardless of how unfair Megan's actions had been, there was no way to undo what had happened. "It was weeks ago. Why bring it up now?"

"According to the scanner log, you went to Starlight Station nine times. You must have felt something for this man."

*Do you feel a connection to me?* Laden with a heartrending combination of hope and frustration, those words had haunted Mason. Even while he'd believed Megan's actions were justified he'd been unable to banish the guilt.

"Otokar arrived this afternoon." It was as much a reminder to his wayward libido as an objection for the empress. "The Palontian delegation is due tomorrow morning. The last thing I need right now is social conflict."

"Do you have any idea how hard he's tried to find you? We're pretty sure he hasn't touched anyone since he met you. That's rather odd for a heartless philanderer, don't you think? If my sister hadn't been planting false leads and sabotaging him at every turn, Kenton might well be fucking you right now."

"I'm sure you'd enjoy watching that."

Amoli laughed. "If you and Kenton were going at it, I'd want to do a whole lot more than watch."

Reveling in the fantasy for just a moment, Mason released a deep sigh. "Somehow I think he'd be more interested in strangling me than fucking me."

"So, let Mason change his mind."

She was incorrigible! So why did Mason find the idea tempting? "I honestly don't have time to even consider this. Otokar is always challenging and these Palontians have more cultural taboos than any people I've ever dealt with before."

"That's what makes this perfect." Amoli flashed a triumphant smile. "Not only is Kenton Palontian, he also speaks nine languages. He's fluent in all six of their ridiculous dialects. He can make sure you don't unintentionally insult the delegates, and he can translate anything they say. They refuse to allow Elite to be entered into any language database. Hiring him as your consultant/bodyguard will allow you to overcome that particular taboo."

Mason ran out of objections. Countless times during the past few weeks he'd imagined facing Kenton. Usually Megan initiated the conversation, but he'd pictured Mason smoothing the way for her too.

Amoli put her hands on her hips and smiled. "Now tell me about the scars. Why did they catch your eye?"

"Two scars, one on his shoulder and one on his inner thigh. That's where the Pleasure Guild brands their --"

"He's a *Vontralirian*?" The empress gaped in disbelief. "There's no denying he's gorgeous and he sure as hell knows what to do with that incredible body, but a *Vontralirian*?"

"It has to be a coincidence. A *Vontralirian* would never travel without his master. It's a direct violation of the Pleasure Guild's charter. Few ever leave Palonti, much less... Unless he escaped during the uprising. How long did you say he's been here?"

"Just short of three months. Coincidence?" Amoli's shrewd gaze moved over Mason's face. "I don't think so."

"Has anyone else seen this vidfile?"

Amoli shook her head. "Anything involving Sabina is immediately forwarded to me. For all intents and purposes, Kenton is a Sabrotine citizen seeking employment on our humble world." All amusement bled from her expression. "I know you don't blame me for what happened three years ago, but I can't help feeling responsible."

Mason smiled, warmed by Amoli's concern. They had known each other since childhood, long before he had learned to shape shift or Amoli had taken the throne. "Your solution to my sexual challenge is to give me a *Vontralirian*?"

"If I'd had any idea what he is, I'd have kept him for myself. I think you're crazy if you ignore this opportunity." She dismissed the issue with an elegant shrug. "Have him monitor the sessions. He can let you know if the Palontians start playing games. You'll have to verify anything he tells you, of course, but what do you have to lose?"

The image of Kenton's naked body lingered in Mason's mind. How in the world was he going to concentrate on business if Kenton was in the room? "Does he know about the surveillance?"

"I seriously doubt Sabina warned him. She likes to show her lovers the vidfiles *after* they've fucked her for a while."

The casual reminder of Sabina's deception twisted Mason's gut. Kenton had every reason to despise him now. No, he had every reason to despise *Megan*. He swallowed hard. He could offer Kenton the job and see if there was any attraction between Kenton and the ambassador. If Kenton felt nothing for Mason, he would keep



things strictly professional. But if the connection they'd felt at Starlight Station transcended his physical form... Like Amoli said, what did he have to lose?

Desire pushed through Mason's hesitation, making his heartbeat race. It had been three long years since Mason had taken a lover. Did he dare try again?

"Where can I find Mr. Ward? I'd like to offer him a job."

## Chapter Three

Kade sat in the elegant lobby of an office building, trying not to let his anxiety show. *Kenton*, not Kade. If he didn't start thinking of himself as Kenton, he might slip out of character. He wasn't actually playing a role. As soon as he stepped off the *Retribution*, he'd embarked on the next chapter of his life. He had a new identity and a carefully constructed past that would allow him to shape a future far different from the existence he'd escaped.

"Ambassador Fintel will see you now."

Kenton nodded at the receptionist and headed off in the direction she'd indicated. This felt strange. Employment had never been a concern before. All his life he'd been pampered and cosseted, like a prized possession, or a *pet*. Now he had to make his own way, provide for himself, and protect others. The responsibilities were oddly liberating. He would embrace each new challenge and savor his accomplishments -- as soon as he got the job!

The office door slid open as Kenton approached. He squared his shoulders and took two steps into the room. The ambassador stood at the beverage station across from him. Dressed in a gray/green suit with a collarless jacket, he seemed rather ordinary at first glance.

"Would you care for something to drink?" the ambassador asked.

Kenton opened his mouth to request water when the man turned his head. Their gazes locked and the words froze in the back of Kenton's throat. Rich green, with thick sooty lashes, the ambassador had captivating eyes. Penetrating, yet filled with secrets, his gaze seemed suspiciously familiar. "Have we met before?"

"I don't believe so."

Dark, carnal hunger stirred within Kenton. Heat churned through his bloodstream, settling with unwanted results between his thighs. This was his first job interview, but he was pretty sure an erection was not an appropriate reaction. He forced his gaze away and took a deep breath, grateful for his hip-length jacket.

He cleared his throat and answered the original question. "A glass of water would be wonderful."

The ambassador turned back to the beverage station, his lips curved by a faint smile. He'd felt it too. Kenton had no doubt the electric attraction had been mutual. He looked more closely at the other man and searched his memory. Despite the ambassador's denial, Kenton was sure they'd seen each other before. Medium height and average build, Mason wasn't the sort to turn heads in a crowd. His features were regular, except for those jewel bright eyes. An intriguing hint of red added contrast to his dark brown hair and his skin seemed pale to Kenton. But then everyone on this planet seemed pale to a Palontian. Giving himself a firm mental shake, he forced away the distraction.

"Have a seat." He handed Kenton a glass of water and nodded toward the desk situated near the massive windows. Kenton sat and the ambassador slipped in behind the workstation. Sunlight spilled in through the windows accenting the red in his hair. He activated the display in the desktop and began, "I'm Mason Fintel and it says here you're Kenton Ward. How long have you been on Tranocous Nine?"

"Eleven weeks." He'd memorized the information in his dossier, but it would be wise to keep his answers simple and lessen the chances for contradiction.

"When was the last time you were on Palonti?"

He'd anticipated the question, even rehearsed various answers. Denying his planet of origin wasn't possible. His appearance was too distinctive. To his knowledge, everyone who could incriminate him had died in the uprising. Still, he wouldn't reveal any more than necessary. He'd risked too much to escape that god-forsaken place.

"It's been many years," he told the ambassador.

"As I understand it, three tribes are vying for control of the planet." Mason glanced up from the display. "Do you have a preference as to the outcome?"

"I have no strong feelings in the matter." There was a mysterious glimmer in the ambassador's gaze that made Kenton uncomfortable. Anything involving Palonti was dangerous for Kenton. He'd intentionally chosen Tranocous Nine because of its political neutrality. "Am I being considered for this position because of my qualifications or because I'm Palontian?"

"As it happens, your planet of origin is what brought you to my attention." Mason allowed himself a full smile for the first time since Kenton walked into the office.

A shocking rush of desire muddled Kenton's thinking. He hadn't noticed how sensual the ambassador's lips were until he smiled. Pursuing this attraction would be foolish, yet he couldn't look away from that kissable mouth.

Shadows from Kenton's past loomed ever larger. He was a *Vontralirian*, bred for pleasure and trained for seduction. Changing his name couldn't rewrite his genetic code. He didn't want to guard Mason, he wanted to tangle his fingers in that wavy hair and claim his mouth in a passionate kiss. He wanted to overwhelm his senses and possess his body until they were both too weak to move.

Kenton's cock throbbed and a graphic image formed within his mind. He pictured himself walking around the desk as he unfastened his pants. He'd stroke his shaft, drawing the ambassador's attention to his erection. Each *Vontralirian* had been engineered with lust-inducing attributes. From their physical appearance, to the way they moved, they were irresistible to others. Or so he'd been taught. He'd actually believed it until he arrived on Tranocous Nine.

Another image eroded the first. Delicate features surrounded by dark red curls. Bright green eyes, stared up at him with longing as she guided his hand to her breast. Megan. The ambassador had eyes just like Megan!

"Are you all right?" Mason asked, amusement tingeing his tone. "You seem distracted."

Savage lust threatened Kenton's calm façade. He wanted to bend Mason over the desk and show him exactly what had him distracted. Kenton had failed to seduce the elusive redhead, an event that had never happened before. Not only had she amused herself at his expense, she'd disappeared. All of his efforts to find her had been in vain, which only fueled his determination to unravel the mystery.

Sexual awareness tightened Mason's expression despite his attempts to conceal his response. Kenton wasn't the only one struggling to keep this professional.

"I've spent the last few years trying to put distance between myself and Palonti." A wise man would thank Mason for his time and get the hell out of here. The *Vontralirian* were known for their passion and intensity, not their wisdom. "What exactly will this entail?"

"There's no threat to my life. I don't really need private security. However, hiring you as a bodyguard will put you in the position to assist me in other ways."

He could think of countless ways he'd like to *assist* the ambassador. "I'm listening."

"The League of Tranocous Worlds is politically neutral. As such we often facilitate negotiations between other parties. I'm about to begin negotiations between the Sabrotine Federation and one of the Palontian Tribes. I'm familiar with the Sabrotine ambassador. I've worked with him before. The Palontians, on the other hand, are unknown to me."

"I'm no diplomat and I'm not interested in returning to Palonti." Not wanting to incur suspicion, he did his best to sound indifferent.

"The negotiations will take place here. All you'd need to do is observe the sessions, translate exchanges spoken in Elite and report any inconsistencies to me."

Kenton hesitated. He had no intention of leaving Tranocous Nine until he confronted Megan, so he needed some sort of job. "Which tribe is involved in the negotiation?"

"The Obikee. Is that a problem?"

Everyone on Palonti knew him as Kade and few had seen his likeness. Was he being cautious or paranoid? "I was just curious."

"I was told you speak all six Palontian dialects. Is this true?"

Kenton narrowed his gaze. He had a knack for languages, but he'd thought the skill irrelevant to the security profession. "I didn't list that information on my application, nor is it included in my résumé. May I ask who told you I'm multi-lingual?"

Mason turned off the display and leaned back slightly in his chair. "I'll need to be able to trust what you tell me, so I'll be perfectly honest with you. Sabina is Empress Amoli's younger sister. Her inappropriate behavior in the past has made it standard procedure for all of her activities to be recorded."

A rush of fury momentarily robbed him of speech. He'd told the purple-haired hellcat he spoke nine languages and proceeded to demonstrate his ability by demanding she suck his cock in each of the nine. These bastards watched it all, recorded every move he'd made and analyzed every word he'd said.

He stood so abruptly his chair topped over backward. "I have no interest in working for a people who care so little about --"

"Sabina brought this on herself. You just happened to be her companion," Mason cut in before Kenton's argument could get fully underway. "The files were purged once the empress finished with them."

Kenton scowled. "How comforting."

If Mason hadn't told him about the invasion, Kenton never would have known. The ambassador could have asked how many of the Palontian dialects he spoke. Trust. Mason wanted them to trust each other. Kenton wasn't opposed to the concept. He just doubted the ambassador realized how many obstacles they had to overcome.

"You never answered my question," Mason reminded him. "Do you speak Elite or were you just trying to impress Sabina?"

Hadn't Mason seen the files? The hunger in his gaze led Kenton to believe he had. The empress must have reviewed the files or this wouldn't be an issue. "I speak Elite."

"Are you still interested in the position?"

"What you've described would work best if the Palontian delegation didn't realize you had an interpreter."

After a moment of thoughtful silence Mason nodded. "You could watch each session from my office and communicate with me through an audiocom."

"When does the negotiation begin?"

"Tomorrow morning." Mason moved around his desk. "With someone of my political stature, personal security is a live-in position. Are you willing to move into my residence?"

The desire Kenton had been battling since their gazes locked surged with new intensity. Mason's expression was inscrutable. Was this a subtle come-on or just another routine procedure? "I don't see a problem with the arrangement."

Undeniable lust flashed for just an instant before Mason turned away. "Good. Gather your belongings and I'll send a shuttle for you around nine. There's a reception for the delegates tonight. I can't get away before then."

"I'll be ready."

Mason returned to his chair and reactivated the screen. "Oh, I almost forgot. My sister, Megan, has a suite of rooms at my estate. Her hours are rather erratic. I never know when she'll turn up. If you see a red-haired woman milling about, don't be alarmed."

## Chapter Four

"Take me home." Mason collapsed onto the seat of his private shuttle as the automated conveyance took off. The reception had lasted far longer than he'd intended. The ambassadors spent the evening trying to outdo each other. When Otokar insisted his quarters were not acceptable, Peylla quickly followed suit. One order led to another until Mason had been forced to refuse their ridiculous demands and send them to their respective rooms like disobedient children. Not a good start for a complex negotiation.

He turned to the communication controls and paged his housekeeper. She stepped in front of the nearest vidscreen, her smile an ever-present balm for Mason's raw nerves. "Has my guest arrived?"

"Yes, sir. About an hour ago." Tillany's family had worked for Mason's longer than Mason had been alive. They were among a select few who knew of Mason's abilities. "He told me he'd already eaten, but after some polite insistence on my part, he agreed to a massage. He's in the spa with Salus. Would you like to speak with him?"

"There's no reason to disrupt his massage. I'll be home in a few minutes."

Her dark eyes twinkled in her round, rosy face. "Are you sure he's here to protect you? Stars above, that man is gorgeous."

"I noticed." Mason returned her smile. "Thanks for entertaining him. I'd hoped to be there sooner."

"If I were thirty years younger and weren't happily married, I'd have found all sorts of ways to entertain him for you."

Mason chuckled. "I'll see you shortly." He ended the transmission and rubbed his weary eyes. His mind drifted back to his nights at Starlight Station. Kenton's sense of humor and extensive education had surprised Mason. One glance at the handsome



Palontian explained why half of the planet was panting after him, but Mason hadn't expected to find him so captivating.

Perhaps he should let Megan wander into the spa. Their attraction had been tangible and... With an abrupt laugh, he dismissed the misguided thought. He wasn't nearly ready for that confrontation. Kenton needed to adjust to Mason before Megan complicated the situation.

Whenever he was working Mason used the ambassador's appearance. The Sabrotine Federation wasn't the only organization antiquated enough to think females were inferior; they were just the most obnoxious. Empress Amoli originally suggested the brother/sister routine. It allowed Mason to utilize whichever form was most appropriate, while protecting the secret of her ability.

Mason had carefully molded the ambassador's appearance to be approachable, yet unremarkable. Objectivity was key in successful negotiations. The opposing parties needed to focus entirely on each other, allowing Mason to assess the true nature of the conflict.

A man like Kenton could have anyone he wanted. So why had the ambassador's unimpressive form attracted him?

\* \* \*

Salus found a particularly tense spot on Kenton's back and worked the knotted muscle with ruthless determination. Kenton groaned. Goddess, that felt good! A *Vontralirian* was trained in various methods of massage, but this was the first time he'd received rather than delivered the treatment.

Kenton had been surrounded by luxury his entire life. His education had taken place at the Pleasure Guild's premiere academy. From there he'd moved directly to the potentate's palace. The ambassador's home was less ostentatious, yet certainly just as impressive. From the mammoth pillars supporting multi-level verandas, to the curved staircase dominating the elegant foyer, the stately mansion gave the impression of wealth and generations of privilege.

Was the mansion a perk of the position or had Mason always been rich? Kenton suspected it was the later. After leaving Mason's office, still irritated by the casual violation of his privacy, Kenton spent several hours finding out all he could about the ambassador. Empress Amoli had appointed Mason to his position six years before. Mason had never been married, but there had been an ugly scandal involving his sister, Megan, a few years back. He'd been unable to find video clips of any of them in the short time he'd had to dig.

Megan was a fairly common name. There was no reason to think Mason's sister was the same woman Kenton had met at Starlight Station. Still, he couldn't help imagining her standing beside Salus, a mysterious smile bowing her lips.

"Would you please turn over?" Salus adjusted the linen drape as Kenton reversed position.

The massage table was located in a plant-cluttered room adjacent to an indoor swimming pool. Colorful tiles, in geometric patterns, spread out across the floor and lined the pool. The ceiling was transparent, as were two of the walls. One wall offered a spectacular view of the formal gardens while the other overlooked a vast expanse of lawn and mansions in the distance. Like the rest of the house, this area felt classic, yet decadent.

"Is Salus taking good care of you?"

Kenton turned his head sharply and found Mason standing in the exact spot where he'd pictured Megan. "How did you get in here?"

Mason motioned to a doorway mostly hidden by one of the potted plants. "Would you rather I wait until you're finished? I wanted to go over a few details about tomorrow."

"Now is fine. You just startled me."

Moving to the wheeled drink cart, Mason poured himself a glass of sautara punch. Kenton had sampled the bright red concoction before the massage began and the exotic flavor lingered in his mouth. Rich and sweet, with a hint of citrus, and the warmth of spice, it was like nothing he'd ever tasted before.

"In hindsight," Mason began, "it might have been wise for you to accompany me to the reception. You would have been able to give me your impression of the Palontian ambassador."

"Who did they send? Perhaps I've heard of him, or her." Kenton tried to remain relaxed, but Mason's smoldering gaze was creating tension faster than Salus could rub it away.

"Ambassador Peylla. He's second son of the Obikee chief."

Kenton froze, barely able to draw breath. Of all the people on Palonti, why did they have to send Peylla? "I've heard of him."

"You don't sound pleased." Mason strolled closer to the table, his eyes focused on Kenton's face. "Do you know him?"

*Think fast, Kade. How do you explain this without...* He'd done it again. Kade was dead! Kenton was a security officer with no political affiliations. "I..." Rolling to his side, he propped himself on his elbow and looked directly into Mason's eyes. "Many people used the uprising as an opportunity to start over. There are certain elements on Palonti that wouldn't be happy to learn I escaped the upheaval."

"I appreciate your candor." He paused for another sip before he asked, "Is Peylla one of these elements, or are you concerned he'll inform others that you're still alive?"

"I'm not sure how Peylla would react if we came face to face." With a sigh he relaxed against the table and allowed the massage to resume. "I was once employed by the former potentate and, as you know, Peylla's tribe despised the man."

"Potentate Chaya is dead. His murder was one of the pivotal developments leading up to the current upheaval."

"Even with Chaya dead, I doubt Peylla will be able to disassociate me from the former ruler."

They were silent for a time and Kenton closed his eyes. He'd likely ended his employment before it began. Everything he'd just said contradicted the information on his résumé, but there'd been no other choice. If Peylla saw him, not only would it end the masquerade, he would likely be returned to Palonti in restraints.

"In what capacity were you employed by the former potentate?"

Kenton glanced up as he debated what to say. "I was part of his household staff." That was more or less true. "It's customary on Palonti for the family of a conquered ruler to be wiped out. This often includes their servants."

"I think you're overestimating Peylla's brutality. To my knowledge Chaya's people were evacuated from the palace, but no one was killed."

"I was responsible for the safety of one of Chaya's lesser wives. Her name was Kalleto. The match was negotiated as part of a peace treaty between Chaya and her tribe. When she failed to produce a son, Chaya had her executed."

"This woman was one of Peylla's tribe?"

"She was his sister."

"I see." Mason stared into the distance for a moment, his expression inscrutable. "As I said during the interview, you will monitor the sessions remotely. I'll make sure your paths never cross."

Kenton accepted the assurance with a nod. It wasn't his manufactured qualifications that had brought him to Mason's attention in the first place. The ambassador needed someone who could eavesdrop on the Palontian delegation. He could do that and a whole lot more.

Releasing his tension with a deep sigh, Kenton focused on the ambassador's face. Hunger burned in Mason's eyes, yet he sat there staring. Conducting this briefing while he was naked had been no accident. Mason wanted to fuck. Was he waiting for Kenton to make the first move? Kenton's cock hardened and he clenched his teeth. Taking control had his body's full cooperation.

Salus worked one of Kenton's legs, carefully arranging the sheet in an attempt to conceal his erection. Kenton was used to being watched, assessed and coveted. So why was Mason's gaze making his skin heat and his balls tingle? Perhaps the sautara punch had stimulating properties. He'd been just as turned on in Mason's office. He couldn't blame this attraction on an exotic beverage.

"Peylla informed me that it's customary for Palontian nobility to be provided with bedmates, as many as they choose and in whatever variety they crave. Is this true or was he trying to shock the Federation's representative?"

This was an interesting change of subject. Kenton gazed up at the starry sky and concentrated on the firm pressure of Salus' hands. "Every member of the Palontian aristocracy has pleasure servants. The custom Peylla is referencing is simply a matter of the guest mentioning which servant, or servants, they wish to utilize during their stay."

"I see. We're a bit more discreet with such matters, but I made the necessary arrangements."

Kenton couldn't help but smile. "What you term discretion, we Palontians would call hypocrisy. We make no attempt to hide our sexual appetites because we find no shame in physical desire." He tossed back the sheet and swung his legs over the side of the table. "If I've misread your expression, tell me now, because I'm about to make the first move."

Spellbound by the gleaming perfection of Kenton's naked body, Mason pushed to his feet. Salus slipped through the door at the back of the alcove, not needing to be told it was time to leave.

Kenton grabbed the back of Mason's hair. The unexpected aggression thrilled Mason more than he cared to admit. He'd been restless ever since Amoli showed him the security file. In truth the restlessness had been with him since Starlight Station. All he had to do was close his eyes and erotic images materialized in his mind. But in his fantasies, *he* was the man bound and helpless, waiting for the brutal passion of his Master's touch.

"I'm not sure how this works on your world," Kenton said. "I want no misunderstanding. Do you want to fuck me or not?"

Mason swallowed hard and shook his head. "I want *you* to fuck *me*." A flash of heat in Kenton's gaze assured him the Palontian understood the distinction.

Requiring no further prompting, Kenton sealed his mouth over Mason's and unfastened the ambassador's jacket. His strong fingers traveled over Mason's chest, spreading heat in their wake. Mason parted his lips and welcomed Kenton's tongue, needing the intimacy and enjoying the faint taste of sautara punch. It had been so long since he'd had sex as a man. After the disastrous incident three years before, Mason completely separated his personas. The ambassador conducted business and Megan dealt with all things social.

Shrugging out of the jacket, Mason finally indulged his need to touch. Kenton's body was slick from the massage oil. Mason explored his torso, admiring his firm muscles and flawless skin. "Catova oil smells wonderful --" He leaned in and pressed his lips against the center of Kenton's chest. "-- but it tastes even better."

Kenton stood perfectly still, allowing Mason to play. He squeezed Kenton's broad shoulders, while his lips memorized the texture of his skin. Mason brushed his fingertips over the mark on Kenton's back. "What is this?" He tried to move behind Kenton and get a closer look, but the Palontian twisted away.

"Just a scar." His gruff tone made it obvious he would say no more.

Unwilling to jeopardize the building intimacy, Mason allowed the evasion. He cupped Kenton's ass and teased his flat nipples. He sucked one between his lips and applied pressure with his teeth until Kenton groaned. The low muffled sound fueled Mason's desire. What other sounds could he drag from Kenton's throat?

Determined to find out, Mason began his descent. He closed his fingers around Kenton's shaft with one hand and cupped his sac with the other. Everything about Kenton was designed for carnal pleasure. He had a body fit for a king -- or a potentate. It was easy to imagine Kenton in the potentate's palace. Picturing him as a guard, however, took more imagination.

The smaller scar was barely visible on Kenton's inner thigh. Was Kenton a renegade *Vontralirian*? If he was, it stood to reason that Chaya had been his master, so the possibility had no bearing on what they were about to do.

Pushing aside the distraction, Mason sank to his knees. The spicy scent of catova oil made his nostrils flare and his mouth water. Gently rolling one ball against the other, Mason watched Kenton's cock buck within the circle of his fingers. It hardened even more, growing longer and darker. Tension gripped Mason's belly, a bittersweet ache too long denied. He imagined Kenton stretching him, pushing deeper and deeper until he screamed from the pleasure/pain. A violent shudder passed through Mason. He needed the pain as much as the pleasure. How long would it take before he felt comfortable enough to admit his dark desires?

He leaned in close and caressed Kenton with his breath before closing his lips around the Palontian's shaft. The flared head alone filled Mason's mouth. He licked and sucked, fascinated and undeniably aroused. Mason grew bolder, pumping his hand up and down. A salty tang soon joined the catova oil and Mason swept his tongue across the very tip.

"Enough." Kenton drew out of Mason's mouth and pulled him to his feet. With almost frantic movements Kenton unfastened Mason's pants and pushed them past his knees. He reached for the catova oil and lubricated both hands. "Bend over."

The command made Mason's cock jerk and his anus tingle. He turned and braced himself against the top of the massage table, spreading his legs as wide as his bunched pants allowed. Kenton rubbed his cock against Mason's ass then pushed between his legs. Confused by the position, Mason glanced over his shoulder. Kenton just smiled and rubbed his hands together. Starting with his shoulders and working his way down, Kenton massaged Mason's back. All the while Kenton's cock throbbed between Mason's legs, a constant reminder of its eventual destination.

"How many times did you watch me fuck Sabina?" Kenton whispered as he reached Mason's hips.

Mason closed his eyes and clutched the padded surface of the table. "What makes you think I saw the files?" Kenton reached around and closed his fist around Mason's cock.

"I could see it in your eyes." Kenton pulled back, dragging his cock over nerve endings Mason didn't realize he had. When he rocked forward, the head of his cock hit Mason's balls hard enough to make him gasp. "Was it just Sabina or did you see the other time too?"

"I saw you with Sabina and a blond man, but I only watched the file once."

"Really?" With one hand still circling Mason's cock, Kenton took the catova oil and drizzled it into the crack between Mason's ass cheeks. "And that one scene aroused you enough for you to seek me out?" He smoothed the oil over Mason's flesh, pausing to tease his tightly puckered hole.

"How many others have there been since you arrived?" He had no right to ask. Mason had just met this man. He hadn't spent two weeks longing for the pleasure promised by his smoldering gaze. Jealousy prompted one more question. "How many times did you go to Starlight Station?"

Kenton drilled him with his finger, thrusting in fast and pulling out slowly. "Don't you already know? You're the one spying on me."

"The empress was spying on Sabina." He pushed to the balls of his feet, resting more of his weight on his forearms. "I need an interpreter. This wasn't some elaborate ploy to..." Kenton slid his finger in and out, establishing a delightful rhythm.

"Do you have a whip handy?"

Mason didn't detect mockery in the question, yet he hesitated.

"Do you like your cheeks burning when you take a cock up your ass?" He punctuated the question with a hard inward drive.

Mason didn't want to reveal too much too soon. Restraints and whips required a level of trust they hadn't yet established. According to the empress, Kenton hadn't touched anyone since Megan disappeared. If Mason progressed gradually, gave Kenton time to adjust, this might develop beyond one heated tussle. The possibility left him breathless.

"If you please me well tonight, we'll talk about more interesting games tomorrow," he whispered.



Rotating his hand, Kenton worked in a second finger. "Are you sure this is what you want? You're really tight and I'm really hard."

Mason trembled, doing his best to relax as Kenton's slick fingers prepared him for a much larger invasion. "I'm sure."

Pulling him backward, Kenton made more room between Mason's body and the table. Neither of them spoke. Kenton stroked Mason's shaft with one hand and fucked his ass with the other. Mason grasped the far side of the table and concentrated on the combined stimulation. Each inward thrust seemed to pass through his body and continue along the length of his cock.

He tossed his head, enjoying the sensations, yet needing more. Oil dripped into his crack again. He felt a greater pressure and braced for the next step. Kenton moved his fingers to the end of Mason's cock, caressing the sensitive tip with his thumb. Holding him open with one hand, Kenton found his hole with the blunt head of his cock and drove steadily inward.

Mason closed his eyes, picturing what he was feeling. Kenton's cockhead spread him wide as pain drilled into his ass. Wave upon wave of blissful burning crashed over him. More oil eased the way and the searing pleasure abated in a series of abrupt spasms. Kenton pushed deeper and Mason groaned.

"Does it hurt?" Kenton's voice was barely a whisper.

"Gods, yes." He released his breath in a hiss, then laughed. "More. I want it all."

With the same relentless patience, Kenton obliged. Mason clenched his teeth to keep from crying out. The pain was exquisite. When Kenton's thighs pressed against his, the Palontian wrapped his arm around Mason's waist and resumed the tantalizing motion with his fingers. Mason's ass echoed the throbbing of his cock, but it wasn't enough. He tried to rock his hips, to drag his body off Kenton's shaft. Kenton held him in place, not ready to move.

"Please, I need to feel you."

Kenton chuckled. "You can't feel me?"

Mason tightened his inner muscles as hard as he could. "Don't wait. Fuck me now."

Moving both hands to Mason's hips, Kenton pulled nearly out, paused for an instant, then slammed his full length back in. Mason screamed as fire ignited inside him. Kenton showed no mercy. He drove hard and fast and Mason went wild beneath him. Bucking and twisting, Mason used the pain to fuel his pleasure, creating sensations so intense he fought for breath. Kenton grasped the back of his neck and held him down as he filled him again and again.

Mason clawed at the sheet and lights danced before his eyes. Each violent thrust detonated a separate burst of pleasure/pain. His cock pulsed and his balls ached, and an image formed within his mind. Megan sprawled across the table, her legs draped over Kenton's arms as he fucked her with the same possessive demand. The need to shift surged within Mason, trapping him on the brink of release.

Kenton reached around and grabbed his cock. "I won't come until you do. Now get busy!"

Forcing back the impending transformation, Mason refocused on the relentless slide of Kenton's cock and the corresponding stroke of his hand. Tension gathered and reality blurred. He threw back his head and pumped his seed against the linen sheet. Kenton shuddered, a moan escaping his throat as he came deep inside Mason's body.

They collapsed against the table, their harsh panting the only sound. Even semi-erect Kenton felt huge. Mason rested his forehead against the table and savored the fullness and the heat.

"Are you all right?" Kenton lifted his weight off Mason and carefully pulled out.

"Why wouldn't I be?" He tried to sound casual, but nearly losing control had left him shaken. "You used half a bottle of catova oil."

"Your whole body grew hot right before you came."

Bending to pull up his pants, Mason kept his gaze averted. "That doesn't happen to you?"

Kenton caught his chin and raised his face until their gazes locked. "It hasn't happened to anyone else I've been with on this planet either."

"It was nothing you need to worry about." Mason allowed an autocratic edge to sharpen his tone. "We need to setup before the others arrive. I'll see you in the morning."

## Chapter Five

Kenton adjusted his chair and angled his body until he found a comfortable position. It was going to be a long day. The conference room was across the hall and two doors down from Mason's office. Kenton watched the "action" on a vidscreen. From time to time something Peylla said caught Kenton's attention, but the majority of the meeting was dreadfully dull.

The Palontian delegation dominated one side of the oval table. Their brightly colored silk tunics and elaborate headdresses appeared gaudy in comparison to the charcoal gray uniforms worn by the Sabrotine officials.

Kenton's gaze settled on Peylla and a knot of tension gripped his stomach. How much had Kalleto told her brother about what happened at the potentate's palace? Had she accepted that Kenton had had no more control over the events than she'd had, or had she painted him a villain just like Chaya? Kenton took a deep breath and buried the memories. Both Chaya and Kalleto were dead. None of it mattered anymore. He wouldn't allow it to matter.

Turning his attention to Mason, Kenton felt a different kind of tension spread through his abdomen. Mason presided over the discussion with watchful subtlety, only adding comments or redirecting the conversation when the hotheaded ambassadors left him no other option. Kenton was fascinated by Mason's eloquence and the insight with which he guided the negotiation. Mason took advantage of his unassuming appearance and people's tendency to underestimate him.

Boredom set in about halfway through the afternoon. How did Mason do this day after day? Kenton imagined him naked and bent over the conference table, with his hands bound at the small of his back. There were many things Kenton had wanted to do last night, but as soon as he'd pushed into that tight, hot ass they had both been lost.

The next time they fucked, Kenton would make sure there were restraints and assorted toys, everything they'd need to explore the full range of their desire.

It was odd. In the short time he'd been free to picture a future of his own choosing he'd always seen himself with a woman at his side. He'd learned on the *Retribution* there were aspects of his sexuality he had yet to explore. Mason was not at all what he had planned, but last night had been enlightening. The more submissive Mason became, the more Kenton enjoyed the experience. In that at least, they were well matched.

"The federation will not throw itself in the middle of a civil war," Otokar objected, snapping Kenton away from his speculation. "The blockade was suspended pending the outcome of the conflict. That's as far as we're willing to go. We'll pay you generously for the wrestilian ore and you can use the credits to hire mercenaries."

"Mercenaries are notoriously unreliable," Peylla countered. His face was framed by a bright blue headdress that perfectly matched his eyes. "Wrestilian ore isn't the only valuable resource on Palonti. If one of the other tribes outbids us, we could end up fighting our own mercenaries. It's happened before."

Kenton watched the Sabroline commander, waiting for his reaction. Many confused the Palontian love of luxury with weakness. Would this grim-faced soldier be able to see beyond Peylla's garish clothing and recognize the determination in his eyes?

"Yours isn't the only deposit of wrestilian on Palonti." Otokar crossed his arms over his chest and leaned back in his chair.

*Apparently not.* Kenton shook his head. Mason had his work cut out for him with these two.

"It is by far the richest," Peylla said. "Do you really want to spend the next five lunar cycles repeating this tiresome ritual with representatives from the other tribes?"

A smile tugged at one corner of Otokar's mouth. "I can think of many ways I would rather spend my time. Still, I have no interest in your planetary conflict."

"It was my understanding that the federation was interested in establishing alliances with stable world governments. Unlike the previous potentate, my father is in

favor of such an alliance, but first and foremost, Palonti's government must be stabilized."

Otokar chuckled. "Meaning the Obikee Tribe must win this war."

"We are the largest tribe by far. It is right that we rule."

"It isn't always the largest tribe that wins. It's the strongest. Do you hold that distinction as well?"

"Ambassadors," Mason drew their attention to the head of the table. "Let's focus on the offer at hand. In exchange for wrestilian ore, Ambassador Peylla has requested troops, weapons, and training for his warriors."

"Unacceptable," Otokar said emphatically.

"All right." Mason folded his hands on the table in front of him and continued, "The Obikee Tribe needs more than standard credits out of this transaction or I wouldn't be here. Are you willing to make a counteroffer?"

"Actually, I am." The sly gleam in Otokar's eyes made Kenton scoot to the edge of his chair. "Peylla may *purchase* weapons with the credits he earns from the wrestilian ore. It's a hazy distinction, I know, but important. Troops are out of the question. However, I might be willing to participate in an exchange program."

"What sort of exchange program?" Peylla asked.

"I will provide you with trainers for your warriors if you guarantee me access to the Pleasure Guild."

Kenton's gaze snapped back to Peylla. The Pleasure Guild operated independently from the tribes. Peylla didn't have the authority to make this concession. Kenton raised his hand to the control console, ready to warn Mason if Peylla accepted the offer.

"If you want pleasure servants, I can --"

"I don't want pleasure servants. I want guild certified trainers and the right to bid at the annual *Vontralirian* auction."

Peylla contained his reaction to a minor widening of his eyes. "Very few of the *Vontralirian* have ever been awarded to offworlders. The Guild is extremely selective."

"Which likely explains their success." Smug pleasure curved Otokar's lips. Apparently, his interest in wrestilian ore had been a ploy. "Let's be frank. There are only so many ways to fuck, but somehow your Pleasure Guild has created a mystique surrounding these *Vontralirians*. Everyone wants one."

"I... Did you already petition the Guild directly?" Peylla was doing a remarkable job of maintaining his composure.

"Of course I did. They're arrogant, secretive, and utterly unreasonable. That's why you're going to act on my behalf."

"You don't understand."

"I don't need to understand. You claim to want Palonti united under your control. Well, start with the Pleasure Guild." Otokar pushed back his chair and stood. "If you need some firepower to blast some sense into the Guild masters just let me know. If not, we'll meet again once you've kicked in their door."

\* \* \*

Mason sat alone in the conference room, rubbing the bridge of his nose. The Palontian delegation had stormed out shortly after the Sabrotine officials made their dramatic exit. Mason should have seen this coming. Otokar was always wily. Still, this was the first time he'd completely misrepresented his interests. Tapping the surface of his audiocom, Mason activated the tiny device nestled in his ear.

"Did you catch all of that?" he asked Kenton.

"Come to your office and I'll explain what Peylla is up against."

"I'm on my way." Another tap set the audiocom on standby. Mason pushed back his chair and stood. After rolling his shoulders and unfastening the neck closure on his form-fitting jacket, he made his way to his office.

"How much do you know about the Pleasure Guild?" Kenton asked as the door closed behind Mason.

"As much as any offworlder is allowed to know." Heaving a frustrated sigh, Mason moved behind his desk and sat down. Kenton pivoted to face him as they spoke. "Tell me what's not in the archives."

"To my knowledge, laws prohibiting pleasure givers and sexual companions have never existed on Palonti. However, many of the people who chose these professions were either unsavory or victimized until the formation of the Pleasure Guild about a hundred and fifty years ago. The Guild created a strict and detailed charter governing the behavior of its members as well as its customers."

"Did the tribal leaders encourage the pleasure givers to organize or was it the pleasure givers themselves who banded together?"

"The pleasure givers formed the Guild and one of the fundamental principles of the charter is that they operate separately from the tribes."

"Then there's no way Peylla can meet Otokar's terms."

Kenton nodded and stood up. "Even if his tribe is victorious, they will have no power over the Pleasure Guild."

"What exactly is a *Vontralirian*? I know they're highly skilled pleasure givers, but what makes them unique?"

"After the Guild ensured casual pleasure givers had what they needed to succeed, they turned their aspirations toward creating the perfect sexual companion." Kenton meandered around the office as he explained. His stride was smooth and leisurely, his posture straight, yet comfortable. "Guild scouts select the most physically perfect children each year and bring them to the academy. Their families are compensated for --"

"What about the children? They're taken from their families and forced into a lifestyle they might not have chosen for themselves."

Kenton's chin rose and an unnamed emotion erupted in his eyes. He managed to maintain control of his expression, but Mason had obviously struck a nerve.

"It's an honor to be chosen. Acceptance as a *Vontralirian* guarantees comfort and security not only for the participant, but for their family."

Mason thought again of Kenton's unusual scars. Was he defending his past, not just his planet's customs? "Please continue. I shouldn't have interrupted."



Accepting the pseudo-apology with a stiff nod, Kenton went on, "During puberty each novice is given treatments that help increase their natural potential."

"What sort of treatments?"

"I don't understand the specifics. I know the injections make subtle changes to their DNA. They become more attractive, more sensual, and more desirable. It also increases their sex drive and heightens their ability to feel pleasure."

"So much of that is subjective." Mason tried to focus on the facts and keep his emotions distanced, but the image of a frightened child being torn from his parent's arms was lodge within his mind. "Not everyone finds the same thing attractive or desirable."

"Each *Vontralirian* is commissioned before this process begins. Their treatments and training are customized to meet the needs of their master."

Every detail Kenton revealed made Mason more uncomfortable. "What happens to a *Vontralirian* if they despise their master? Do they have any recourse if they're abused?"

"The Guild is meticulous when making these matches and the treatments ensure that both parties find pleasure in the union."

"You didn't answer my question. What recourse does a *Vontralirian* have if their master becomes abusive?"

"The charter protects a *Vontralirian* in such cases. They're allowed to return to the institute and seek another master or become an instructor."

"Why didn't you?" The question was out before Mason realized what he had said.

"Why didn't I what?" Kenton's features remained expressionless, but Mason hadn't missed the hitch in his voice.

"Why didn't you return to the institute when Chaya abused you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Mason didn't argue. It was obvious Kenton wasn't ready to share the truth. "I'll meet you at home. I need to speak with the empress. Otokar's deception requires my withdrawal from the negotiation. I don't broker deals involving slaves."

## Chapter Six

Kenton swam across the pool with agitated strokes, his conversation with Mason replaying in his mind. How had Mason guessed the truth so easily? Or had the empress seen his scars in the surveillance files? His flesh would regenerate eventually, but the marks had been so deeply embedded the healing process might need to be repeated. He dove and twisted, kicking off the wall and launching himself in the opposite direction.

As Otokar had said, the Guild masters were secretive and inflexible. If it weren't for this ridiculous negotiation, Kenton would have been surprised if anyone on Tranocous Nine had heard of a *Vontralirian*.

He lowered his feet to the bottom of the pool and broke the surface of the water. What difference did it make if Mason knew the truth? If they'd meant to turn him over to Palontian authorities, he'd be in custody.

"Did you heat up the water for me?"

Like sun-warmed honey Megan's soft, husky voice washed over his senses. He turned around slowly, afraid he'd imagined the sound. She stood at the other end of the pool, a knee-length robe hanging open over a sleek swimsuit. Not trusting himself to speak, he trudged through the water and up the stairs beside her.

"Let me explain what happened at --"

He swept her against him and ended her sentence with his mouth. She stood stiff and resistant within his embrace, her teeth clenched against his kiss. "Open your mouth."

"Not until you let me explain." She hurried through the words with her head turned to the side.

Grabbing the back of her hair, he tilted her head and started again. His lips slid against hers, rubbing and caressing. He reached up under her robe and found the strap of her swimsuit, tugging it down along her arm.

“Stop...”

She gasped and he pushed his tongue between her lips, not caring if she bit him. He’d dreamed about this, longed for her, feared he’d never find her. She was not disappearing again until he’d seen what he’d only imagined and tasted every millimeter of her delectable body.

His mouth became more aggressive, his tongue boldly thrusting. Gradually her lips softened and her tongue began to respond. He took off her robe and tossed it aside, their mouths never breaking contact. With two firm yanks, he pulled her suit down around her waist and trapped her arms against her sides.

She felt even better than he remembered, her breasts heavy, yet firm. He cupped one and then the other, pausing to roll her nipples. Soon touching them wasn’t enough. He kissed his way down her neck.

“Kenton,” she whispered. “I don’t want to do this until we talk.”

Catching her nipple between his teeth, he gave her a firm nip. “I don’t want to talk until we do this.” He suckled deeply, ravenous for her taste.

“What about Mason?” The question brought his head up. She crossed her arms over her breasts and stared into his eyes.

“Damn you!” He stepped back and raked his fingers through his hair.

Megan quickly righted her swimsuit, her heart pounding in her chest. She’d expected Kenton to be angry. She hadn’t dreamed he’d still want her, at least not at first. His aggressive kiss left her wobbly-kneed and physically ready to pick up where they’d left off at Starlight Station. But she couldn’t, not until he understood her motivation and the true complexity of the situation.

“Can we please talk?”

"What do you want to talk about? The fact that you're a ruthless cock tease or the fact that I'm fucking your brother?" He caught her around the waist and pulled her back against his chest. "I want you naked and moaning my name. You're sure as hell not putting anything else on."

His angry words stabbed into her heart, compounded by the realization that she deserved them. Any semblance of detachment evaporated beneath the heat of his ire. Humiliation and guilt eroded her composure. She wanted to run back the way she'd come and have Tillany send him away.

*You already tried hiding, her inner voice chided. It doesn't work. If you want him, fight for him. You're not a coward.*

She settled back against him. His cock pressed against the small of her back and one of his hands cupped her breast. "I'm going to turn around. I want to look at you."

"Take off your suit. I want to look at you."

"If I get naked, we won't have this conversation."

He chuckled, his warm breath stirring her hair. "That's the idea."

His hold loosened and she turned to face him. Raising her hands to his chest, she maintained what little space she could between their heated bodies. "Sabina and I grew up together. Regardless of her tempestuous nature, she *is* my friend. She told me you'd teased her, that you'd led her on and --"

"You believed her?" He cupped her breast again, his thumb easily finding her nipple through the sturdy fabric. "I wouldn't be her fuck toy, so she sent you in to punish me?"

She opened her mouth to deny it, but that was exactly what had happened. "I didn't know she'd lied until I saw the surveillance vid."

Anger scrunched his forehead and narrowed his eyes. "How many people have seen those damn files? Mason said they were deleted."

Shit! Mason had seen the file not Megan. She had to be more careful. "When the empress realized I was avoiding you, she wanted to make sure --"

"Why would the empress care about your sex life?"

"I knew her long before she was the empress. Amoli has spent half her life cleaning up after her little sister. Sabina can be a manipulative bitch when she doesn't get what she wants."

"I figured that out all by myself."

"I'm sorry." And she was. Not so much because she'd tried to seduce him, but because she'd walked away.

"Those are just words. True repentance requires action." He caught her nipple between his thumb and forefinger, pinching her just hard enough to make her crave a firmer pressure. "What are you willing to do to right the wrong?"

A long neglected need surged through Megan. She didn't just want to fuck him, she wanted to submit to him, to experience the bittersweet pleasure only found on the far side of pain. She knew he was skilled with a whip, but did he *enjoy* utilizing the skill? Having a lover willing to accommodate her desire would never be enough. She needed her partner to revel in control and savor her screams.

His aggressive mood gave her the perfect opportunity to find out if Kenton was her mirror image or just someone well trained in the sensual arts. She knew Mason could trust him, but what about Megan?

Without explaining her actions, she took him by the hand and led him around the pool. He threaded his fingers through hers, as if he were afraid she'd slip away. She was inordinately pleased by the subtle gesture.

They reached the spa and his steps faltered. His fingers tightening around hers and he heaved a frustrated sigh. "What about Mason?"

How much should she tell him? He deserved to know the truth, yet he was still recovering from her original deception. Better to ease him in gradually. "Mason and I are fraternal twins." The familiar lie sprang to her lips. "We share the same taste in many things. It doesn't happen often, but when we find ourselves attracted to the same person... I think of Mason as an extension of myself. Touching him is just like touching me."

Kenton's brow arched and his eyes sparkled. "I beg to differ with you. You don't feel anything like Mason."

"The point is Mason has the same attitude."

"Have you and Mason ever *shared* a lover?" He didn't sound hopeful, merely curious.

She shuddered and shook her head. "I know that's a common fantasy, but it doesn't appeal to me." This was happening too fast. She hadn't expected to fuck him tonight, much less show him the toy room.

Pressing her palm against the scanner, she triggered the door and led him into her private haven. This was the one place she felt completely at home. She hadn't entered this room in three years, had begun to wonder if she'd ever use it again. The door slid shut behind them and she let go of his hand. Her heart thudded in her breast as she watched his reaction.

A fully adjustable table dominated the center of the room with a tinted skylight directly above. Unlike many dungeons, her toy room was light and airy, the walls continuing the colorful tiled pattern begun in the pool area. One corner of the room was padded, another contained a whipping post. Cabinets and drawers filled with disposable toys were inset in the far wall.

He looked around in stoic silence, his expression revealing nothing. Her heart lurched and tension gripped her stomach. Had she misjudged him?

His fingers closed around her wrist and a smile quirked his lips. "You deserve to be punished. Is that what you're telling me?"

Lust erupted in the depths of his gaze, but she saw a hint of tenderness too. He understood. Unable to speak past the tightness in her throat, she nodded again.

"Your clothing offends me." The command sent shivers down her spine and heat pooled between her thighs.

Without hesitation, she pulled down the straps and wiggled out of the stretchy suit. She kicked it to the side and raised her arms, locking her hands behind her head.

He moved closer and the faint scent of chlorine tickled her nose. She kept her gaze lowered.

"Part your legs." She did and he circled her, his hands clasped behind his back. "I will have your complete obedience. Is that understood?"

"Yes."

He wrapped his arms around her from behind, his mouth just above her ear. With one hand he cupped her breast, while the other covered her mound. "This body is mine to do with as I please. If you agree say, 'Yes, *Master*'."

She pressed her lips together as her pussy clenched needfully. The snap of his voice nearly triggered an orgasm. "Yes, Master," she whispered. This was dangerous. She'd never responded to anyone this fast or this powerfully.

He rolled her nipple, pulling firmly while the bud hardened to his touch. "If the sensations become unbearable say the word 'cease' and I will stop. But know this before we begin, I have no intention of being gentle."

She didn't want him to be gentle. Still, suggesting a safe word was an important step. Establishing a Master/slave relationship required trust and communication. If she'd only sensed anger in Kenton, she never would have brought him here. The debacle at Starlight Station provided them with appropriate roles. This could be a single, intense experience or the start of a lasting partnership. They definitely had sexual chemistry to spare, but true compatibility went far deeper than mutual attraction.

His fingers slid into her folds, easily finding her clit. "Did kissing me make you this wet or is the thought of punishment making you squirm?"

"Both," she admitted, her voice shaking. "I need your discipline."

Taking her by the hand, he led her to the whipping post and pressed her back against the thick pole. He secured the manacles around her wrists and reeled in the alloy cable until her arms were suspended above her head. Though snug around her wrists, the plush lining felt soft and titillating against her skin. Why had he chosen this position? Did he intend to flog her breasts? Her nipples grew even tighter.



He went to the cabinets and took his time selecting what he would need. "Are your nipples pierced?"

"Yes, Master."

His back was turned, but she presumed from the question that he'd found her weights and chains. He opened another drawer before he found what he was looking for. She lowered her gaze as he turned around, but not before she saw the passion burning in his gaze. Closing her hands into fists, she savored the intense longing.

He approached with languid grace, his erection forming an unmistakable bulge in the front of his swim trunks. Why didn't he take the silly things off? She wanted to see him, touch him, and suck him deep into her mouth.

Cupping her chin in one hand, he raised her face until their gazes met. "You will not come unless I give you permission. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Master."

He opened his other hand and a blindfold unfurled. After tracing her lips with his tongue, he fastened the blindfold around her head. Darkness engulfed her, intensifying the hollow ache of her cunt and the subtle brush of air against her skin. She listened and waited for his distinct scent to reach her nose. The damp drag of his swim trunks told her he'd finally tugged them off, then his steps returned to the cupboards.

"I want so many things from you. I'm having trouble deciding where to begin." After a long pause, he returned to the whipping post. He trailed something soft across the upper swell of her breasts. Loose fibers, like a tassel or -- the object slapped against her tender flesh and tiny stings replaced the teasing caress. He had her silk flogger. Each soft strand was braided and knotted at the end. He awakened her breasts with moderate strokes, pausing between each to pinch one of her nipples.

The first brush of the strands against her mound made her gasp. Already tension gripped her abdomen and made her pussy throb. If he pinched her clit like he'd pinched her nipples, she was in serious trouble.

"Do you want me to fuck you?" He caressed her thighs with the whip, then dragged the strands across her pussy. "Do you ache for my cock?"

"Yes. Oh gods, yes." Four sharp snaps was all he gave her before he moved away. Heat spread through her lower body, blossoming across her skin and sinking into her core. His thumbs parted her outer lips and his tongue pushed between her folds. "Oh, Master! I... Please may I come?" A tingling spasm had already begun.

"No." He pulled back and stood, his chest rubbing against her sensitized skin as he ascended. "Open your mouth." An instant after she obeyed, he fit his lips over hers. His tongue delved and darted. "I dreamed of this taste, hungered for it."

Cool air wafted across her burning skin an instant before he continued the sweet torment. The flogger punished her mound, slower now, allowing her to absorb each lash before he delivered the next. A long pause followed and then the exquisite stroke of his tongue, bolder, pushing well into her cunt. He lifted her leg to his shoulder and feasted, sucking and stabbing while she writhed and moaned.

He lowered her leg to the floor and licked his way up her trembling body. After filling her mouth with the taste of her passion, he continued the intoxicating cycle. Twice more he drove her to the brink of orgasm only to lick her pussy and feed her cream-covered kisses. He refused to let her come, using the flogger and his mouth with ruthless precision.

She whimpered and arched. "Please, Master. I can bear no more."

He chuckled, running the knotted strands from her shoulders to her knees. "You will bear what I expect you to bear." The tension on her arms released. He'd unhooked the cuffs from the post while leaving her wrists confined. "On your knees." She knelt before him, keeping her legs spread as much for stability as to please him. "Now lean forward. Brace yourself against the floor but keep your head up."

As soon as she adjusted her position he brushed his cockhead against her lips. She opened and swiped her tongue over the very tip. His taste was sharper than hers, unmistakably masculine. The combination sent excitement skittering across her nerve endings. She sucked and licked as his fingers tangled in her hair. He pushed in fast and pulled out slowly. Velvet-soft skin covered marble-hard flesh. The blindfold accented

each discovery. Taking as much of him as she could into her mouth, she let him move freely.

Sparks showered her ass and she cried out around his cock. The flogger! His swings were harder now, corresponding with each inward thrust. The strands connected with one ass cheek and then the other, back and forth as he fucked her mouth. He aimed the flogger between her legs and heat gave way to fire, driving her right to the edge of oblivion with each firm stroke.

Just when she thought she'd go mad from the demanding need, he pulled out of her mouth and moved behind her. He slammed into her pussy and she screamed. His cock stretched her inner walls, filling her as she'd never been filled. Her ass burned, her cunt throbbed, and colors burst behind her eyes. His hands gripped her hips, holding her still as he established a savage rhythm.

She lowered her shoulders to the floor, resting her forehead against her bound wrists. Fast and deep, his thrusts rocked her entire body. She squeezed him tightly, caressing him with her cunt. It was good, so *incredibly* good. She savored each forceful drive, lost in the power of submission.

"Come for me." His voice sounded strangled and his fingers bit into her flesh.

Tightening her inner muscles, she lifted her hips. His balls slapped against her clit twice and her pussy rippled with bursts of pleasure. He drove deep one final time and shook against her back. His seed erupted in hot spurts as he cried out her name.

## Chapter Seven

With a reluctant groan, Kenton pulled out of Megan's pussy and rocked back onto his heels. She remained in her submissive position, her ass welted from the braided flogger. His chest tightened and tingling aftershocks made his cock twitch. How could he want her again after that staggering orgasm?

Unable to believe his actions, he leaned down and trailed his tongue from her clit to her anus and back. He savored the taste of his cum and her cream, inhaling their combined scent as if to imprint it on his brain. *Mine*. Shaken by the feral urge to slam back into her and start it all over again, he released a shaky sigh and glanced away. He'd never wanted anyone like he wanted Megan.

*What about Mason?* The question echoed through his mind even as he turned back to Megan and tasted her again. His desire for Mason had flared when he looked into the ambassador's eyes -- the feature most noticeably resembling Megan. Was that all there was to the attraction?

He pressed his palms against her ass cheeks, amazed by the heat. She stirred restlessly, still not raising her head. He untied the blindfold and tossed it aside. Many people abandoned their roles as soon as they found release. Megan obviously needed more than an occasional foray into Master/slave pleasure. She was a true submissive. His breath hitched and blood flooded his cock. He would protect her and lavish her with pleasure as only her Master could.

After kissing his way up her spine, he helped her to her feet. "I might have need of you again." This was their first night together and he was a guest in her house. They needed to establish some fundamental rules. "I would prefer to have you at my side, but I can come to you if that --"

"Bind me to your bed."

She had yet to meet his gaze and he couldn't identify the emotion making her voice quiver. Surely she wasn't frightened. He studied her expression before he spoke again. Her cheeks were flushed and tears had gathered behind her eyelashes.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing." She licked her lips and lowered her gaze. "It's been three years since I've slept in restraints. It's dangerous when you sleep alone. The servants might be able to release me, but I was never willing to take the chance."

Tenderness washed over him with shocking intensity. He curved his fingers around her chin and raised her head until their gazes met. "You are mine to protect and pleasure. No more will you sleep alone."

Her bound hands rested against his chest as he kissed her and he pushed his fingers into her hair. His other hand swept up and down her back, delighting in the silken texture of her skin. He nipped and nibbled for a moment, then eased past her lips. Her tongue curled around his, welcoming and caressing.

He lifted her into his arms and she cuddled against him, resting her head on his shoulder. Exiting through the spa, he headed for his bedchamber. She didn't object and he didn't care who saw them. Servants were trained to turn a blind eye to the activities of their employers and Megan assured him Mason wouldn't care if...

*Mason.* His heart gave a sad little lurch.

"What's the matter? Your arms just tensed." Megan lifted her head from his shoulder, her gaze staring into his.

"Mason," he admitted.

"I told you. You don't have to choose between us."

"You can accept that arrangement, but I'm not sure I can."

She started to object, then relaxed and returned her head to his shoulder.

He carried her into his chambers and laid her face down across his bed. She rested her chin on her folded arms and watched him walk into the bathroom. When he returned she smiled, not saying a word.

Sitting on the edge of the bed he nudged her inner thigh. She immediately scooted her legs apart and he washed her with the warm cloth he'd retrieved from the bathroom. Her eyes drifted shut and she arched just enough so he could reach all of her.

He tossed the soiled cloth in the general direction of the bathroom, unable to drag his gaze away from her pink folds. Tracing her slit with his fingertips, he asked, "Are you sore?"

"Not there."

Her ass cheeks were still welted, the delicate skin broken in several places. He'd chosen the silk whip because his desire had been so wild. She needed pain. She'd made that clear from the beginning. Still, he refused to cause any lasting damage.

"Was I too rough?"

She craned her neck so she could see his eyes. "No, Master. You were perfect."

Her softly spoken praise made him grin like a school boy. He quickly stood and moved across the room. He was offering too much too soon. She had deceived him, played with his affections and then disappeared. Her remorse seemed genuine. Still, he needed to proceed slowly and test her sincerity.

Opening his wardrobe, he rummaged through his belongings for a few moments before he found the ointment he wanted. "This is very effective." He returned to the bed as he unscrewed the lid. "You should feel much better in the morning." With gentle caresses, he applied the ointment to her welts. He closed the jar and set it on the nightstand. "It's best if you remain on your stomach. Can you sleep like that?"

She nodded; her gaze already sleepy. He reached for the wrist cuffs, meaning to secure them to the headboard when a buzzer sounded.

"Shit," she muttered and motioned toward the companel near the door. "That's an emergency interrupt. I need to respond." Kenton hustled across the room and activated audio only. "This is Megan; go ahead."

"Empress Amoli needs to speak with Mason," Tillany's voice responded. Kenton had never heard the housekeeper sound so anxious. "Do you know where he is?"

"I can probably find him. Are you sure this can't wait until morning?"

"I wouldn't have intruded if it weren't an emergency."

Megan sighed and pushed to a sitting position, resting heavily on one hip. "I'll be right there."

Kenton deactivated the comlink and returned to the bed. He unfastened the cuffs and helped her to her feet. "Let me grab my robe. Do you need help finding him or shall I --"

Her chuckle interrupted his words. "I'm fine. A robe would be appreciated, but your concern is completely misplaced."

"I've never whipped a woman before." He held up his hand to stop her objection. "I know gender shouldn't make a difference, but I was trained to cosset and caress a woman, not overwhelm her with pleasure and pain."

"You did the latter quite masterfully. I want to hear more about your training when I return." She nodded toward the companel. "Unfortunately, duty calls."

Kenton grabbed his robe off the hook in the bathroom and helped her into the simple garment. She kissed him softly on the lips before she left.

Something about the situation seemed odd. Security scanners should have revealed the location of everyone in the house. Why would Tillany need Megan to find Mason?

Megan hadn't said she needed to find her brother. She'd said "duty calls." She was likely more familiar with her brother's habits than anyone else. Perhaps they were telepathic. There was no grand mystery. He was just looking for hidden meaning because Tillany had interrupted one of the most amazing nights of his life.

Shrugging aside his speculation, Kenton returned to the bathroom and stepped into the shower stall. He shampooed his hair and scrubbed his body, determined to relax, but no matter how hard he tried, Kenton couldn't banish the feeling he was missing something important.

\* \* \*

Tightening the belt around her waist, Megan activated the companel in her bedroom and waited for Amoli's image to appear.

"I don't like to be kept waiting." The shimmer in her eyes assured Megan the anger was feigned. "You look well tumbled. Have you told him yet?"

"You had me summoned from his bed to ask me that?"

Amoli chuckled, then shook her head. "You sent messages to each of the ambassadors requesting that they utilize a different negotiator."

She hadn't really posed it as a question, but Megan nodded. "I told you that was my intention before I left my office."

"Well both ambassadors demanded to speak with me. Otokar is convinced the Palontians paid you to block his play and that Palontian fop simpered on and on about his mistreatment. I promised Otokar you would see him bright and early tomorrow morning. After you pacify him, you'll --"

"Pacify him? That son of a bitch set me up to look like an ass."

"I understand that and I'm not asking you to apologize or anything so demeaning. Just make sure he understands that you were not bribed by Peylla."

Megan crossed her arms over her chest and sighed. Arguing with Amoli was pointless. Once the empress made up her mind, she was every bit as stubborn as her little sister. "And Peylla? Shall I spend the afternoon coddling him?"

"You're so perceptive." Amoli's chin came up and the humor left her gaze. "Peylla's tribe will most likely win out in the end. Otokar might have been more interested in the Pleasure Guild than wrestilian ore, but we would certainly benefit from a ready supply."

"I hate you."

Amoli smiled. "I know, dear. Now go work out your frustrations on your bodyguard."

\* \* \*

Pacing at the head of the conference table, Mason impatiently waited for Otokar the following morning. Mason was looking forward to this meeting nearly as much as he was dreading the next. Defending his integrity to Otokar was far more appealing than groveling before Peylla.



Mason should be relaxed and well rested after the night he'd spent with Kenton, but Otokar's verbal attack brought back unpleasant memories.

"You look murderous," Kenton's voice whispered through the audiocom tucked in his ear. "Where's your renowned diplomacy?"

Tingling heat cascaded through his body in response to Kenton's voice. When Megan returned to Kenton's bedroom the night before, he'd cuffed her wrists and secured her to his bed. He curved his body against her back and pushed into her from behind. But he hadn't fucked her. He'd held her and gently caressed her until she fell asleep. The fucking came this morning when he woke up fully erect and still buried to the hilt inside her body.

"This isn't the first time Otokar has played me for a fool." Mason let the memories drift to the back of his mind. Megan told Kenton she had plans for the day and encouraged him to have breakfast with Mason. Kenton insisted on accompanying Mason to League headquarters despite his claim that these meetings were an annoying formality.

"I'm here to ensure your safety," Kenton reminded him. "That includes preventing your arrest."

Mason managed to smile. "I might imagine strangling Otokar, but I promise not to act on the impulse."

His promise was tested a few minutes later when Otokar strolled into the conference room.

"Why did you pull out of the negotiations?" Otokar came right to the point.

"The League of Tranocous Worlds does its best to remain politically neutral. Slavery, in any form, is one of the few areas on which we will not bend. If slaves are involved in the transaction, no Tranocous negotiator will have anything to do with the deal."

"How very noble of you." Sarcasm dripped off every syllable.

"We don't attempt to impose our convictions on others, but we expect others to honor our --"

The door slid open and a man walked into the conference room. Light shone off his sleek black hair and the copper tint to his skin identified him as a Palontian. Tension hardened his handsome features and his hands were clasped behind his back.

"I'm meeting with your ambassador following this meeting. You need to wait in the lobby."

"I can't do that." He pulled his hands out from behind his back and pointed a pulse pistol at Mason. "I'm requesting political asylum."

Shock tore through Mason. In all his years as a negotiator, he'd never had someone threaten his life. Otokar took a menacing step forward and the Palontian turned the gun on him.

"Stay where you are and keep your hands where I can see them."

"If you truly want political asylum, this isn't the way to go about it," Mason said in a calm, yet insistent tone.

"I will not go back to him!" He aimed the pistol at Mason, but his gaze kept darting back to Otokar. "You took in Kade. I know you did. I saw him get into your shuttle. I want --"

The door interrupted his request. Kenton knocked the gun out of his hand with a fast, hard chop, then jerked both his arms behind his back. Kicking the backs of the other man's knees, Kenton took him down.

"Good work." Mason propelled the gun well out of reach with the toe of his shoe. "Restrain him to one of the chairs."

"Kade! I knew you were still alive. I just knew it!" He sat passively and allowed Kenton to bind his hands to the arms of the chair.

"You two know each other?" Otokar moved closer, his eyes narrowed and glistening. "Nikwan is one of Peylla's pets, but who the hell are you?"

"He's my bodyguard," Mason said.

Otokar scoffed. "Is that how you justify it?" He placed his fists on his hips and glared at Mason. "What a fucking hypocrite! You turn your nose up over my interest in pleasure *slaves*, while you've already acquired one of your own."

"Kenton is not a slave. He's an employee."

"But you don't deny he's a *Vontralirian*?"

"Ambassador Fintel had no knowledge of my background when he hired me," Kenton defended.

"Right."

The door flew open again and two security guards rushed into the room. "Are you all right, Ambassador Fintel?" One aimed his rifle at Kenton, while the other covered Nikwan.

"Everything is under control," Mason assured them. They seemed reluctant to leave. "Go on. I'm fine."

Mason crossed to the communications console and paged Amoli. "Is there a problem?" the empress asked as her image came on screen.

"Would you have time to join us, your majesty?" The title let Amoli know it was an official request.

After a short pause, she said, "I'll be there momentarily."

Mason returned to his uninvited guest. "You said you would not return to 'him.' Were you referring to Ambassador Peylla?"

Nikwan nodded, looking at Kenton for encouragement. "When Kade escaped, it sent ripples of discontent through the ranks of the *Vontralirian*. None of us had ever considered freedom as an option."

"This is all very touching," Otokar drawled. "Is there some reason I'm still here?"

"I'm not sure, yet." Mason shot him an angry glance. "Do you have somewhere else you need to be?"

"That depends where you're headed with this. You know what I'm trying to accomplish. Does this bring me any closer to my goal?"

"It might. Have a seat."

Mason didn't question Nikwan until the empress arrived. The empress entered the room with her usual fanfare, surrounded by her private guard. "Did this man threaten you with a weapon?" she asked as one of her guards pulled out a chair for her.

"I don't believe he meant to harm me. He was just making sure he had my attention." Mason looked at Nikwan and asked, "Why did you request political asylum?"

"The Guild is the only source of protection for the pleasure givers on Palonti. The tribes have abandoned the charter. They're fighting for control over the Guild. If this happens, we are powerless. The Guild must remain separate or we are truly slaves."

Amoli glanced at Mason before asking Nikwan, "Are you making this request for yourself or do you represent the Pleasure Guild?"

"I only speak for myself, but every pleasure giver on Palonti is in the same predicament."

"I'd be happy to escort any pleasure giver to a Sabrotine stronghold," Otokar offered with a sly smile.

"They'd be exchanging one master for another," Mason objected. "The Pleasure Guild can only protect their people if they are free from governmental influence."

"What are you suggesting?" Amoli asked.

"We could establish an academy here on Tranocous Nine." Mason glanced at Kenton. What was he thinking about all this? He remained behind Nikwan, his expression tense and watchful. "Otokar would provide an armed escort to those wishing to leave and we would guarantee their protection from anyone attempting to violate the charter."

"Then what's in it for me?" Otokar grumbled.

"What you've wanted all along. I will bring your offer before the Guild masters. The Sabrotine Federation will assist with the evacuation in exchange for two invitations to the *Vontralirian* auction."

"Five invitations for the next ten years and I want it in writing."

"Then you'll build the new facility."

"Done."

"Just a minute," the empress cut in, "The League of Tranocous Worlds will not support slavery in any form. You know this, Ambassador Fintel."

Mason smiled and folded his hands on the tabletop. "If the Guild masters want Otokar's assistance, they will rewrite the charter. *Vontralirians* will become contract laborers, with individual contracts negotiated by each *Vontralirian* or their agent. There will be no slaves at Tranocous Academy. I give you my word on that."

Otokar chuckled. "How are you going to justify this to Peylla?"

"I don't need to justify myself to anyone. The tribes are oppressing their pleasure givers and their pleasure givers have asked us to intervene. We've liberated those in oppression before and we'll likely do so again." Amoli dismissed his concern with a wave of her hand. "We'll just have to find another source of wrestilian ore."

## Chapter Eight

Kenton sat on a leather sofa in Mason's office. They had just completed their holoconference with the Guild masters and he was still in awe of the ease with which the entire situation had been resolved. Mason was amazing. There was no other way to put it. In one fell swoop Mason had freed the *Vontralirians* and strengthened the alliance between Tranocous and the Sabrotine Federation.

Mason turned one of the desk chairs around to face the couch where Kenton sat. As Mason lowered himself into the chair he grimaced.

"Are you all right?" Kenton asked.

"I'm fine. Why do you ask?"

"You made a face as if you were in pain. Did you hurt your back?"

Mason stared at him for so long in silence, Kenton didn't think he'd reply. Then he took a deep breath and said, "I didn't hurt my back. *You* flogged my ass."

Their emerald green eyes and sensual mouths. His instantaneous attraction to both. "You're..."

"A shape shifter. Megan is not my sister. Megan is me."

Questions flooded Kenton's mind and his mouth dried up. He wasn't cheating on Mason with Megan. They were the same person. Peace unfurled within him only to be swept aside a moment later by resentment. They'd deceived him -- again!

"I think you have less to explain. Why don't you go first? Your real name is Kade?"

"No. Kade is dead. My real name is Kenton."

Mason didn't argue, but he didn't let the subject drop either. "Unless it's too painful to explain, I'd like to know about Kade."

Kenton heaved a sigh and indulged his curiosity. "The former potentate reserved the right to purchase any *Vontralirian* before the yearly auction."

"Why did the Guild allow it?"

"Because people who disagreed with Chaya had a way of disappearing."

"And Chaya chose you?"

"Not in the way you mean." He felt as if he were relating the story of someone else's life. In a way he was. He had abandoned Kade when he stepped off the *Retribution* all those weeks before. "I wasn't purchased to pleasure Chaya. I was given to Kalleto."

"You're talking about Peylla's sister?"

"Yes. Chaya didn't realize it until long after he'd accepted her as wife, but many women in Peylla's tribe have been genetically altered. They're able to control reproduction."

"They only get pregnant when they want to?" Mason sounded incredulous.

Kenton nodded. "They can also control the gender of their offspring."

"And Kalleto refused to bear the child of her enemy." Kenton nodded again. "How did you play into the situation?"

A twinge of regret made him restless. His seduction had only postponed Kalleto's execution. He hadn't been able to save her. "I used my skills to *motivate* her. She eventually accepted Chaya back into her bed, but things took an ugly turn."

"In what way?"

He cleared his throat, uncomfortable with the details. "She called out my name while Chaya fucked her."

"What the hell did he expect?"

"He was a potentate. He expected his wife to be awed by the power at his command." Anxious to move on to the other half of the conversation, Kenton rushed through the facts. "Chaya ordered her execution and my castration. I'd sensed Chaya's resentment building even before the incident and made arrangements to escape Palonti.

Chaya's order made my departure a bit more urgent. I snuck aboard a blockade runner and the pirate I'd hired to rescue me attacked the other ship."

"That must have been exciting."

"You have no idea. The pirate captain and the smuggler had a history together. Spending time with them helped me understand just how sheltered my life had been."

"That's why you went to Starlight Station, to expand your sexual horizons."

It was more of an acknowledgement than a question, but Kenton nodded. "I'd never even chosen my own partner before I left Palonti. Every aspect of my life was decided for me. I left the *Retribution* convinced I needed freedom. Two nights with Sabina was all it took to prove I'm not wired that way. Some people might be able to find fulfillment in casual sex, but I need more."

"I'm really sorry about --"

"That debt is paid in full."

Mason smiled. "Your new identity withstood the scrutiny of Amoli's watchdogs. Who compiled it for you?"

"Traborn Morel made the arrangements. He's the pirate captain I mentioned earlier."

"Traborn Morel is a *privateer*, not a pirate."

Kenton laughed. "As he is quick to point out." His smile faded and his gaze locked with Mason's. "Your turn. Can you take on any shape?"

"Not hardly. I can emulate others, but it works best if we're roughly the same size. I'm slightly taller than Megan, but she has more curves."

"I noticed." Kenton grinned. "Do you consider yourself male or female -- or both?"

Mason released the shift with an audible sigh. It had been a long day and retaining Mason's shape was squandering energy she couldn't spare. "I was born female and *this* is my natural shape. I realized I could change my appearance when I



was twelve. I was staring at one of my friend's breasts wondering when mine were going to develop and suddenly they did."

Kenton chuckled. "That must have been amusing for your friend."

"I crossed my arms over my chest and rushed into the house. She never realized what had happened."

"Are there other shape shifters on Tranocous Nine?"

"My father spent four years in the Froswick Dimension, training with the *Nac O'te* warriors. He met my mother during those years and brought her back with him. My mother isn't a shape shifter. However, the gift is common in her family. I had a Froswick tutor who helped me strengthen and control my abilities."

"Do you always take on Mason's shape when you negotiate?"

"Not always. Some races respond better to Mason, while others are more receptive to Megan. The Sabrotine Federation is militant and chauvinistic. Megan wouldn't have a chance with them."

"But you're misrepresenting yourself."

She shrugged. "And Otokar didn't? I won't lump them all in together. That brings me down to their level. Fortunately, I'd worked with Otokar before. I knew he was a self-serving jerk. Luckily for me, our goals happened to align on this one."

"Will Peylla's tribe retaliate?"

Megan shrugged and indulged in the triumphant smile she'd been suppressing all day. "Let them try. The Sabrotine Federation is the most powerful force in this galaxy."

"And you used them to bring freedom to my, no *Kade's* people. Not bad for a day's work." Kenton smiled, his gaze caressing her face. "I'm sure glad you're on my side."

Megan just looked at him for a long, silent moment letting his physical appeal wash over her. A familiar ache erupted in her core. Would she always want him there? *Always*? The word caught her by surprise. She'd only actually had him inside her once and already she was thinking of *always*?

"What happened three years ago?"

The question snatched her from her musing with a sudden yank. One last obstacle and they would be free to shape the future to their liking.

She took a deep breath and pushed to her feet, needing a bit of distance as she explained, "Amoli decided it was time for me to marry."

"Why would your marital status concern the empress?"

"She has grown so accustomed to mothering Sabina, she can't help herself."

"Are your parents still alive?" He remained on the couch and kept his tone casual. She appreciated the sensitivity.

"They spend much of their time in the Froswick Dimension, so Amoli has taken it upon herself to safeguard my future."

He offered a tentative smile. "Is that a good thing?"

"Most of the time." Leaning her hip against the corner of her desk, Megan continued, "Amoli introduced me to a man named Raylen. The empress felt we were well suited. At first I agreed. He was ambitious and well respected, and our personalities seemed to complement each other."

"Did he know about your abilities? For that matter, does the empress?"

"Amoli knows and I told Raylen before we became intimate. He assured me it wasn't a problem and for nearly a year it wasn't."

"What changed his attitude?"

"One of his colleagues learned that he was sleeping with a 'gender-shifting freak'." She glanced at Kenton to gauge his reaction. The anger in his gaze made her smile. "Shape shifters aren't indigenous to the Tranocous system, so most people didn't believe a word he said. Raylen combated the rumor with the story I'd been using for years."

"That Megan and Mason are two separate people?"

"Exactly. That quieted the rumors for the most part, but Raylen soon moved on to a relationship with fewer complications."

Kenton stood and moved in front of her, his arms crossed over his chest. "If it was an amicable separation, why did it take you three years to try again?"

"It got ugly toward the end," she admitted.

"How ugly?"

"He told everyone he was in love with Megan, but Mason continually tried to seduce him. He made it clear to Mason that he was only interested in Megan and..."

He framed her face with his palms and moved in close. "And what?"

"He claimed Mason crawled into bed while we were making love and Megan insisted he fuck both of us or she would end the relationship."

"Why didn't you prove you're a shape shifter and shut him up?"

"Usually it's irrelevant, but Amoli assigns me tasks from time to time that require my abilities. If it became widely known that I'm a shape shifter, we would lose that option."

"So he got away with it?"

"Yes and no. The empress scrutinized every move he made and had her officers harass him until he 'chose' to leave the star system." She rubbed her cheek against his warm palm, enjoying the simple intimacy. "But it ended Mason's social life, until I met you."

"Raylen was an asshole." He brushed his mouth against hers. "If he couldn't see how extraordinary you are, he didn't deserve you."

She smiled, thrilled by his conclusion.

"Can I talk to Mason for a minute?"

Confused by the request, she hesitated. "Why?"

"Because your Master asked it of you."

She shifted back into Mason and held his breath. What was this about?

"The first time I fucked you, your entire body got so hot I thought you'd singe my fingers. Is it hard for you to hold a shift when you come?"

Mason tried to hide his smile, but Kenton wouldn't allow any retreat. "Yes."

"You deserve to be punished, don't you?"

"You said my debt was paid in full," he objected.

"No, Megan paid her debt for what she did at Starlight Station. You still let me fuck you knowing full well I was in love with your sister."

The casual admittance made Mason's heart slam against the wall of his chest. *He loves me. Or at least he loves Megan.*

"Do you deserve to be punished?" Kenton asked again.

"Yes, Master. I deceived you. I await your discipline."

"Take off your clothes."

Mason licked his lips and reached for the hem of his tunic. Megan was so much more physically attractive. He couldn't imagine why Kenton wanted to take him in this shape. He tossed his shirt aside and unfastened his pants. Kenton watched him through narrowed eyes. When he stood before Kenton naked they kissed. Their lips clung and their tongues slid as Kenton's breath filled Mason's lungs.

"I want *you*," Kenton whispered. "And I love you both." He guided Mason's hands to the desk behind him and curved his fingers around the edge. "Don't move."

Kenton kissed his way down Mason's neck and onto his shoulder. Heat trailed behind his lips and Mason's heartbeat raced. Kenton stroked his chest and dipped low across his abdomen, nearing but not touching his rapidly hardening cock.

"Let me touch you too," Mason whispered and Kenton grasped his chin illustrating his disapproval with a silent glower.

"This is punishment. You will not come and you will not speak unless I ask you a question." Rubbing his shoulders and tracing his spine, Kenton worked his way down to Mason's ass. "Why is your ass tender when I whipped Megan?" He teased the crease between his cheeks, keeping away from the irritated skin.

"It's a limitation of my mixed blood. A true Froswick mimic can shift completely."

Kenton knelt and Mason's heart fluttered erratically. One of Kenton's hands closed around his shaft and the other cupped his sac. Mason's abdomen quivered and he closed his eyes.

"Watch me." Mason forced his eyes to open and Kenton licked his lips, then circled the tip of his cock with his tongue. "Don't forget. You are not allowed to come."

He nodded. Kenton wet Mason's shaft with swirling strokes of his tongue, then slid up and down while he carefully rolled his balls. Mason grasped the edge of the desk, his legs tense and trembling. Hot, wet, bliss. Never had anything felt so good. Kenton hummed as his rhythm sped. Mason rocked his hips and reveled in the selfless gift of his Master.

Kenton's head bobbed, his lips maintaining a snug circle as his hand sneaked farther back between Mason's legs. Knowing what Kenton meant to do, Mason shifted his feet apart and made room for Kenton's fingers. Kenton traced his crease, teasing his anus without pushing inside. All the while his mouth continued its rhythmic slide.

Pleasure gathered in Mason's belly, tightening his balls and making his cock throb. He should be doing this for his Master, not the other way around. Kenton sucked harder and Mason thrust faster, unable to resist his need. Kenton pushed his finger into Mason's ass as he pulled his mouth away.

Mason cried out, frantic for the heat and the sweet friction.

"Fight it!" Kenton finger fucked his ass, the lack of lubrication causing unbearable heat. Mason clenched his jaw and let his head fall back on his shoulders as desire made his insides cramp. Suddenly the finger stopped and slid from his body. "I told you not to close your eyes."

He started to apologize, then remembered he'd been told not to speak. Instead, he slipped to his knees and locked his hands behind his head, keeping his eyes downcast.

"Much better." Still, Kenton picked up Mason's clothes and handed them to him. "Get dressed. We'll continue this at home."

## Chapter Nine

Kenton relaxed against the shuttle's wide seat and brushed the hair back from Mason's face. He knelt between Kenton's legs, flushed and breathless. Though still fully clothed, Kenton had insisted Mason pull up his tunic and unfasten his pants, so his cock was in view.

"Let's test my endurance, shall we? How long does it take to reach your estate?"

Mason's eyes widened and he licked his lips. "Nearly an hour, sir."

"You may use your hands and your mouth anyway you like. If you're able to make me lose control, I'll consider your punishment finished." Disappointment flashed in Mason's gaze and Kenton chuckled. "This is a familiar game. I sincerely doubt you'll best me."

Ever imaginative, Mason didn't react as Kenton expected. Mason sat back on his heels and stroked his own cock as he stared deeply into Kenton's eyes. It was a damn effective strategy. Kenton's hands itched and his cock bucked against the confines of his trousers. Two could play at this game. He unfastened his pants and pushed them to his knees, revealing his erection. Mason's gaze lowered as Kenton lifted his cock away from his body and rubbed up and down its full length.

Mason abandoned his masturbation and moved closer to Kenton's sex. Punishing Mason had left Kenton hard and eager for the wet heat of Mason's mouth. Closing his hands over Kenton's, Mason caressed him, without actually touching his cock. Damn, the man had phenomenal instincts.

A shudder passed along Kenton's spine and he reared up, silently revealing the depth of his need. Mason swiped the tip of Kenton's cock with his tongue, then closed his lips around the flared head. For endless minutes he did nothing more than suck, slow, deep pulls that collapsed his cheeks.

Kenton slid his hand out from under Mason's and watched him through half-closed eyes. Heat rolled along his shaft and concentrated in his balls. He accepted the tension, savored the demand without succumbing to it.

Mason licked his way up one side and down the other before he returned to his suckling. His warm hand eased between Kenton's balls and the seat, cradling his sac in his palm. On and on he went, lips sucking, tongue licking, fingers teasing.

Why the hell had he suggested this?

As if sensing Kenton's impending doom, Mason pulled back and let him catch his breath. The message was obvious. Mason didn't want to win this contest. He wanted his punishment to continue. Twice more he paused before they reached the estate, so Kenton rewarded him with a long, appreciative kiss.

Kenton pulled Mason to his feet and fastened the waistband of his pants. His cock was still exposed, but he lowered the tunic over his erection. Silk would brush against the ultra-sensitive tip with each step Mason took.

"Do not touch yourself or allow your expression to reveal your arousal."

Mason acknowledged the command with a stiff nod.

After righting his own clothing, they strolled through the house. Kenton thought about the playroom, but that was Mason's domain. He wanted to control every aspect of this night.

Without saying a word, Kenton went to his bedroom. He didn't need to look behind him to know Mason followed. His door slid open and he motioned Mason inside. As soon as the door slid shut, Kenton tore Mason's tunic off over his head and unfastened his pants. Mason kicked his shoes aside and tugged off his socks, ending his frantic striptease by removing his pants completely.

Kenton retrieved the cuffs from the headboard and snapped them closed around Mason's wrists. Hooks and cables were discretely hidden in strategic places all over the room. Kenton had noticed them as he waited for Megan to return from "finding Mason" the night before.

"Raise your arms," he ordered. When Mason did, Kenton grabbed the cable dangling from the ceiling near the foot of the bed. He fastened the cuffs together, then attached the cable. The cable gradually retracted until Mason's arms were suspended well above his head.

He paused to admire his handy work. Mason's lithe body was helpless and awaiting his punishment. Moving behind him, Kenton inspected the fading welts still visible on his ass.

"Too bad your skin is recovering. You deserve a good lashing."

Mason looked over his shoulder and started to say something before he quickly shut his mouth.

"Go on. What were you going to say?"

"Only the skin on my ass is healing."

Lust jolted Kenton from his leisurely inspection. Did he possess the control to thoroughly pleasure such a giving slave? Leaning in close, he whispered, "Do you crave the lash, my love?"

"You know I do."

Kenton paused for a long, deep kiss, then crossed the room and opened his wardrobe. His thin, flexible sensory rod could stimulate whatever sensation he chose to deliver. Finding the rod among his possessions, he twisted the handle and set the device to pleasure.

"Turn around and face the bed." There was just enough slack in the cable for Mason to obey. As soon as he settled into position, Kenton trailed the end of the rod down his spine and pushed it into the crack of his ass.

Mason wiggled and moaned as the rod stimulated his anus. Kenton pushed it lower, following the curve of Mason's body until he made contact with his sac.

"Oh, Master. So good."

The words were barely audibly, but Kenton heard. He withdrew the rod and snapped it against the back of Mason's thighs. "I did not give you leave to speak." He twisted the handle again, mixing pain with pleasure and went to work on his eager



slave. Sparing only Mason's ass, Kenton traveled from his knees to shoulders and back to his knees. Kenton watched welts rise in vivid appreciation of his stinging kiss. He measured each snap, determined not to break the skin. Mason gasped and yelled, but not one word escaped his mouth.

Kenton rotated the handle back to pleasure and returned it to the tightly puckered hole for which he ached. Mason shook violently as he fought against the need for release.

"Come, you've earned it."

With a strangled scream, Mason pushed back, capturing the rod within the tight circle of his anus. His cock jerked and cum jetted in strong, rhythmic streams. The shift passed over him like a shimmering wave. Mason was swept away and Megan stood before Kenton, naked, trembling, and unbearably beautiful.

"Hello, sweetheart. I was wondering if I could make you do that."

Megan's ass vibrated with tingling pleasure. Her pussy throbbed, echoing the pulse of Mason's release. Never in her wildest dreams had she imagined such excruciating pleasure. Kenton withdrew the rod and she whimpered, her core clenching in on itself.

He released the cable and unhooked her wrists, leaving the cuffs in place. Sitting down on the edge of the bed, he smiled up at her. "You're going to have to ride me, love. Your back is a mess."

Steadying her with both hands, he helped her climb astride his hips. She barely got her legs situated on either side of him before he found her entrance and pushed inside. Wide, wider she stretched to take him. Deeper and deeper he drove. She clutched his shoulders and arched, holding nothing back. Her ass came to rest against his thighs and she let out a shuddering breath.

"I don't think I've ever been this hard," he whispered against her hair. He eased her away from his chest and caressed her breasts, still unwilling to move. "How does it feel?"

"Perfect."

"Talk to me." He pressed a kiss against her temple. "Tell me what you feel."

"My back is on fire and your cock is huge. All I can feel is you."

"Your cunt is on fire and you're so tight I can hardly breathe. All I feel is you," he countered. Reclining across the bed, he guided her hands to his chest. "Ride me."

She balanced her weight on her knees and lifted her hips, dragging her body almost off of his. Pausing with just the head of his cock inside her, she stared into his eyes. Centimeter by glorious centimeter he filled her again. Her inner muscles pulsed with each beat of her heart.

"Move," he growled. "If you don't, I will."

Leaning forward, she rocked, finding a circular motion that dragged her clit along his thick shaft with each stroke. It wasn't enough. She had too much control. With a whimper she guided his hands to her hips and whispered, "Please, Master, take me."

He grasped her firmly and brought her down onto him hard and fast. She rode his bucking hips, her breasts jostled by each forceful stroke. He pulled her forward and pressed her cheek against his chest. Pushing up with her legs, she gave him more room to move. She met him thrust for thrust, pleasure zinging from her pussy to her breasts and back.

Arching clear off the bed, he thrust to the hilt and came with a throaty moan. She shook uncontrollably, her pussy milking his cock as reality shattered. Their mouths fused and their bodies melded as scalding pleasure showered down upon them.

They clung to each other in the aftermath, both too weak to move.

"Do I get to turn back into Mason now?" she whispered with a playful grin.

He chuckled and brushed her hair back from her face. "You're a greedy little thing."

"I certainly can't get enough of you." She smiled as happiness welled within her.

For a long time they held each other, content in the afterglow. Kenton trailed his fingertips up and down her spine, while she nibbled at his collarbone.

Suddenly another chuckle rumbled in his chest and she looked into his eyes.  
“What’s so funny?”

“I was wondering if you’re disappointed with your bodyguard. I didn’t do too badly today. But to be perfectly honest, I think I’m better suited to give you pleasure.”

She lowered her face until her lips teased his. “I told you from the beginning I didn’t need a bodyguard.”

“So you did.”

They kissed and smiled and kissed again.

“And I want exclusive rights to your other services,” she told him.

“What about Mason?”

She laughed. “All right. I’ll share you with Mason, but *only* Mason.”

“I think I can live with that.”

## **Aubrey Ross**

Aubrey Ross writes an eclectic assortment of erotic fiction. From power struggles between futuristic clans, to adventurous Mystic Keepers, her stories are filled with passion and imagination. Some of her recent awards include an EPPIE finalist, two Passionate Plume finalists, and a CAPA Nomination from the Romance Studio.

With a pampered cat curled on the corner of her desk, Aubrey dreams of fascinating words and larger than life adventures -- and wouldn't have it any other way! Visit her website at: <http://www.aubreyross.com>. Join Aubrey's Newsletter group at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Anything-but-Ordinary/>.