



Invasion Earth 1: Forgotten Hope

By

Aubrey Ross

All rights reserved.
Copyright ©2007 Aubrey Ross

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000.

ISBN: 978-1-59596-654-4
Formats Available:
HTML, Adobe PDF,
MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader

Publisher:
Changeling Press LLC
PO Box 1046
Martinsburg, WV 25402-1046
www.ChangelingPress.com

Editor: Maryam Salim
Cover Artist: Angela Knight



This e-book file contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language which some may find offensive and which is not appropriate for a young audience. Changeling Press E-Books are for sale to adults, only, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

Invasion Earth: Forgotten Hope

Aubrey Ross

Masquerading as a vampire has kept Chevon Rankin alive for two centuries. She believes the mystery surrounding her sister's murder is nothing but a painful memory until Garret Olsen, a Setti shifter, kidnaps her right out of her bed.

Hot on Garret's trail, Commander Brock Sihngal rescues Chevon, but Garret escapes. Chevon's excitement at encountering a person from her home dimension comes screeching to a halt when Brock slaps her in restraints and declares her a criminal, but Brock's erotic brand of interrogation leaves Chevon panting for more.

Brock is fascinated by the feisty Mimic. She attracts and challenges him, yet he can't afford to be swayed by her appeal. He's convinced she was in league with her treacherous sister and he's honor bound to prove her guilt.

Prologue

Garret Olsen reclined against the mound of pillows and closed his eyes. There was nothing like a brush with death to make you appreciate life. He wouldn't allow himself to remember just how close his recent stumble had taken him to death's icy shore. He was alive and that was all that mattered.

But his mind wouldn't cooperate with his determination. How had Rhys found him? Garret had been so careful, calculating every move. He'd remained in the Terran dimension long after the others fled. They shook their heads and called him a fool, but his instincts had been right. Chevon was still alive and he would find her. He would accomplish what no one in two hundred years had been able to accomplish. After he discovered the secret Chevon guarded, he'd return to the Setti dimension in triumph.

"Where shall we begin, sir?"

Opening his eyes he found his two favorite slaves standing at the foot of his massive bed. One was a willowy blonde, the other a voluptuous brunette. They were both naked, their hair still damp from the shower. Had they washed each other, hands caressing, breasts sliding against breasts, fingers delving into soapy cunts? The thought both excited and annoyed him. They should be focused entirely on his pleasure.

"I'll eat you." He pointed to the raven-haired beauty. "While you eat me," he told the blonde.

The blonde immediately knelt on the bed and bent toward his crotch. Her hair pooled around his hips, blocking his view. He felt her fingers close around his shaft and her tongue circled his tip. *Oh, yes*. She stroked and licked until his cock throbbed, echoing the frantic rhythm of his twin hearts. He longed to shift, to take her in his natural form. She was nearly ready for the ultimate submission, to see the face of her Setti master. As she sucked eagerly, her head bobbed and her hand massaged his sac. She would let him do anything in exchange for an infusion.

The brunette, on the other hand, had barely begun her training. Her need for his essence was not nearly as desperate.

“How would you like me?” she asked. Her eyes were dilated and passion glazed. Perhaps she was progressing more rapidly than he’d realized.

“Climb on top of my face and bend forward over my chest. I want to play with that lovely little hole you guard so fiercely.” She hesitated, glancing at the blonde who was still sucking away on his cock. “You aren’t going to get away with watching tonight. Your ass has remained virgin far longer than any of my other slaves. Now get busy.” Her dread fueled his desire like nothing else. He certainly didn’t need another ass to fuck. Yet each subtle resistance would make her surrender sweeter in the end.

She climbed onto the bed and positioned herself astride his chest. He grasped her hips, holding her away for a moment so he could enjoy the view. His chest spread her slender thighs wide, displaying her delicate folds and dusky slit. Reaching between her legs, he circled her clit with his index finger. It was already ripe, anticipating his tongue and the careful nip of his teeth. She murmured deep in her throat and rocked toward him, inadvertently shifting his focus. Cream gleamed at the entrance to her core. Setti essence spiked the human libido, making his slaves insatiable.

He teased her opening, circling without pushing inside. She groaned and wiggled. Coating his fingers with her cream, he moved on. Her ass was rounded and velvety soft. He caressed one cheek while he lubricated her tightly puckered hole with the proof of her excitement. She fidgeted and moaned, but made no move to deny him. He pushed his middle finger into her ass and she gasped, her entire body shuddering.

Damn, she was tight. She’d grip his cock like a velvet fist while he initiated her properly. He’d bend her over his lap and spank her until those cheeks turned rosy and hot. Dragging his finger out slowly, he imagined two fingers, maybe even three... Perhaps he’d have her kneel across the blonde’s face while he stuffed this virgin hole. He knew they --

A loud thump interrupted his erotic imaginings.

One of his guards shouted and anger swept Garret's desire aside. He had left orders that no one interrupt him. The scuffle continued and trepidation bled through his annoyance. Disentangling himself from his slaves, he shoved both women to the far side of the bed. All his conventional weapons were in his own room and he had just begun to feed.

The doors burst open and Sylina Tesch strode into the room, auburn hair whipping around her face as the door slammed behind her. "You left me there to die!"

Expecting an invading force and not a single woman, Garret laughed, then he lunged for her. She darted to his left, moving so fast she blurred. "How did you get in here?" How the hell had she found him? He'd moved his hideout twice since his run in with Rhys. He gathered energy into the center of his being and launched it at her in an abrupt burst.

She neatly sidestepped the blast and said, "You'll have to do better than that, but wait, you can't. I interrupted your feeding. Didn't anyone teach you the value of knowing your enemy?"

The haughty bitch! Who did she think she was? He summoned every slave in the house, projecting urgency along with the mental command. Footfalls echoed through the hallways, moving steadily closer. He could shift. He was stronger in his Setti form, but slower, and agility appeared to be her advantage. She'd timed her attack perfectly. He was naked, unarmed, and depleted.

The doors groaned as his slaves fought to obey his summons.

"Call them off," she said calmly. "This is between you and me."

"I don't think so." He glared at her. No one challenged a Setti shifter and lived.

"I know where Chevon is; now call them off."

Shock ricocheted through his mind. If she was lying he'd kill her in her sleep! He halted his slaves, stationing them beyond the door. "I'm listening."

She advanced toward the bed, her green eyes bright with indignation. "You literally sucked the life out of Lance and abandoned me to the enemy. I knew you were ruthless. I had no idea you were a coward." He motioned his women toward the exit on the opposite side of the room. Sylina blocked their path. "They stay. I want to see how it's done."

Tension knotted his gut and he forced himself to swallow. In preparation for the battle that night five weeks ago, he'd gorged himself on energy then infused both Lance and Sylina with higher levels of Setti essence than he'd ever attempted before.

If the actual infusion hadn't killed her, the detoxification should have. Yet here she stood, making demands of him!

"You want to see how what's done?" he asked. She couldn't mean what he thought she meant. His slaves were gripped by sexual frenzy when he infused them. They never remembered exactly what transpired.

"Rhys said you were injecting me with some sort of chemical that made me highly susceptible to suggestion." She took the blonde and shoved her toward the bed. "He said it's extremely addictive. Is it in your semen or is there some other means by which you inject it? I want to watch you inject one of your slaves."

"You're no longer addicted, so why are you here?" He pulled the blonde behind him. She wrapped her arms around his waist and pressed her warm body against his back, oblivious to the conflict raging around her. The brunette was cowering in the corner, her knees drawn up to her chest, eyes glassy and unfocused.

He studied Sylina's unrelenting expression. Why wasn't she afraid? She'd seen his true form during his fight with Rhys. She should be terrified. *Anyhuman* would be terrified.

"I have a proposition for you."

He paused. Was this more than just morbid curiosity? She'd overpowered his guards and slammed the door with her mind. What other abilities was lovely Sylina hiding? "Tell me how to find Chevon."

"First I want to know exactly what I'm dealing with."

"Rhys explained all you need to know. I'm able to imbue humans with unusual abilities, but they often develop a certain dependency as a result." He'd never been uncomfortable with his nudity, yet this confrontation had his face flaming and his hands itching to cover his crotch. Pride alone kept his shoulders squared and his arms at his sides. "Tell me how to find Chevon or I'll --"

"You'll be plagued by nightmares for the rest of your life." Her lips parted in a cold, menacing smile. "When you're able to sleep at all."

He laughed. "I didn't realize you were familiar with spells."

"I'm familiar with dream spirits." Her voice held no hint of levity and except for the slight arch of one eyebrow, her expression remained impassive. "My mother is a succubus."

Unwrapping the blonde's arms from around his waist, he crossed the room in three angry strides. "I've been inside you, Sylina. Don't you think I would have noticed if

you weren't human?"

"I fucked a vampire for three months a few years back before I ever saw him feed. He didn't reveal his power until he knew he could trust me. What makes a person human?" She let the implication hang in the air as he tried to stare her down.

"I work alone." He tried to sound emphatic.

She shrugged and strolled toward the bed. "I thought you wanted Chevron. Isn't she why you came to Earth?"

Why were his hearts pounding? It couldn't be this easy. His life was never simple. "What do you want from me?"

Sylina cupped the blonde's chin in one hand and looked back over her shoulder at him. "I want what she wants. Only I'm not willing to become your slave to get it. I suspect there are other ways to access your power. The first step is understanding exactly what you are."

"If I help you figure out a way to... filter my energy so you don't become addicted to it, you'll give me Chevron?"

Her smile was slow and filled with challenge. "This is an ongoing negotiation. Let me watch you feed your slave and I'll offer you a piece of information equally valuable."

He wanted to refuse, to test her abilities here and now. Still, finding Chevron was his primary reason for being in the Terran dimension. Better to learn what Sylina knew and dispose of her later.

"Why don't I infuse her and then let you examine her? It might be less awkward for everyone."

"She wouldn't care if you televised her feedings and I don't give a damn about your feelings. I have a vague memory of being bent over a table during a dinner party and fucked in full view of your guests."

Garret groaned as a vivid image erupted in his mind. The party had been wild. Most of the guests had been vampires. One fed from his lover's breast while his friend aroused her with his mouth. Passion made human blood richer, more nutritious, so vampires often fucked while they fed. Soon empty chairs and rapturous expressions hinted at the activities going on under the table.

One especially bold vampire dared Garret to demonstrate the obedience of his slave. Sylina had been at his side that night. He hadn't just fucked her. He'd made her strip and suck his cock before she faced his guests and let him take her from

behind, right there in the dining room.

She looked at his rapidly hardening cock and glared. "I see you remember it too."

God, how he remembered. Sylina had been the hottest, most responsive slave he'd ever infused. She motioned toward the blonde, who had one hand buried between her thighs and the other tugging on a rosy nipple.

"She's not going to wait much longer." A hint of impatience hardened Sylina's tone.

He sent the brunette away with a sharp command, then joined Sylina beside the bed. "You really want to see this? What you glimpsed during the fight wasn't frightening enough?"

She laughed. "Have you ever seen a *sammite* demon? They're so grotesque they frighten other demons. If you ever cross me again, I'll imprint the image on your mind permanently. Now we can form a partnership or *I* can start training *you*."

Chapter One

Chevon watched the images scroll through her mind, helpless to prevent the unwanted onslaught. She knew it was only a dream, yet no matter how hard she tried to distance herself from the emotions, loss tore at her heart and grief assailed her spirit. She knelt beside her sister, cradling Berryl's slight body against her chest. Blood covered her hands, running down her arms, soaking her sweater and jeans.

"Why? Just tell me why," she whispered the words she'd spoken two centuries before. Berryl raised her hand to Chevon's face, then parted her lips as if she'd speak. Her eyes glazed over with death and her arm went limp, dropping to her side. Chevon cried out and buried her face in Berryl's curly hair. Sorrow squeezed her chest and burned her throat. It couldn't be true. Her sister was not a Setti spy! Berryl would never sell Froswick secrets to the enemy. There had to be a mistake.

"She knows nothing."

A strange female voice intruded on Chevon's dream. She shuddered, then sighed as the images receded into her subconscious. Had the voice been part of the dream?

Her mind felt muddled. She brushed her hair off her forehead and tried to sit.

Pressure settled over her entire body, pinning her to the mattress and making each breath a struggle. Fear erupted, banishing the remnants of her grief. What the hell was wrong with her? She blinked, fighting to focus in the darkness. Moonlight streamed across her bedroom, outlining the furniture and allowing her to see.

A man stood beside her bed, his arms folded over his chest. Little more than a silhouette, his features were lost in shadow. "Is she awake?"

"I'm not sure," the unseen woman replied. "She opened her eyes twice during the vision."

Who were they? How had they gotten past her shields? Icy rivulets of fear infiltrated her bloodstream, making her fingers tingle and her chest ache. She couldn't move!

"Is she shielding the information?" The man raised one hand and stroked his chin, his gaze gleaming in the moonlight. "This doesn't make sense."

Movement drew Chevon's attention to her left. She shifted her eyes and pain shot into her brain, making her groan. She only caught a glimpse of the woman before she stepped back into the darkness.

"She's awake," the woman warned.

"I'd hoped it wouldn't come to this, but there doesn't seem to be another way." The man placed his knee on the bed and bent over Chevon. He took her face between his palms and his gaze began to glow.

Instinct and experience snapped Chevon out of her panicked stupor. If she didn't act now, she wouldn't survive to try a different course. For two hundred years she'd guarded her thoughts and shielded her presence, and still the enemy had found her. She dissolved the mental barriers and projected her terror across the common Froswick link, broadcasting her peril to anyone from her dimension.

"What is she doing?" The woman stepped closer to the bed, her worried expression revealed by the moonlight. "Can't you feel --"

Light flashed as an entity burst into the room, transforming from shadow to substance as he charged her attacker. The newcomer flung the other man backward and the pressure eased. Chevon scrambled off the bed, searching frantically for a weapon. She was a mimic not a warrior, but she wouldn't die without a fight! The brass lamp would have to do. She snatched off the shade and smashed the bulb on the edge of the nightstand, leaving the jagged glass in place.

The men grappled in the shadows. Where was the woman? Loath to take her eyes

off the fight, Chevon opened her mind and scanned. The woman hadn't moved. She still stood on the other side of the bed near the wall, her energy pulsing with an unfamiliar rhythm. Chevon locked onto the woman's position and started around the bed.

In a flurry of aggression, the newcomer slammed her attacker against the far wall. Pictures rattled and the unseen woman gasped. The newcomer didn't spare her a glance. He rushed up behind Chevon and wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her back against his chest.

A surprised yelp was all she managed before reality spun away. Wind whipped her hair about her face and the lamp fell from her numb fingers. Had she just been rescued or kidnapped?

They soared through the darkness, propelled by his will alone. She could see nothing, no passing scenery, no rush of stars. Was he taking her back to Froswick? Her heart fluttered at the thought. It had been so long since she'd seen anyone from her dimension.

Their flight ended as abruptly as it began. He turned in a slow circle and her bare feet connected with something cold and solid. Four walls closed in, forming a small, square room. A smooth table extended at a slight downward slope from one of the walls. Nothing would stay on that surface... unless it wasn't a table, more like a control panel.

He didn't give her time to ponder the mystery. Stunned and breathless, she did little more than drag her feet as he pulled her from the room. With his arm wrapped around her waist, he led her into a much larger space. He summoned a fire in the massive hearth with a negligent wave of his hand. She watched in awe as the firelight revealed more and more of her surroundings. Marble and sculpted stone combined to form a chamber either ancient or otherworldly.

"Where am I?" she whispered the most obvious questions as a myriad of others flooded her mind. "Who are you and why did you bring me here?" As she turned to face her rescuer, her heart gave a sickening lurch. Brock Sihngal, Commander of the Phantom Warriors. She took a step back before she realized what she was doing and halted her retreat. Not Brock, anyone but Brock.

"You don't look happy to see me." Mockery rumbled through his deep voice and flashed in his light green eyes. A worn pair of blue jeans rode low on his lean hips, while a simple black tee shirt outlined every ripple and contour of his muscular torso. Stubble shadowed his jaw and his dark hair was tousled, accenting its tendency to curl. Gods, he was gorgeous -- ruthless and deadly, but gorgeous.

Licking her lips, she dragged her gaze away from his face. "How long have you been on Earth?" Was there any possibility he was searching for his lover, not his

escaped prisoner?

“Not nearly as long as you have.” He moved closer. She refused to back away again. Showing fear to someone like Brock was self-defeating. Not that fear was the only emotion making her heart pound. All Brock had ever had to do was walk into a room to speed her pulse. She wouldn’t even consider what his presence was doing to other parts of her body. “What did you tell the Setti shifter?”

“I didn’t tell them anything.”

“Them?”

He hadn’t sensed the woman. How odd. Chevon took a deep breath and looked into his eyes. Heat curled through her chest and gathered in her abdomen, awakening unwanted sensations. She’d never dared to hope fate would deliver Brock to her door and his world was now forbidden to her. Still, bittersweet memories had been her constant companion.

Snap out of it! She gave herself a firm mental shake. He was here to apprehend her, not reconcile! They were no longer lovers. They were enemies.

All through her years of training as a Recon Mimic she’d heard stories of his achievements. He was respected for his battle prowess, but people would do almost anything to spend one night in his bed. According to the rumors, when Brock used his erotic skills for pleasure rather than interrogation, the experience was incomparable.

“Why did you say ‘them’?” he prompted, his tone a bit impatient.

“There was a female in my bedroom as well as the shifter.” Averting her face, she tried to focus on the present. Her mind kept pulling her into the past.

Attraction blazed between them from the beginning. They hadn’t been able to keep their hands, or their mouths, off each other. After battling their desire for two miserable missions, Brock had transferred her to a different team. He delivered the transfer orders in person and took her savagely against the wall. Their frantic coupling had been the start of a torrid affair. It hadn’t been until he arrived to interrogate her instead of defend her that she’d realized how little she’d meant to him.

She’d escaped on Froswick. She’d do it again -- as soon as she figured out where the hell she was. She cleared her throat and said, “I saw her for a second before you arrived.”

“Show me.”

He raised his hand to touch her face. She slapped it away.

“Afraid of a little touch?” He crossed his arms over his chest as a slow, predatory smile curved his lips. “Do you remember all the things I promised to do to you?”

How could she forget? After listening to her claims of innocence for about an hour, Brock had pulled her to her feet in the interrogation cell, grasped her hair with one hand and cupped her chin with the other. Then he’d described, in great detail, all the things he intended to do if she didn’t cooperate. Just the memory of his silken threats caused her insides to melt and throb. He’d expected her to tremble with fear, but fear was the farthest thing from her mind. She’d been under his control too often to fear his mastery. Deep in her heart she knew Brock would never hurt her.

Still, the Froswick leaders believed her family was in league with the Setti, that she had been ordered to murder her sister. Nothing she’d said then or could say now would change their minds.

“What I remember is that you’d already made up your mind about my guilt.” She ignored her pounding heart and met his gaze. “An interrogation was pointless then and it’s pointless now. Unless you just want to fuck me.”

Anger hardened his expression. “Is that an invitation? I’m always willing to oblige a woman in need.”

“I’d starve to death first.”

He unfolded his arms and leaned in, bringing his face within inches of hers. “Then why is your skin flushed and your pupils dilated? Your nipples have just started to harden. Shall we see if I can make you come touching nothing but your breasts?”

“This isn’t a game!” He kept his hands at his sides, while his gaze moved boldly. “If I’m not your mission, I demand you let me go.”

“Go where? Back to the Setti shifter? If he has an accomplice, show her to me.”

“I can’t mimic her appearance. I didn’t see her well enough.”

“Then describe her.”

“Dark hair, perhaps red, it was hard to tell in the moonlight. Oval face, wide set eyes. Again I couldn’t tell what color.” She crossed her arms over her breasts and returned her gaze to his face, carefully schooling her expression. She could never let him suspect how often she’d thought of him in the past two hundred years or how much she’d missed him. “What are your orders, Commander? Why did you bring me here?”

Brock stared at his little mimic, determined to overcome the irrational longing in his heart. He couldn't still want her. He had never believed she killed her sister. Chevon wasn't capable of cold blooded murder. But he couldn't dismiss the rest of the evidence. Security images and stolen datacrystals imprinted with her DNA. She was a traitor and regardless of his attraction to her, she was the enemy.

Few ever bested him, yet this slip of a female had escaped his grasp and deprived him of an important victory. Even now, dressed in a baggy nightshirt and entirely at his mercy, she stared up at him with challenge in her eyes. He had always been fascinated by her indelible spirit. Her sojourn on Earth had only added sophistication to her fiery beauty.

Her hair remained solid brown with no hint of the green highlights so common to women of Froswick. The top of her ears were smooth and her pupils were round, like a human's. Why didn't she revert to her natural appearance?

"We have unfinished business," he told her, "and I prefer to work without distractions." This villa was protected by the Guardians. The Setti shifter couldn't find her here. Still, Brock wasn't ready to admit her safety was his top priority. It was better if she remained wary, at least for now. "How did you escape?"

She laughed and cocked her head, staring straight into his eyes. "I've spent the majority of my life as a fugitive because of what happened to my sister and *that's* what you want to know?"

He allowed her insolence for the moment. She'd be in restraints soon enough, naked and begging for release. A completely inappropriate surge of lust followed the thought. This wasn't good. It was impossible to prevent his body from responding to the sexual nature of his techniques, but he had always managed to maintain a professional detachment when he questioned a prisoner.

"If you were innocent -- as you claim -- why did you run?"

"Why is the Commander of the Phantom Warriors still investigating the murder of one woman, even if she was a Setti spy?"

"This is not a conversation, it's an official interrogation. Need I remind you of that fact?" Apparently, he needed to remind himself. He caught her by the upper arm and led her across the room. A stool sat before the fire. He urged her to sit, then took his place beside the hearth, resting his elbow on the ornate mantelpiece. "How did you escape the holding cell? Even I can't teleport through those shields."

"Why is this so important to you?" She stared into the flames, her features taut, gaze shuttered. Her skin appeared pale and purple smudges shadowed her eyes. A

quick scan confirmed his suspicions. Her energy levels were dangerously low.

“You need to feed.”

“Release me so I can hunt,” she said without looking at him.

“Answer my questions and I’ll consider it.” She stared into the fire in mutinous silence. He clenched his teeth and took a deep breath. “It was an illusion, wasn’t it? You’re one of those rare mimics who can take on the characteristics of their surroundings. You made it appear as if you’d escaped, then you slipped out when my guards rushed into the cell.”

“If you already knew the answer, why ask the question?”

A smile tugged at one corner of his mouth. Damn it. He shouldn’t find her amusing. He must remain distanced and in control. Circling behind her, he took a lock of her hair and wrapped it around his finger. He pictured her on her knees, her wrists and ankle cuffs locked together, legs open wide. That was the classic position of a pleasure thrall not a prisoner. What was wrong with him?

“Release the illusion,” he said gruffly. “You can’t spare the energy.”

“It’s not an illusion any more.”

“This is not your natural appearance. I remember...” He remembered every nuance of her face and form, the sudden flash of her smile, the upward tilt of her eyes, the smell of her cream, the way she stilled just before her body shook with climax. Her image had been replaying through his fantasies for longer than he cared to admit.

She snatched her hair out of his hand and stood, turning to face him. “I held the illusion so long it imprinted. I’ve tried to recapture my original appearance. I can’t.”

Her gaze focused on his mouth, hunger smoldering like emerald fire. Was it just her need for energy or had Chevon thought of him down through the years? She’d been furious at his willingness to interrogate her, had perceived his actions as betrayal.

“What do you want from me?” she whispered.

“Why was a Setti shifter in your bedroom?” She was a traitor. He could not be swayed by her appeal or their history.

“He was trying to kill me!”

Brock arched his brow. “If Garret wanted you dead, you’d be dead. Try again.”

“Just tell me what you want me to say. It will save us both a lot of aggravation.” She

tossed back her hair and put her hands on her hips. “Do you think he’s my lover? Are we working together to take over the Terran dimension?”

Kicking aside the stool, he bent and shoved his shoulder into her belly, easily lifting her off the floor. “The thought had crossed my mind.”

Chapter Two

Kicking and wiggling as much as Brock’s hold allowed, Chevon writhed against his shoulder. He couldn’t be serious. First he accused her of murdering her sister, now he inferred the Setti shifter was her lover. Had he gone completely mad?

“Put me down!” she yelled.

“My attendant is making alterations to the back room. He should be about finished by now.”

Blood rushed to her head and his shoulder jammed into her stomach with each purposeful stride. It didn’t take much imagination to guess the sorts of alterations his attendant was making. Why didn’t Brock take her back to Froswick? Absorbing sexual energy was their people’s main source of sustenance. Every sex toy imaginable was available in their home dimension.

He carried her into the “back room” and set her on her feet. Her head spun and her vision blurred. Reaching out instinctively, she grasped his thick upper arms. The man was solid muscle! Heat zipped along her spine. She remembered being crushed against his chest and surrounded by those rock hard arms. She’d reveled in his strength, trusted him to protect and defend her. Resentment drove her back. Her legs shook and he caught her elbow.

“You’re weaker than I thought.”

Bristling at the insult, she shook off his grasp. He thought she was a killer, that she’d murdered her own sister. How could he believe such a thing after all they’d shared? “I don’t know how long they had me trapped in that dream.”

“I want to hear all about this dream, but you need energy before we proceed.” He looked over her shoulder at something beyond her. “Luc, is the system operational?”

“Yes, sir.”

Still a little unsteady, Chevon turned around. A lithe young man stood beside a portable restraint system. The sleek combination of padded rails, pulleys, and cables didn't unnerve her as much as Luc's unusual appearance. Wavy hair and thick lashed eyes, angular features with a full lipped mouth, everything about him was golden, and graceful. Simple linen pants were his only garment, leaving his well defined chest and toned arms available for her appraisal. An angel and the personification of sin, could there be a more arousing contrast than these two men?

“Move.” Brock nudged her toward the younger man.

Luc was obviously not from Froswick. What powers did his serene expression conceal? As soon as they restrained her all hope of escape would be lost. She dug in her heels and tried to penetrate the shields. Nothing. She was sealed inside the mansion, Brock's prisoner until he chose to release her.

“There'll be no escape this time.” Wrapping one arm around her waist, Brock carried her the last few steps. “Your only option is to cooperate.”

She hit out at Brock, but Luc caught her wrist before her fist connected with his master. There was no doubt whose side Luc was on. With frightening ease the two men secured her wrists and ankles in flexible cuffs. Then Brock tightened the cables with a mental command. Her arms were drawn above her head and her legs pulled apart. Only her nightshirt protected her modesty.

Brock stood as he did so often with his hands clasped behind his back. She couldn't decipher his expression. “You will accept energy from Luc or I will be forced to feed you. And you don't want that.”

“You can't force me to absorb energy. It doesn't work that way.” The thought of tasting Brock's dark, concentrated energy again made her tremble. But he hadn't offered to feed her himself. She didn't know what to think of Luc. He stood back, silently waiting for Brock's command. “I'll hunt once you've released me.”

“You won't survive the interrogation without energy.”

“What do you hope to learn?” She jerked against the cables, unable to suppress the pointless urge. “I knew nothing then and I know nothing now.”

“So you say.” He motioned Luc forward.

“May I undress her?” Brock inclined his head and Luc stepped in front of her, blocking her view of his master. A strong jaw and slightly hooked nose saved Luc's features from being pretty. He had the most beautiful eyes Chevon had ever seen.

Like molten pools of gold, they shimmered with curiosity and kindness. “You don’t need to be afraid. I won’t hurt you.”

Brock chuckled. “That fact won’t soothe her.” He nudged his attendant aside and grabbed the front of Chevon’s nightshirt. “Still like it rough, little mimic?” With a few quick jerks, he shredded her garments.

She glared at him as heat sank from her chest to her belly. Masquerading as a vampire had come easily. She needed the same things most vampires needed, craved the same pleasures they craved. By using her fangs every time she fed, she kept most from realizing she extracted energy rather than blood.

Moving behind her, Brock cupped her breasts and pressed against her back. “Luc’s people are called the Drahbin. The only way he can feel sexual release is through his empathic abilities. He is the ideal feeder for our kind. He’ll know exactly what pleases you because he’ll experience your pleasure.” He rolled her nipples, tugging and pressing until they stood tight and high.

“You’re wasting your time.” She prepared for the impending battle, distancing her mind from the sensations already unfurling within her body. Brock had unwittingly given her the strategy. He couldn’t interrogate her as long as she was weak, so she’d refuse to feed. After she slipped into unconsciousness he’d be forced to turn her over to a healer and she’d find a way to escape. “Even if he makes me come over and over, I won’t absorb the energy.”

“We’ll see.” Brock whispered the taunt into her ear, his warm breath teasing the sensitive shell. “Taste her, Luc. Use that clever tongue to make her moan.”

Luc knelt in front of her and parted her outer folds with his thumbs. Chevon looked at the room, wondering again if they were still on Earth, determined to ignore both men for as long as possible. The Froswick restraint system seemed out of place in the elegant mansion. For that matter, a battlefield was a far more appropriate setting for Brock.

Tingles followed the wet stroke of Luc’s tongue. She squelched the feeling before it built into something more substantial. Focusing on the ornate ceiling and the fanciful mural high above their heads, she defused the cycle again and again. Brock pinched her nipples and her pussy fluttered. Damn him! He knew she could resist Luc’s patient tenderness until the end of time.

“Suck on her clit or she’ll never come.”

“I’m enjoying this,” Luc murmured, turning his head as he attacked her clit from a different angle. “She’s simmering, aroused yet resisting. It’s really quite pleasant. And she tastes wonderful.”

“I have a job to do,” Brock grumbled. “Feed her and we’ll explore her responsiveness after I’ve concluded my interrogation.”

“Yes, sir.” Luc circled her entrance with his tongue, then closed his lips around her clit, sucking with firm, steady pulls. Tossing her head, she twisted as far as the restraints permitted. She needed energy. There was no denying the bone deep ache pulsing through her body. But she couldn’t surrender, not now, not ever!

She didn’t want to be subjected to Brock’s unorthodox techniques. Did she? Brock squeezed her breasts and pressed the distinct ridge of his cock against the small of her back. Sex was a weapon, a tool he used in his quest for information. She was a mission, a prisoner. Regardless of the desire they unleashed, she couldn’t let herself forget.

With a careful nip, Luc sent her over the edge. She cried out and arched as ripples of pleasure tore through her. He prolonged her orgasm with his mouth, gently tugging on her clit to keep the spasms going. Energy saturated the pleasure, flowing freely, offered without reserve. She closed herself off from it, groaning as her body protested her stubbornness.

Luc rocked back on his heels and looked into her eyes. “I can feel your hunger. Why deprive yourself when you need this so badly?”

“She didn’t feed?” Brock stepped back and a cold rush of air made her shiver.

“No, sir. She is incredibly stubborn.” Luc looked dazed as he struggled to his feet. Had he really felt everything she’d felt? Froswick healers were empathic, but nothing like Brock described.

What now? They could coerce responses from her body, but none of it mattered if she didn’t absorb the energy.

Brock joined Luc in front of Chevon. Her full breasts rose and fell rapidly, hinting at her uncertainty. Why was she being so stubborn? He shook his head. Stupid question. Her physical weakness was her only advantage and she knew it.

“You would rather die than reveal what you know?” He watched her face as he waited for her answer, assessing her expression and the emotions concealed within her gaze.

She shook her head, staring back at him with unflinching conviction. “All I know is my sister is dead and whoever murdered her is still on the loose. I’m not a Setti spy, nor was she, but someone has gone to a great deal of trouble to incriminate me.”

He wanted to believe her. The earnest sincerity in her tone and those wide, guileless eyes challenged the evidence. She'd been found with the body, covered in her sister's blood. That was easily explained. The person on the security feed could be someone mimicking her appearance, but her only explanation for the offworld accounts and the stolen datacrystals was that someone had framed her. He had never allowed himself to be swayed by a pretty face and he wasn't going to start now. Even if the evidence had been planted, there had to be an underlying reason. Which brought him back to the beginning, why did the Setti want her dead?

"For the sake of argument, let's say you didn't kill your sister." He swept her shapely body with a casual glance, while his cock hardened and tension gripped his balls. The sensation didn't stop there. Longing wrapped around his heart and pulsed through his blood. Why did he find her so captivating? "Who are you trying to protect?"

"No one." She sounded defeated. "I can't reveal my deep, dark secrets, because they don't exist."

A frustrated sigh made her breasts quiver and Brock focused on the generous mounds. Still hard and rosy from his touch, her nipples made his mouth water. Her trim torso flared into rounded hips and long, supple legs. His gaze lingered on her mound. Smooth and plump, the fleshy outer lips only allowed him a glimpse of her pink folds. Pink, not green like he remembered. Why did it bother him that she looked human now? She was still the most intriguing female he'd ever encountered.

She's your mission, nothing more! You will extract the information she denied you with her escape and turn her over to Central Command. He squared his shoulders and debated how best to proceed. If unconsciousness claimed her, the information locked within her mind would slip beyond his grasp. He couldn't allow that to happen.

"Come, Luc. We'll have to try a different approach." Brock unfastened his pants and pushed them past his hips. Her gaze lowered and widened as she saw his erection. Good. Let her wonder where he intended to put it, let her ache for the thrust of his cock. They had offered her a bounty of pleasure and energy. Now she would know disappointment and want. She would whimper as they denied her release again and again.

He looked at Luc, accessing the telepathic link they had established years before. *She doesn't come until I say she comes.*

I understand.

Brock traced the curve of her cheek with his index finger. He wanted to kiss her, to explore every inch of her body with his fingers and his mouth before he claimed her. He gave himself a mental shake. This was business!

Get undressed, he told Luc. We have to make her so desperate for release she'll accept energy along with the pleasure .

Her gaze moved from his face to Luc's and back, her expression filled with curiosity and suspicion. "What are you plotting? I know you're scheming telepathically."

"Since you insist on being so stubborn you'll risk damaging yourself, you've left me no choice." Brock rolled her nipples as he spoke, the tip of his cock brushing against her belly. "We're going to bring you to the brink of orgasm as many times as it takes until you accept our energy."

Chapter Three

Chevon sagged against the padded rails with a hoarse groan as another orgasm dissolved just out of reach. Her muscles cramped and her pussy throbbed, hollow and neglected. It was a battle of wills, the erotic skill of her tormentors against two hundred years of isolation and mistrust. If she surrendered now, all she'd sacrificed would be in vain.

They had her face down at the moment, the fourth position Brock had chosen since the battle began. Her arms stretched out to her sides and her knees were bent against a wide rail, forcing her butt up and spreading her legs wide. Padded rails also supported her waist and upper chest, easing the pressure on her wrists and ankles.

"Now this position offers all sorts of possibilities," Brock said, stroking her ass with both hands. Slipping one hand beneath her suspended body, Luc tugged on one of her nipples. It felt raw and oversensitive. One man or the other had been suckling her almost continually since this nonsense began. "Are you ready to stop resisting?"

She gritted her teeth. Brock had asked the question after each deflected orgasm. They'd used their fingers, their lips, and their tongues, but neither of them had actually fucked her.

"Are you ready to accept the truth?" she countered, as she had each time he'd asked his question.

Brock pressed something against her anus and Chevon froze. She'd experienced some of her most powerful orgasms during anal sex. Brock had initiated her into this form of pleasure. It was so unfair for him to use their past experience against her now.

"You're stiff all of a sudden, sweetheart. Don't you like this?" He circled her rear opening with the slick object. It was cool and smooth, definitely not his cock. "Or do you like it too much?" With a firm inward thrust, he pushed the lubed toy well into her ass. Chevon groaned, her vaginal muscles fluttering madly. It would be so easy to just relax and accept what he offered. No! She could not give in to him.

"She's dripping again," Luc announced. "Can I clean her up a bit?"

"Not this time. I want her completely focused." Brock slid the toy in and out, in and out. Heat and sensation curled deep into her body with each slow stroke. "Just let it happen. You need this." He reached between her thighs and circled her vaginal opening. "Would you like my cock inside you? I'll use the toy too. Just say the word and I'll fill you. Let me fuck you. Let me feed you."

"No!" she growled in exasperation. "Fuck me, I don't care, but I will not feed!"

He pushed the toy deep and adjusted the handle so she couldn't expel it from her body. "You are the most exasperating woman I've ever met."

"How much longer can she keep this up?" Luc asked from somewhere on her right.

Brock chuckled. "The real question is, how much longer can we? My balls turned blue about an hour ago."

His amusement sent anger spiking through her body. She hoped his cock fell off! It was no more than he deserved. If he'd believed her on Froswick, if he'd helped her instead of --

"Why don't you let me take care of that before we begin again?" Luc's silken tone launched an unexpected dart of sensation right into her pussy. Her thoughts scattered and she gasped. An image of Luc on his knees in front of Brock materialized in her mind. Brock had his hands tangled in Luc's golden hair as he slid in and out of the younger man's mouth.

"Did she just..."

"Almost," Luc said. "That shiver was anything but revulsion. We might have stumbled on to something."

The cables shifted, gradually moving her up and over. A rail pressed against her

thighs and others supported her knees, back, and shoulders. She faced the men now, in a semi-reclined position. Her arms were more relaxed, but her legs were spread wide. She licked her lips and took turns glaring at them.

Brock stroked Luc's hair, while his gaze locked with hers. "If I'd realized you liked to watch, this could have been much more enjoyable -- at least for us."

Voyeurism didn't generally appeal to her. So why did the thought of these two touching each other excite her? Perhaps it was the contrast in their appearance. She found each attractive, yet they were so different.

Her ass ached, the pressure driving her crazy. She squirmed and tugged against the cables. Brock closed his fingers in Luc's hair and pulled his head back. Chevron didn't understand the angle until Brock fit his mouth over Luc's without breaking eye contact with her. He kissed Luc, his tongue questing, lips sliding, but all the while his eyes devoured her, promised a similar conquest as soon as she was ready to be devoured.

Brock tore his mouth from Luc's and urged the younger man to his knees. He pivoted as Luc went down, making sure Chevron could see exactly what Luc was doing. Luc's cock looked ready to explode. Would he come when Brock came? She'd never seen two men... Luc took Brock into his mouth, sucking firmly on the head before drawing the thick length to the back of his throat. Brock watched her, his expression tense and challenging.

He must have said something to Luc telepathically. After licking his way back to the tip, Luc released Brock's cock and turned around. Still on his hands and knees, Luc crawled between Chevron's legs and parted her sodden folds. She tensed, waiting for the tender onslaught of his mouth. He dragged his tongue from where the toy protruded, across her opening and over her clit. Just that one sustained caress, then he paused.

Chevon looked past Luc and found Brock standing directly behind him. He had coated his cock with lube and was preparing Luc for his entry. The possessive fire burning in his eyes made her tremble. How long had they been together? Did Brock love Luc? This was darker than passion and deeper than desire. Brock tossed the lube aside and positioned himself against Luc's anus. Gripping Luc's lean hips, Brock waited until Luc closed his lips around her clit, then pushed his full length deep into Luc's ass.

Luc's hands tightened against her thighs and Chevron trembled. She knew what it felt like to be taken by Brock, to stretch and give until you shook with the pressure. Her pussy throbbed, desperate for penetration, as needful of attention as she was of energy. Luc found her clit and matched the firm stroke of his tongue to Brock's deep thrusting.

Suspended before them, apart yet connected to the act she was observing, Chevon knew they had found a way beyond her defenses. Brock's powerful body rippled and strained as he drove into his lithe, young lover. Luc's mouth moved against her pussy, accenting her desperate need. She wanted to watch, to revel in the carnal beauty of their uninhibited pleasure, yet she wanted to participate more actively. She wanted to feel Luc moving in her cunt while Brock pounded into his ass. She wanted to feel both men pumping inside her.

She had resisted so long. Need surged, intensity built, and she whimpered, accepting defeat.

Brock roared, his head thrown back as he shuddered in release. Luc arched and sucked on her clit, demanding her surrender. Exhausted and ravenous, Chevon lifted her hips, grinding her pussy against his mouth. His tongue surged into her passage and she screamed. Pleasure shot up through her body, saturating her cells with energy. She trembled and gasped, absorbing the energy as fast as the men could feed it to her. Wave after dizzying wave swept through her, until her entire body tingled and warmed.

Easing out of Luc's body, Brock pushed to his feet. "Clean her up and let her rest for a while. I need to report in."

Through her sensual lassitude, Chevon couldn't help wondering why he sounded so angry.

* * *

Brock paused for a moment inside the Nexus Chamber, breathless and shaken. He never lost control in front of a prisoner. It was foolish and dangerous. Chevon's need for energy couldn't excuse his rash behavior. As soon as he'd touched her and tasted her, he'd lost all objectivity. She'd ceased being his prisoner and become Chevon, his feisty, passionate mimic all over again. He couldn't stop touching her, wanted nothing more than to claim her in every way a man could claim a woman. Thank the gods Luc had been there to facilitate the barely acceptable compromise. She'd needed energy and they'd found a way to feed the most stubborn woman alive.

Luc's empathic abilities, as well as his disarming appearance, complemented Brock's domineering nature. They had used the contrast to their advantage for the past few years. When Brock's arrogant provocation inspired rebellion in a prisoner, Luc was often able to coerce cooperation. They made one hell of a team.

Dragging his fingers through his damp hair, Brock sat down in front of the wide consol and activated the communications grid. He needed to let Rhys know he'd captured Chevon. Brock hadn't known Rhys long, but Rhys had earned the respect of people Brock trusted implicitly.

A flash of shimmering blue light preceded Rhys' appearance. Brock turned from the controls and stood as Rhys solidified in the center of the room. Long, black hair framed the Guardian's face and trailed down his back. His eyes captured the sapphire light continuing to glow even after his transformation was complete.

"Why are you in the safe house?" Rhys asked without preamble. His tunic and cross-gartered boots made Brock homesick. Had the Guardian just come from Froswick or one of its neighboring dimensions?

"I finally located my target," Brock said, "or rather she located me."

"Chevon is here?"

"I was pursuing another useless lead when I heard her screaming across the common Froswick link."

"She *allowed* you to find her?" Rhys moved to the consol Brock had just vacated and swept his hand across the controls. A screen inset in the wall came to life, displaying various views of the villa's rooms.

Brock bit back a groan as Rhys located Chevon. She was in the shower. Fine spray from multiple showerheads glistened on her skin, accenting the supple curves of her soft body. She was arguing with Luc. Rhys didn't activate audio. The conflict was obvious. Luc held soap and a cloth, intending to help her bathe, but Chevon was having none of it.

"Her wrists and ankles are chaffed. Did you already interrogate her?"

"She was so depleted of energy when we arrived an interrogation was impossible."

"So, feed her." Impatience made Rhys' tone brittle.

"She refused to feed. We had to persuade her."

Rhys swept his hand across the controls, deactivating the display. "I know you and this woman were involved at one time. Is that going to be a problem?" He turned to face Brock, his gaze stark and assessing. "To my knowledge, Garret is the only Setti hybrid on Earth, but you seem... distracted."

"It's nothing I can't handle. Are you positive Garret can't penetrate the shields surrounding this place?"

"The Nexus Chambers have never been breeched, by the Setti or any other race. Why do you ask?"

“I didn’t mean actually breaching the defenses. I was thinking of something more insidious. Garret was with Chevon when I arrived. Her terror was genuine, so I teleported her here.”

“You think she might be bugged?” Brock nodded. “I’ll run an invasive scan before I head back to Froswick. My father constructed this house himself. It should be impenetrable.”

“How are things going in Froswick? I haven’t spoken with Arabel in several days.”

“Everyone is fascinated by the possibility of Terran vampires enabling Froswick warriors to transform. The *Nac O’té* need as many Day Warriors as they can get and no one cares how they’re created.”

“The Setti situation has become so desperate we can no longer afford to be selective,” Brock agreed.

“The villa is clean,” Rhys said as the scan completed its sweep. “We’ve managed to eradicate the Setti on the outposts we’ve identified, but I know there are hybrids still operating underground. We have to find them.”

“You said Garret is the only hybrid on Earth.”

“He is -- so far. I haven’t been able to identify his Midox. That’s the only reason he’s still alive. I intend to follow him up the proverbial ladder as far as I can.”

Brock couldn’t argue with that strategy. Rhys had been fighting the Setti longer than he’d been aware of their existence. “Reactivate the monitor. I want to hear what Chevon tells Luc.”

Rhys smiled and turned back to the controls. “He’s good cop, you’re bad cop?” The viewscreen flickered to life.

“Something like that.”

“And you’ve found this effective in the past?” The Guardian rose, obviously preparing to leave.

“With Chevon, I suspect we’ll need every strategy at our disposal.”

* * *

Chevon wrapped a towel around her head and slipped into the silk robe Luc handed her. “Are we still on Earth?”

“When you’re dealing with a Guardian, it’s more complicated than teleportation.”

“Is that supposed to answer my question?” She hadn’t realized how fiercely she’d fought against the restraints until Luc released her a few minutes ago. Her legs had wobbled and her arms protested every movement. The hot shower felt wonderful, but she’d refused to enjoy the comfort with Luc ogling her. She followed him through a luxurious bedroom and down a short corridor that led back to the main room of the mansion. “Does this house belong to Brock?”

“Few feel comfortable addressing him by his first name. Did you know *Brock* before you left Froswick?”

“I thought I did.” She sighed. “It’s a long story.”

Luc didn’t pressure her. He motioned toward the toppled stool. “Sit. I’ll ease the tension in your muscles while I explain about the Guardians.”

Though richly embroidered, the robe had no belt or fastenings. Chevon held the front together as she righted the stool and sat down.

“The Guardians are a race of noncorporeal beings that observe and assist lesser developed races. For the most part they allow conflicts to play out naturally unless the balance of power is greatly disproportionate. The Setti have motivated the Guardians to become involved on multiple occasions.”

Chevon looked over her shoulder and met Luc’s angelic gaze as her pulse quickened. “Are you a Guardian?”

He brushed the backs of his fingers down her cheek and smiled. “The Guardian I was referring to looks far more like Brock than me. His name is Rhys. He was born of a human mother and a Guardian father. His father commanded this villa into existence with the power of his mind. Only the Chosen can access the Nexus Chambers and only through a Nexus Chamber can you reach the villa. So the answer to your question isn’t as simple as you would think. Brock entered the Nexus Chamber from Earth, but I’m not really certain where we are now.”

“Then you and Brock are Chosen?”

“Brock is one of the Chosen. I’m his attendant.”

Luc rubbed her neck and the muscles across the top of her shoulders with long, soothing strokes. She saw his face pressed between her thighs, felt his tongue caressing her clit. He used the heel of his hand with a firm circular motion and she imagined Brock pounding into him, fucking him with unrelenting demand. Would she ever be able to get that image out of her mind?

“Do you serve Brock by choice or obligation?” she asked, desperate for a

distraction.

“He saved my life, but I don’t consider myself in service to Brock. I’m free to leave at any time.”

Concentrating on the mesmerizing leap of the flames, she forced her desire into submission. Wanting Brock made her vulnerable. Wanting *them* was dangerous. “Where are you from originally?” She tried to sound casual, though she hadn’t missed the hushed reverence in Luc’s tone. “I’ve never heard of the Drahbin.”

“My people originate in Dimension 290-3, more commonly known as the Kingdom of Zylott. But Brock found me during a raid on one of the Setti outposts. I was specifically engineered as a pleasure giver for the Midox and his mates.”

She caught his wrist and drew him to her side, so she could see his face. “What exactly does that mean?”

He sat on the floor beside her, firelight gleaming on his bare chest. He’d slipped back into his loose linen pants after she refused to allow him to join her in the shower. “How much do you know about our enemy?”

“They’re evil and there is no way in hell my sister was involved with them.”

His smile was both charming and patient. “I was thinking in broader terms.”

“Full-blooded Setti are unable to survive beyond their home dimension, which has forced them to find other races compatible with their physiology,” Chevon recited. She’d heard it all before, the dire predictions of destruction and outlandish tales of creatures too grotesque for description. None of it seemed real. The dreaded Setti were a name nothing more. Even Garret had appeared basically human. She had been more frightened by the woman’s presence in her mind, than by the “horrible” Setti shifter.

“You’ve never seen a Setti hybrid in its natural form, I take it.” She shook her head. “Don’t dismiss what you don’t understand. I could tell you stories about my Setti master that would give you nightmares for the rest of your life.”

“I already struggle with nightmares, so I’d rather pass.” She softened her tone when she asked, “Was Midox the name of your master?”

“Midox means ruler. Each Setti outpost is governed by the strongest Setti hybrid. When a Midox is challenged and overthrown, his entire household is slaughtered. Brock and his team arrived during such an uprising. If it hadn’t been for their intervention hundreds of innocent people would have lost their lives.”

“That’s horrible.” She looked into the fire, uncomfortable with Luc’s perceptive

gaze boring into hers.

He chuckled. "Our rescue was horrible?"

"Of course not. I'm glad Brock was able to save you and the others."

Touching her chin, he turned her face back toward his. "Why are your feelings so conflicted whenever you think about Brock?"

"We aren't talking about me. We're talking about you." She pivoted on the stool, her feet nearly touching his. "You said you were engineered for the Midox, but Brock said all of the Drahbin are... as you are."

"My entire race was changed by the Setti. Those of us who were not bartered to our sworn enemy in exchange for breeding stock were kept as pleasure slaves. The Setti are vain as well as ruthless and fertility is one standard by which they judge a man's worth."

"It's not just the rulers who have harems?"

"No. All the hybrids do. The richer the hybrid, the more mates he can afford. Drahbin slaves are frequently used to guard a hybrid's women and to give them pleasure when the hybrid is otherwise occupied."

"The hybrid doesn't mind that his women are... I would think it would make him jealous knowing how well a Drahbin attendant can satisfy his mate."

"Knowing we feel nothing, makes us no more threatening to the Setti than any other sex toy." A subtle current of resentment threaded through his tone.

"That's ridiculous." Unable to stay the urge to touch him, she pushed her fingers into his hair. "You feel everything your partner feels. They should be more threatened by you than any ordinary lover."

"The genetic alteration that made us empathic also made us infertile. A precious few are still able to conceive with other Drahbin, but most of us are... We give pleasure and we serve. That's our lot in life."

"That *was* your lot in life. You can be whatever you want to be now. Why do you stay with Brock? Why don't you --"

He framed her face with his hands and brought his mouth within inches of hers. "Because I've felt more alive since I've been with Brock than I ever felt before. He can be rude and abrasive, arrogant and mean, but I can't get enough of him."

She swallowed hard, understanding all too well what Luc meant. There was

something about Brock that drew her, fascinated her. It was more than his striking appearance. Beneath Brock's steely control, she had always sensed the strength of his character. That's why it hurt so badly when he'd believed the lies about her.

"Don't let him interrogate you," Luc whispered. "Tell him what he wants to know; all of it. Part of you wants him to question you and you'll never forgive yourself if you surrender under those circumstances."

She twisted out of his hold. "You have no idea what I want."

He shook his head and pushed to his feet. "I know exactly what you want and we both know it."

Chapter Four

Accessing her vampiric abilities, Sylina cloaked herself in invisibility and eased open the bedroom door. Dispersing her corporeal body required more energy than she was willing to expend right now. Being unseen would have to do.

Garret had his dark-haired slave bent over the side of her bed. The slender female shuddered and moaned as he saturated her with his alien essence. Morbid fascination drew Sylina's gaze to the translucent appendage firmly lodged in the slave's ass. Garret could introduce his mysterious essence into any of his bodily fluids, but this method provided the most concentrated delivery.

"Open yourself to me." His voice sounded odd, gruff and somewhat distorted. Sylina looked in the mirror adjacent to the bed and gasped. He didn't notice the small sound. His features fluctuated, shifting in and out of focus as he barely held his Setti nature in check. "If you struggle against the transfer, you'll weaken us both. Relax and let me feed."

The appendage pulsed and swelled, glowing in the shadowed room. Sylina looked closer. Each time Setti essence surged into the slave, shimmering energy returned through the translucent tube. He took as he gave, withdrawing her life force as he intensified her addiction.

A shiver coursed down Sylina's spine. Two months before, she had writhed beneath him, eager for his essence, willing to do anything. Her gaze narrowed and

she slipped into the woman's mind, appalled by the damage already done. Humans were so fragile. Careful not to touch Garret's being directly, Sylina skimmed his energy from the slave's mind. The woman groaned and trembled, collapsing against the bed.

"What's wrong with you?" He paused, his appendage shrinking and going dark. "I've hardly begun."

"You must have taken too much yesterday." The slave panted, her hands clawing at the sheets. He always fed in this grimy room. None were worthy to share his bed. "Just give me a minute. I'll be all right."

Sylina eased out of the slave's mind. She needed to be sure there were no adverse affects before she risked taking more. Garret withdrew as well. "One of the others will feed me tonight. Return to the pen and do not disappoint me again."

After righting his clothing, he left the bedroom without a backward glance. Sylina hurried after him, slipping out before he slammed the door.

Strength swept through her, speeding her pulse and jolting her mind. She rolled her shoulders, overcome with restlessness. She longed to run, to jump... to fly? A smile parted her lips. How long should she wait before she gleaned more energy from his slaves? She felt strong and vital. This was wonderful!

She followed Garret down a staircase and across a darkened room. Her eyes adjusted instantaneously to the meager light. Did his essence make all his slaves this strong? Why didn't they overthrow him and... He was the source of their strength. Even without his ability to influence their mind, no slave would deprive themselves of this power.

Distracted by her discoveries, it took Sylina a moment to realize she had never been in this part of the house. She hurried her pace, moving closer to him. For no apparent reason he paused in front of a bare section of the cement wall. He extended one hand toward the wall and spoke a phrase she couldn't understand. Not just the phrase was alien. His voice changed, reverberating with a growling undertone.

A section of the wall disintegrated and he passed into the chamber he had just revealed. Sylina rushed in after him and ducked to one side of the opening. A different phrase closed the gap, shutting her inside with Garret.

He raised his arms to shoulder level and lowered his head. The room vibrated. Sylina grasped the wall behind her and moved her feet apart. She couldn't let him realize she was here.

The shift began with his features. His face rippled as it had in the bedroom, but this time the transformation continued, sweeping down his body. Expanding and

changing in a slow, continual flux, he released his human form and became Setti. At least seven feet tall, he rocked on his thick hind legs, until secondary legs extended for balance. His torso remained humanoid, disproportionate to his massive legs. She only glanced at his elongated face, afraid he'd sense her curious stare.

Her gaze returned to his chest. Diagonal slits parted his flesh and his transparent skin allowed her to see his internal organs. His lungs expanded, causing the air slits to quiver and flap. Throbbing with alternating beats, his twin hearts held her mesmerized. This creature had once been inside her? A violent shudder accompanied the thought.

He extended one of his arms and a curtain of energy dropped in front of him. She blinked and fought back a gasp afraid he'd step through the portal and leave her alone in this windowless cell. Instead an image formed in the rushing energy. Even more repulsive than Garret, the second Setti stared straight ahead with round, unblinking eyes.

Midox Genaudi. Garret inclined his head at an angle, accenting the serpent like length of his neck. He projected the thought directly to the other Setti. Sylina shivered. Why was she able to hear? Was he aware of her presence or was this a side effect of absorbing his energy?

I've been waiting for your report. I don't like to be kept waiting. The other creature punctuated the thought with a surge of annoyance.

Sudden developments have kept me from my usual schedule. I located Chevon, but she knows nothing. Berryl's secret died with her.

Genaudi's head swayed and the slits on his chest gaped. *You would stake your life on this ?*

Yes, sir.

Then destroy Chevon and return to me. Your mission is concluded.

Sir! Chevon is only one of the reasons I've remained. I cannot possible abandon my--

You can do whatever I command you to do!

Garret lowered his head again, the continual undulation of his neck revealing his anxiety. *I respectfully request more time. Within a few weeks I will be able to produce tangible evidence of my claims .*

Genaudi took a long time to respond. *You know I am intrigued by your claims. If any of your science projects manage to survive, we will both be heroes in the Setti*

realm. Who thought this obscure planet would hold such potential. You have three weeks, but destroy Chevon now. If she has no information for us, there is no reason to keep her alive .

* * *

Luc was up to something. Brock deactivated the monitor and left the Nexus Chamber. The robe Luc offered Chevon was meant for guests. A prisoner was supposed to be kept naked and Luc knew it. Sharing his background might have helped earn her trust, but why had Luc warned her away from an interrogation? If she freely offered the information, Brock would have no reason to touch her, to watch her skin flush with desire, and smell the heady musk of her arousal. He rushed toward the villa's main room, anticipation gripping his soul.

"If you've been inside my head, you know I have nothing to tell him," she was saying.

"My abilities don't work that way," Luc replied. "I sense emotion. I can't hear thoughts or scan memories."

"Why isn't she in restraints?" They both looked at him as he spoke. Luc appeared flustered. Awareness arced between Brock and Chevon. Why hadn't this longing subsided now that his lust had been appeased? "Have you forgotten she's my prisoner?"

Luc turned to face him, hiding his challenging expression from Chevon. "If she's willing to talk to you, does she need to be in restraints?"

"That depends on what she's willing to say." He glanced at Chevon. "The same tired excuses aren't going to interest me for long." Without shifting his gaze from her lovely face, he reached across his telepathic link to Luc. *Remain in the room and do your best to verify the truthfulness of her statements .*

She's either telling the truth or she honestly believes what she's saying is the truth , Luc responded without pause.

I haven't asked her anything yet!

"Shall I come back when you've finished arguing?"

He took a menacing step toward her. She pivoted toward the fire, refusing to be cowed.

"You've been on Earth for almost two hundred years. Have you had contact with anyone from our dimension?" he asked.

“Not since the first Day Warriors failed to apprehend me.”

“Yes, let’s start there. What happened to Sestio and Ezetta?” He had recently learned Ezetta’s fate from her daughter Mercedes. Would Chevron’s tale correspond with what he’d been told?

“Sestio was murdered shortly after they arrived.” Her voice held no emotion as she related the sequence of events. “According to Ezetta it was the Setti strike team also hunting me at the time. I was afraid anyone sent after me would meet with the same fate as Sestio, so I contacted Ezetta. I explained that my sister was already mortally wounded when I arrived at her apartment and the evidence incriminating me had been planted. She was no more willing to believe me than you have been, but she was being helped by a vampire.”

“What does one have to do with the other?” So far everything she’d said had been corroborated by Mercedes.

“The vampire scanned my mind and verified that what I told her was true. Odd that Central Command hasn’t thought of employing such a method.”

She still stared into the fire, so he allowed himself to smile. She was always so feisty. It made him want to spank her soft, round bottom and -- he snapped his thoughts back on track before the tangent could fully form. “Why didn’t you return and attempt to clear your name? Why remain in hiding all these years?”

“The Setti had already killed two people. I was next on their list. We knew the only hope either of us had of saving our lives was to stage our deaths.”

“So Ezetta summoned reinforcements and this vampire made it look as if he had murdered both of you.”

She stepped away from the hearth. Was she intentionally moving toward Luc? Did she sense his growing loyalty or was she attracted by his appearance? “I thought the ruse had been successful until I woke up with a Setti shifter in my bed.”

Brock didn’t bother asking Luc to validate her statements. She had repeated Mercedes’ story almost verbatim. “All right. What do the Setti think you know? You were the last person to see your sister before her death. Something has kept the Setti hunting you for two centuries.”

“And I’ve spent two centuries trying to figure out what it is,” she snapped. “Berryl was not a Setti spy. She was an investigative reporter. Yes, she traveled extensively and had a diverse network of contacts, but she also had a massive body of work to legitimize her travels.”

He didn’t argue with her. The evidence against them had been gathered over a

period of years. Chevon might have been dragged into something she didn't understand, but Berryl had known exactly what she was doing.

Her emotions support her claims.

Brock shot Luc an annoyed look. Luc knew she had yet to tell him anything he didn't already know. "Tell me about the Setti shifter. What did he say to you? How did he find you?"

Holding the front of her robe together with both hands, Chevon met his gaze. "He said something about hoping it wouldn't come to this and that's when I started screaming."

"You said he had a woman with him. Did she say anything to you?"

"I thought I was dreaming. I've had vivid dreams about Berryl's death ever since it happened. But as I emerged I realized it was not a natural dream. I felt as if the woman had opened a window into my memory."

"And they were reviewing the events surrounding Berryl's death?"

She nodded. "The woman told Garret I didn't know anything and then she realized I was awake. That's when he threatened me, and you know the rest."

He searched her eyes and waited for any inkling of suspicion to warn him of deceit. He felt only a vague disappointment that his skills would remain untested.

If she is no longer your prisoner, we're free to seduce her instead.

He ignored Luc's playful suggestion, not quite ready to turn her loose. "Were you able to sense the nature of the woman? I don't know of too many species that are able to do what you described."

"She was definitely not human, beyond that I'm really not sure. I don't think she was doing it alone. I sensed Garret's presence as well. I know you were preoccupied when you flashed into the room, but you didn't sense her at any time?"

"No, she was completely concealed from me."

"How strange."

He sighed and shook his head. "So what do I do with you now?"

"What do you mean?" She squared her shoulders and raised her chin. "I've told you everything and I know you believe me. I see it in your eyes. You have no reason to keep me now."

He chuckled, allowing desire to ignite in his gaze. "I officially release you from my custody. Consider yourself my guest."

Chevon licked her lips and pressed a hand over her pounding heart. Nothing had changed. He still thought she was a traitor, a despicable Setti spy. "Guests are allowed to leave. I'd like you to return me to my apartment."

"So Garret can finish what he started?" Brock stalked toward her, his gaze boring into hers. "What kind of a host would I be if I allowed harm to come to one of my guests?"

"He's right, Chevon," Luc chimed in. "It's too dangerous for you to leave the villa."

"I can't stay here with... you two." Even if the villa was gorgeous and being here with two virile men was a fantasy come true, this was Brock! The man had stomped on her heart while her life was in tatters. And she'd loved him her entire life. How could she hope to resolve such conflict?

Brock reached her a second before Luc. She twisted out of his grasp and shoved him back. "Don't touch me. You lost that right a long time ago."

"I understand your anger. This must have been --"

"You don't understand a damn thing!" She advanced, too angry to care that she was easily within arm's reach. "I lost more than my sister that day. I lost my whole fucking life. I lost my future, my world, my identity. I was thrust into an alien environment with little more than the clothes on my back." She paused for a deep shuddering breath, her head spinning as hurt cut through her anger. "And you were part of the government that allowed it to happen."

He didn't try to touch her. His stark, expressive eyes communicated more eloquently than words. "You're right. I can't understand what you suffered because of my actions."

If he'd offered empty promises or tried to defend himself against her accusations she would have reinforced her temper and dug in her heels. There was so much more she wanted to say. Two hundred years worth of resentment ready to spew. But what would that accomplish? Nothing she could say would change the past.

He caressed her with his mesmerizing gaze, waiting for her next move. She stared back at him, willing herself to hate him, her anger melting with each moment that passed.

“You’re a bastard,” she said, as much to remind herself as to get a response from him.

A smile quirked one corner of his mouth. “I’m a bastard.” He moved closer and her heart fluttered in her breast. Catching both her wrists, Luc drew her arms to the small of her back and held them there with a firm grasp. The robe unfurled, parted as if by decree, and framed her naked body.

“Every prisoner I interrogate is naked when I first see them, so understand the significance of what I’m about to say.” Brock cupped her chin with one hand and brushed the upper curve of her breasts with the other. “You take my breath away.”

Her nipples hardened and she pressed her thighs together, unable to ignore the persistent ache unleashed by his words. “Don’t toy with me,” she whispered. She’d held on to his memory like a lifeline. The happiness she’d known in his arms had sustained her as she adjusted to an alien world. She’d refused to remember the forces that had torn them apart. In her mind they were still together, loving, laughing, and building a future together, untainted by the Setti.

“If toying with you was all I wanted, you’d be in restraints.” He started to cup her breast, then pulled his hand away. “I shouldn’t be doing this.” He motioned Luc back. “We shouldn’t be doing this. I will return you to Froswick as soon as it’s safe to do so, until then you will be treated with respect.”

She watched in shocked disappointment as he hurried from the room. “What the hell just happened?”

Luc’s gaze gleamed with knowing amusement. “He’s frightened.”

She laughed. “Commander Brock Sihngal is frightened of me?”

“Don’t mock him. Your emotions are just as convoluted.” Luc paused and shook his head. “I’ll show you to your room.”

Chapter Five

“You said you know where he took Chevon. I need you to take me there.”

Sylina paused the television and looked at Garret. The intoxicating buzz she'd felt after absorbing his energy had only lasted about an hour. She was anxiously waiting for him to infuse someone else so she could try again.

"I can't." She flipped off the television and tossed the remote onto the coffee table beside the sofa on which she reclined. "I managed to create a telepathic link with Chevon before Brock grabbed her. They've kept me entertained with their lust triangle, but I can't penetrate the shields physically. Besides, you haven't paid me for the last time I took you to Chevon."

"I let you watch me infuse one of my slaves and I've let you scan my mind. The rest is up to you."

He was right and he had no idea just how far she'd come since scanning his mind. "I told you before, Chevon knows nothing."

"Which is exactly why I need to find her."

"Ah, time to tie up a potentially loose end?"

"Basically."

She hesitated. She'd hoped to perfect her technique without his knowledge, but he preferred his female slaves and she would benefit more from male energy. Besides, Midox Genaudi's comment about Garret's "science projects" had haunted her ever since they left the chamber. What was Garret up to and how could she use it to her advantage unless she got Garret to show her the lab? If there were "science projects," there must be a lab.

"I might be able to help you, if you're willing to negotiate again."

He snarled and reached for her throat. She bounded off the sofa and landed lightly on her feet. Damn, that was fast. Hours after his energy had been absorbed she still benefited from his essence.

Grinning, she shook her finger at him. "Tsk, tsks, that's not a very encouraging opening bid."

"What do you want this time?"

"Are all your slaves female?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"I'm half succubus, you dolt. My abilities are much stronger with men." She tossed

her hair over her shoulders and straightened the fall of her blouse. “I want you to infuse one of your male slaves, while I’m in his mind.”

“Fine.” He scrubbed the lower portion of his face before he spoke again. “If we can’t penetrate these shields, how do we kill Chevon?”

“I’ve been studying the emotional dynamics between these three. Crimes of passion are my specialty. Though I can’t influence Chevon directly, I’ll slip into the minds of her companions and create such jealousy, such blinding rage, that they’ll rip each other apart.”

* * *

Brock tossed and turned in his bed, unable to escape the images rolling through his mind.

Chevon lay in the center of her bed, the guest robe parted to her waist, revealing her long legs and the supple curve of her hip. He hungered and burned. Why had he ever let her go? No one stirred him like Chevon. She was fire and sweetness, feminine strength and passion.

Guilt and regret twisted around his desire. He should have fought for her. He should have trusted her enough to find the answers instead of turning on her like...

A gleam drew his attention to the doorway. Luc stood there, his knuckles white where he gripped the door. His features tensed and his gaze fixed on Chevon with ravenous intensity. Why was Luc in her room? Brock tried to rise, to shake away the scene. His limbs felt weighted and his eyes refused to open.

Luc moved across the room, pausing beside the bed to shed his pants. His cock arched away from his body, massively erect and ready to fuck her. How was this possible? Luc could only reflect desire, so whose desire was he reflecting?

Chevon made a muffled sound and rolled to her back, uncovering one side of her body. Lust jolted through Brock. Had the gods ever fashioned a more beautiful woman? She was perfect and she was his!

Resting one knee on the bed, Luc brushed her hair back from her face. “Chevon, my love, wake up.”

My love? He had saved this prick’s life! Was this how Luc planned to repay him?

“What... what are you doing here?” She sounded groggy. Had the sun set or was Luc using her solar trance to help him subdue her? Anger spiked and Brock fought against the oppressive pressure. He must help her. He must...

Luc guided her hand to his erection. "I need you, Chevon. I'm going insane." The plaintive sound of Luc's voice tore at Brock's heart. This didn't make sense.

She jerked against his hold, her gaze flying to his face. "I don't know whose desire you're channeling, but it's not mine."

"I know you find me attractive." His gaze narrowed on her face. "I've felt how you respond to me." He joined her on the bed, crawling toward her like a stalking cat. "If you aren't making me burn, then Brock is playing a dangerous game."

"What are you talking about?" She inched toward the other side of the bed.

"He must want me to fuck you. He's probably watching right now." He pounced, trapping her beneath him and dragging her hands above her head. "I say we give him what he wants."

"This doesn't make sense." She tugged against his hands, her body arching beneath him. "Luc, something is wrong with you. We need to figure out what --"

Luc silenced her with a demanding kiss. Brock clenched his hands until his nails dug into his palms. She lay stiff and unresponsive. Luc moved his mouth over and against hers, waiting for her passionate nature to awaken.

"If he's not man enough to act on his desire, let me ease your ache. I saw how disappointed you were when he left you. I know how much you needed him, how much you wanted *us*."

"What happened earlier was... I don't know why he..."

"He was more than willing to fuck me while he longed for you," Luc whispered against her lips. "Let me make love to you while he lies alone in his empty bed, too prideful to admit his desire. He doesn't understand what a treasure you are. I will cherish you."

She whimpered and Brock cursed. It wasn't like that. He hadn't used Luc to... yes, he had. He'd plowed Luc's ass while he imagined Chevon kneeling before him. He'd betrayed them both.

Luc bent over Chevon's breasts, his hand caressing one while he suckled the other. "Luc, please. Brock wouldn't send you to me without telling us."

Catching one of her nipples between his teeth, Luc tugged and suckled by turns. Brock had taught him what drove her crazy while she was in restraints. She raised her arms and pushed her fingers into Luc's hair. Was she holding him close or trying to push him away? Her skin flushed and her breasts quivered. She'd be wet by now, battling her own desire. Luc eased his hold, soothing the beaded crest with his

tongue, while he urged her legs apart, making room for himself between her thighs.

“Brock is such a fool,” Luc muttered. “I will never leave you wanting.” Jealousy gripped Brock’s gut and he tossed his head. Damn them!

Luc traced her slit with the head of his cock. She rocked, obviously eager to have Luc inside her. Brock could remember the snug, hot embrace of her inner muscles. She used to whimper for him, arch for him, beg for him.

“I knew you were innocent the first time I touched your mind,” Luc murmured. “You’re safe with me.” He caught the backs of her knees and lifted her heels to his shoulders. “Let me pleasure you as you deserve to be pleased.”

Each word stung like a slap. Luc didn’t know what he knew. Luc just wanted to taste and tease and fuck her! Kissing his way down her inner thigh, Luc paused over her mound.

She tried to push him away and close her knees. “We can’t do this. Something is wrong with you. You can’t...” Her protest trailed away as Luc parted her folds with his tongue and flicked the tip against her clit.

“Do you want me to stop?” His voice was muffled by her flesh. He licked her slit, dragging his tongue from back to front again and again.

“I want to know why you’re here.” She accepted his erotic kiss, her eyes closed, lips parted.

“I’m going to fuck you over and over.” He pushed two fingers into her core, pumping steadily until she cried out. He’d made her come! Despite her doubts, she’d just climaxed for Luc. Brock couldn’t see Luc’s face now, but his tone was almost smug when he spoke again. “The first of many, my love.”

Kneeling between her wide-spread thighs, Luc positioned his cock at her entrance. Brock watched Luc’s shaft sink into her creamy cunt, filling her -- and replacing him. Tortured by the rapturous expression on her face, Brock went wild. She was his! She had always been his.

Luc growled, tossing his head and thrusting deep. His hips rocked and she drew her legs up high against Luc’s sides. She was a sexual being. This is how their people found sustenance. Why would it bother him to watch her feed? Brock tried to relax, to accept his own thoughts, but he could see nothing except Luc’s cock moving steadily in and out, in and out.

“I need you. I need all of you.” Pulling out of her pussy, Luc flipped her over and positioned her on her hands and knees.

Screaming against the pain, Brock fought through the paralyzing compulsion. He tossed back the covers and bolted out of bed. A fresh surge of anger spurred him on. He could still see Luc's cock disappearing inside her and hear her cries of pleasure.

Brock rushed toward the guest room, fury blurring his vision and making his ears ring. Rounding a corner, he heard their throaty moans. He would kill Luc for this. He would kill them both!

Chevon knelt on the bed, Luc's face pressed against her pussy from behind. He held her ass cheeks apart, paying as much attention her anus as to her creamy slit.

"Is this how you *attend* me?" Brock shouted. "You wait until I'm paralyzed by the sun and then you fuck my woman?"

Luc wrapped his arm around her hips, preventing her from scurrying away. His face gleamed with her cream and his gaze openly challenged Brock. "You walked away -- two hundred years ago!"

Brock flew at Luc, fists flying, knocking him off the bed. Chevon screamed, tumbling with them to the marble floor. Her weight barely slowed Brock down. Luc rolled and made it to his feet before Brock could untangle Chevon's arms and push her aside.

"Stop it!" she shouted. "What is *wrong* with you?"

Bending forward, Luc charged. His shoulder connected with Brock's belly. Brock picked him up and flipped him onto his back. The sound of flesh hitting marble echoed through the chamber. Chevon threw herself between them, her gaze furious. "You're killing him. Is that what you want?"

Brock jerked her to her feet, desperate for the feel of her warm body against his. "How could you let him fuck you when you knew..." He bit back the words. She didn't deserve his love. He offered her respect and she spread her thighs for the first man who crawled into her bed.

Kill the whore. She betrayed you. Snap her neck. Rage burst within him. He tangled his fingers in her hair and glared into her eyes.

Luc moaned, struggling to his knees. "Let her go. This is between you and me."

"It is not," she cried. "Think about it, Brock. Luc can only channel desire. I sure as hell wasn't turned on until he woke me up, so where did those feelings come from?"

She's lying. Kill the whore!

“Stop it.” He shoved her back and placed his hands over his ears. “Get out of my head.”

Panting and confused, she looked from Brock to Luc and back. “What’s going on?” She stayed just out of reach. “Who’s in your head?”

Think. He needed to think. Why was he so angry? He’d watched Luc bring her to orgasm again and again while she hung in restraints. Luc was incapable of sexual aggression.

“You tell me,” he sneered. Taking several deep breaths, he filtered out the noise and concentrated on the facts. “Come here.”

“Why?”

“I think you’re bugged. If you didn’t allow it, then get your ass over here.”

She glanced at Luc, who was leaning against the foot of the bed. He gave a stiff nod, so she approached Brock. Taking her face between his hands, he sank into her mind. He searched and scanned, meticulously covering every telepathic pathway, latent or well-used. She opened to him, offering no resistance.

“There it is,” he whispered. Pinching off the link, he felt her flinch, then relax.

“What did you just do?”

“I squashed your bug.”

* * *

Sylina gasped as her link into the protected villa blinked out. “Damn it.”

“What do you mean, damn it?”

“They figured it out.”

“How is that possible?”

She glared at Garret. He might be ruthless and ambitious, but he sure as hell couldn’t put cunning on his résumé. “What’s a Drahbin?”

“What do the Drahbin have to do with anything?”

“The blond man with Chevon is a Drahbin. They realized he couldn’t have gone into a lust crazed frenzy without help from someone.”

Garret shook his head, closed his eyes, and rubbed his lids. “I don’t believe this. How did a *Nac O’te* warrior end up with a Drahbin?”

“Gee, let me guess. During a raid on the Setti?” She made no effort to conceal her disgust. He was pathetic. “How long have your kind been manipulating genetics?”

“It’s a necessary evil when you’re imprisoned by your body’s limitations.”

“Or when you want to create a race of slaves?”

His eyes flew open and he focused on her throat, his expression murderous. “I’ve had about enough of your insolence.”

Her trachea constricted, cutting off her supply of air. She gaped like a fish out of water and rubbed her neck. Nothing she did released the suffocating pressure. Her vision blurred and tears gathered behind her lashes. *You can’t find her without me* .

“I don’t need to find her. I need to kill her.”

Sylina’s ears rang and her head throbbed. She grabbed the edge of the desk to keep herself from falling to her knees. Hating herself for the weakness, she relented enough to say, *please* .

“Please, what?” His gaze gleamed and a cruel smile curved his thin lips.

The crushing pressure eased. She sucked in a frantic breath. “We need to draw them out,” she whispered, each word burning.

“Yes, we do. But how do you intend to help me? You won’t let me fuck you and your mental control isn’t what you claim it is or Chevon would be dead.”

Using every ounce of control she possessed to conceal her utter loathing, she whispered, “I have one last trick up my sleeve.”

Chapter Six

Chevon looked from Brock to Luc and back, stunned and confused by the sudden turn of events. “Are you... back to normal?”

Luc wiped blood from the corner of his mouth and managed to smile. “Has Brock ever been normal?”

Snatching her robe off the floor beside the bed, Chevon prepared for the conversation. Neither of the men seemed concerned with their nudity. They were intimately acquainted. Why would their nakedness bother them? A frustrating mixture of emotions accompanied the thought. She had no claim on Brock. Celibacy wasn’t an option for their species. Besides, watching Brock fuck Luc had been one of the most intensely erotic experiences of her life. How had this gotten so complicated? She shook away the muddle and focused on the crisis at hand. They needed to figure out what had sent the men into lustful fits of rage.

“You saw a woman the night the shifter attacked, but she obviously has more control over men,” Brock mused, pacing beside the bed. “She was using you to access us, but you were unaffected by her compulsions.”

“Succubus?” Chevon suggested.

“What’s a succubus?” Luc asked.

“A dream spirit,” Chevon told him.

“But I wasn’t asleep.”

That caught Brock’s attention. “Not even when the compulsion started?”

“No. I was sitting by the fire when I became incredibly aroused. I went to your bedroom, expecting to find you wide awake and ready to work off some of your frustration. You appeared to be sleeping soundly, so I checked on Chevon. As soon as I saw her, I lost control. Nothing like that has ever happened to me before.”

Brock didn’t speak for a long time. They all knew they weren’t responsible for the bizarre interlude, so why was he still so agitated?

“You said she was in your head,” Chevon reminded him. “Were you just referring to the emotions she was stimulating?”

“She was trying to get me to kill you. They can’t get to us here, so she did the next best thing.” He pushed his hair out of his eyes and spun toward the door. “I need to speak with Rhys.”

“I’d like to meet him.” He paused. “You said I’m an honored guest.”

“Fine.” He shot Luc a secretive smile, telling him something telepathically, she was sure. “I’m pretty sure Rhys can take care of himself, even if you’re up to mischief.”

They stopped by Brock's bedroom and he donned his robe before he led her to a small room tucked into the back corner of the villa. "This is the Nexus Chamber?" She turned in a slow circle. When she reached the far wall, she hesitated. She remembered the sloped table. "This is where you first brought me."

"It's the only way into or out of the villa."

"Where else can you go? Luc made it sound as if these were gateways to multiple dimensions."

"Luc has a big mouth."

She just smiled.

Brock sat down behind the control consol and activated the communications grid. A viewscreen inset in the wall shimmered to life and a man's image took shape on the screen. "I'm in a bit of a hurry," the dark-haired man said. "What's going on?" Multiple braids framed his face, while the rest of his hair flowed freely down his back. His bright blue eyes darted to Chevon, but his expression didn't change. If he bothered to smile, he might actually be handsome.

"One of Garret's friends has been having fun at our expense," Brock said. "I told you I thought she was bugged and I was right."

"The scanners didn't pick up anything."

"It was a tiny access link. I've disabled it, but we need to figure out what sort of being is capable of doing what this creature did."

"Go on."

Brock motioned her forward. "Explain exactly what happened the night you called out to me."

She ran down the details for Rhys and then Brock explained what had just happened. "Sexual compulsions and emotional manipulations are standard skills for a succubus. We had both come to that conclusion, but Luc never fell asleep. I was always taught that a succubus can only work in the subconscious mind."

"The skills you've described are shared by some vampires as well," Rhys said.

"That doesn't account for the gender specificity," Chevon pointed out.

"True." They were all silent for a moment. Then Rhys concluded, "We've learned these things: Garret has an accomplice, they cannot reach you physically, and the

Setti have accepted your innocence.”

She snorted. “They don’t want to find me any more. Now they want to kill me. How comforting.”

“Do you remember the red-haired woman we rescued from Garret when he attacked Mercedes?” Rhys asked Brock.

“I remember her face. Why do you ask?”

“The healers cleansed her body of more Setti essence than they had ever seen before. No human could have survived that level of toxicity. They’re all convinced she has some powerful latent ability.”

“Then why did you release her?” Brock crossed his arms over his chest and leaned against the back of the chair.

“We had no justification for holding her. There is no doubt she was a mind slave, regardless of her unusual level of addiction.”

“If you rescued her, why would she go back to Garret?” Chevon asked.

“Why does any addict return to their addiction?” Rhys shrugged. “They think they can handle it this time. They’re willing to make the sacrifice. It’s a tragic cycle. I have no proof Sylina is your mystery woman, but the timing seems to fit.”

Pushing back from the console, Brock stood. “We can’t hide out here forever.”

“I agree. If Chevon is the only reason the Setti had for being on Earth, let’s lure them off the planet. Our resources are spread thinly enough as it is.”

“I know you’re hoping to use Garret to find his Midox, but it’s my recommendation that we act decisively. We’ve put up with Garret long enough.”

“Garret’s life is forfeit. That was decided long ago. Let me think about the merits of an Earthbound strike. I’ll let you know.” He glanced at Chevon and inclined his head. “I look forward to meeting you.”

The viewscreen blinked out and Chevon looked at Brock. “Where is he?”

“In Froswick. Ezetta’s daughter joined with a Terran vampire and ended up a Day Warrior. Needless to say many of the *Nac O’te* are anxious to see if the phenomenon can be repeated.”

“Mercedes joined with a vampire from Earth and it triggered her Awakening? I’ve never heard of such a thing.”

“Neither had anyone else.” He took her by the hand and led her from the Nexus Chamber.

“Where are we going? When will Rhys make his decision?”

He chuckled. “It sounds like you’re as anxious to kick Setti ass as I am, but I think there’s a few things we should settle before we worry about launching an attack on Garret. Don’t you agree?”

“That depends on what you think needs settling.”

Pausing in front of a doorway she hadn’t noticed before, Brock motioned her into the room. A large sunken tub dominated the chamber, feathery tendrils of steam curling up off the water. Candlelight undulated on the surface of the pool and mellowed the colors of the extravagant mosaic walls. Luc waited for them on the far side of the tub, gloriously naked, his gaze luminous in the candlelight.

“Does Rhys have a thing for ancient Rome?”

“His father, Xenos created the villa,” Luc interjected.

Brock clasped his hands behind his back, hinting at his anxiousness. “This is for your pleasure. I want you to be comfortable. Would you prefer we not linger?”

“It was just a question.” She skirted the pool and headed toward Luc. “As long as we won’t be joined by a legion of drunken revelers, this could be relaxing.”

Luc grinned. “I’m not sure relaxing is what he has in mind. But let’s start fresh, shall we?” He activated the shower and motioned her beneath the spray.

“Why do we need to start fresh?” She looked from Brock’s dark visage to Luc’s smoldering gaze and back. Desire simmered within her, yet uncertainty remained. Did she really want to open herself to the sort of pain Brock had caused her before? Wasn’t it easier to just push him away?

“Why are we doing this? I don’t even think I like you any more.”

Brock smiled and her treacherous heart fluttered. “I owe you an apology at the very least. Let’s start there and see where it takes us.”

“This is an apology?”

“In a manner of speaking.” His gaze caressed her face. “I was willing to use my sensual skills to your detriment. Now I want to use them to make peace with you.”

This was a start, a new beginning. Was she willing to try?

She looked at the waiting shower. There was no stall to speak of, just a drain in the tiled floor to dispose of the water and suds. “Do you still believe I killed Berryl?”

“I never believed you capable of murder.”

“Then why --”

“You said it yourself. Someone went to a great deal of trouble to incriminate you.” He raked his hair with the fingers of one hand, growing progressively more uncomfortable. “We were all under tremendous pressure to produce results. Central Command wanted someone to blame. In a way, the public needed a cause behind which to rally. It didn’t seem to matter if they believed her guilt or innocence, at least Berryl’s death snapped people out of their apathy.”

As misguided and untrue as the reason was, it was comforting to think that some good had come from her sister’s sacrifice.

“I never wanted to believe what the evidence indicated,” he went on when she didn’t respond. “I had only your word to support your innocence.”

“My word should have been enough.”

“I was wrong.” Shocked by the sincerity in Brock’s expression, she glanced at Luc. He’d deactivated the shower and was waiting patiently for them to resolve the conflict. “I can’t change what happened,” Brock continued, “I can only assure you that I will do everything in my power to find out who murdered Berryl and clear your name once and for all.”

She’d dreamed of this moment since she fled Froswick. Still, her pride was not appeased. An attempt on her life had changed his attitude, not his renewed trust in her.

I owe you an apology at the very least. Let’s start there and see where it takes us. His suggestion echoed through her mind. He’d admitted he was wrong, a monumental achievement for Brock. It was her turn to bend. She shrugged out of the robe and stepped into the shower. Luc reactivated the spray.

She closed her eyes and arched her neck, letting the water saturate her hair. Luc slipped in behind her, his strong fingers massaging her scalp. “You didn’t want me to wash you before. Let me wash you now. I want to run my hands all over your body while Brock watches us.”

Dragging her eyes open, she found Brock had shed his robe and gotten in the pool. He stood chest deep in the water, arms folded on the wide stone rim. Words were

unnecessary. Everything she needed to know was in his eyes, tenderness, hunger, and regret. The past had no power here. Tonight they would savor the present and look toward the future.

Luc shampooed her hair, then smoothed the slick lather over her breasts and across her belly. Pausing to rinse the suds out of her eyes, he continued his exploration. His fingers skimmed along her spine and traced the crack between her bottom cheeks. He stroked her inner thighs before returning to her mound. As he parted her and caressed her, Chevon raised her arms and clasped her wrists behind his neck.

“Bring her here,” Brock commanded, his voice harsh and urgent.

She’d known he couldn’t remain passive. It simply wasn’t in his nature. Luc brought her to the edge of the pool and made her kneel in front of Brock. He grasped her bottom with both hands and pulled her toward him, until his mouth was aligned with her slit. He licked and nibbled until pleasure throbbed through her abdomen.

The first tingle of an orgasm began and he pulled his mouth away. “No!” She slapped at him, but Luc caught her wrist. “We already played this game. I didn’t like it then and I sure as hell don’t want to play again.”

“I have a different game in mind,” Brock assured her. Luc released her hands and stretched out on his back beside her, his head resting on the slightly rimmed edge of the tub. “Turn around and straddle his face. I think you can figure out the rest.”

She looked down the length of Luc’s lean body. His cock arched thick and long, nearly to his navel. Had the compulsion returned? “Is this natural desire?”

Luc smiled and held up his hands. “Brock wants to give you pleasure and I’m happy to participate.”

How sad it must be to live your life vicariously through others. She licked her lips and glanced away.

Luc pressed a kiss into the center of her palm. “If you feel so sorry for me, why don’t you do something about it?”

She responded to the challenge in his tone, lowering herself over his face. Brock grasped her hips and adjusted her position as she arched forward, resting on her forearms. Luc flexed his abdominal muscles and his cock rose. She parted her lips and sucked the flared head into her mouth. Both men murmured their appreciation. She could feel the heat of Brock’s gaze as she swirled her tongue around the tip of Luc’s cock. Excitement built and power surged. She felt wild and wanton, and they had barely begun. Luc’s shaft slid against her tongue, deeper and deeper, bumping the back of her throat. Hot and hard, this was the elemental essence of man.

Effortlessly finding her clit, Luc unleashed his sensual assault on the sensitive nub. He flicked his tongue across it and caught it between his teeth. She yelped each time he sucked and groaned with each soothing lick, unable to stop the subtle rocking of her hips.

Brock wet his hand and slapped her bottom, the sharp sting catching her by surprise. "What if I'd bitten him?" She raised her head enough to ask.

"I knew you wouldn't." He grinned. "You like this even more than I like doing it. Now suck!"

She waited for the next firm smack, but he pushed his finger into her pussy instead. Brock loved to keep her off guard. He pumped with a steady rhythm and sensation churned. Then he brought his palm down on her other cheek. She sucked so hard on Luc's cock, he was the one who moaned.

Brock alternated between her bottom cheeks without warning. She didn't know where he'd strike next. He never hit her hard enough to hurt, just build the heat. She swirled her tongue and bobbed her head, lost in the sensual haze. Brock could prolong this for hours, keep her simmering on the brink of orgasm without pushing her over the edge.

Fingers moved in her core, while another hand worked cream up and coated her anus. Hands squeezed both her burning ass cheeks, confirming her suspicion that she was feeling Luc's fingers too. Luc's shaft pulsed against her tongue, a constant indication of Brock's desire.

Brock bent and nipped her bottom, spiking the sensation as he pushed his finger into her ass. Luc drew on her clit at exactly the same time, triggering her orgasm. She moaned around his thick shaft and rhythmically squeezed their fingers. Energy rushed into her along with the pleasure and Chevon trembled.

Before the last tingle faded, Brock lifted her off Luc and into his arms. "Wrap your legs around my waist." His voice was hoarse, his eyes passion bright.

She braced herself against his shoulders as he moved her legs into place. Her thighs parted and his cock found her opening, spearing through her folds without hesitation. She was slick and ready and the sheer bliss of having him inside her again was all it took to trigger another rippling orgasm.

He clutched her to his chest, his face pressed against her throat. "I missed you too," he whispered.

The water lapped against her bottom, the heat just beginning to fade. Luc eased himself into the pool as Brock kissed her. His tongue delved into her mouth,

thrusting fast and steady. Luc stroked her sides and her thighs, traced her spine and squeezed her bottom. Brock wouldn't release her lips.

"Are you sure you don't want to apologize to her alone?"

With obvious reluctance, Brock separated their mouths. "You helped me insult her. You're going to help make her forget what a bastard I am."

Luc's clever fingers delved into the crease between her bottom cheeks, his touch suddenly slippery and warm.

"What is that?" She tried to see over her shoulder, but Brock captured her mouth again. It didn't distract her as well as he intended, she was sure. Luc caressed from the small of her back to where Brock's body was lodged inside her and back. Then he coated her tightly puckered hole with more of the warm, slippery substance.

"All right," Luc said softly, "give her to me."

Brock moved forward, which pressed her closer to Luc. The younger man grasped her hips and pushed against her rear opening with the head of his cock. She shivered. Uncertainty and anticipation combined in a dizzying wave. Brock had taken her like this before, but never while her pussy was... occupied. How would they both fit? She swallowed hard and clung to Brock.

Luc pulled steadily on her hips, his cock driving deeper and deeper. Sweet, aching pressure, she felt so damn full she could hardly breathe! Leaning against the edge of the pool, Luc adjusted the angle of his penetration. She tangled her hands in Brock's hair, hovering on the brink of pain.

"Relax, sweetheart." Brock brushed his lips over hers. "Your entire body is clenched." She tried to relax, she really did, but they had her cross impaled and utterly helpless. Luc shifted his hands to her thighs and Brock urged her backward until she pressed against Luc's chest. "Lock your hands behind his neck." Brock disentangled her fingers from his hair and guided her arms into position.

As soon as she had steadied herself against Luc, Brock pulled back so he could cup her breasts. He rolled her nipples and stroked her skin, giving her body time to adjust to the overwhelming pressure. Trailing feather light touches along her sides he stroked his way to her hips and explored her thighs. His patience soothed her as much as his gentle touch. He could have forced her toward surrender. He chose to coax her instead.

"Better?" He insinuated his hand between their bodies, his gaze searching hers.

"Almost." His middle finger circled her clit and she sighed. He pulled back and pushed in slowly, keeping up the light caress with his finger. Her body melted,

responding to his caring with a fresh rush of cream. He slid more easily. She concentrated on the steady motion, affection building alongside of her need.

“Ready?” Tension etched his features and sharpened his voice. He was obviously anxious to proceed.

“Oh, yes.” She angled her hips and arched her back. Luc groaned as her fidgeting settled his length more deeply inside her body. Brock found a strong rhythm that sent fissions of pleasure surging through her. Tenderness shone from his eyes and the frantic pounding of his heart echoed hers. This was no ordinary power exchange.

Luc held her firmly while Brock moved. The arrangement confused her at first. Didn't Luc need to move too? Luc felt Brock's pleasure; he would come as soon as Brock came. She rested her head against Luc's shoulder, stared into Brock's eyes, and let the sensations sweep her along.

Heat surged from Brock, spun through her, and lodged in Luc. She accepted the transmission with a soft gasp, unprepared for Luc's response. He held the energy, increased the concentration, then shot it back across their telepathic link. She cried out, shaking violently.

Luc nuzzled her hair, his shaft hard and throbbing inside her. Brock pumped faster and faster, speeding them toward completion. He passed energy to Luc over and over, the intensity building with each volley.

Brock thrust deep and Luc expelled a long stream of sizzling energy. Chevon whimpered, coming in hard rhythmic spasms. Brock joined her in release, his face pressed against her hair. An instant later Luc erupted, his body shaking as he reached around her and clutched Brock's back.

Chapter Seven

Brock sprawled in bed, his body replete while his mind whirled with speculation. Chevon curled against his side and Luc sat at the foot of the bed staring at them with a mixture of curiosity and wariness.

“How am I supposed to relax when you're blasting me with anxiety?” Luc softened the question with the hint of a smile.

“It’s not intentional,” Brock assured him. Chevon pushed her fingers through the hair on his chest, her rounded nails lightly scraping his skin. Gods, her simplest touch sent renewed desire rushing through his bloodstream. How was he supposed to problem-solve with her warm and naked beside him?

“Rhys suggested you wait.” She glanced up and smiled. “He must not know you very well.”

“If Garret is the only Setti on Earth, waiting until he’s offworld to attack him is the more prudent course. It just wouldn’t be my choice. Central Command sees no reason to involve the people of Earth in this conflict unless the Setti have already engaged them. I think the Setti are a threat to all people and must be treated as such.”

She propped her elbow against the bed and brushed her hair out of her eyes. “If he’s convinced I know nothing, why would he leave Earth for a dimension far more familiar with combating his kind?”

“The Setti do what they’re commanded to do,” Luc said. “If killing you was his idea, he might regroup and head back to his Midox. On the other hand, if the order came from his Midox, Garret will hunt you until the end of time.”

She sat up and drew her legs to her chest, wrapping her arms around her knees. “Thanks for the encouragement. You’re such a comfort.”

“I didn’t say that to frighten you. The Setti are ruthless.” Luc’s expression was surprisingly unapologetic. He’d been grumpy ever since they left the bathing chamber, which didn’t make sense. Brock had never felt better in his life.

“Tell me something I don’t already know.” Chevon slipped her legs under the sheet, tugging it up to cover her breasts. She looked at Luc again and tension mounted. “How long have you two been together?”

Her brittle tone sent understanding jolting through Brock. “Maybe we should talk about this alone.”

Luc smirked. “Do you mean alone with me or alone with her?”

Stacking pillows behind his back, Brock sat as well. “Either. Somehow I don’t think the conversation will be productive if you two stay in the same room.” Chevon was off the bed and halfway across the room before he could say another word. Brock waited until he heard the guest room door slam before he spoke again. “We’ve shared women before. Why is this a problem?”

“Because this isn’t just sex. You love Chevon whether you’re ready to admit it or not. I felt what you felt for the other women.” He paused as sadness crept into his

gaze. "And I know what you feel for me."

Brock respected Luc too much to argue the point. He had been fascinated by Luc's abilities when their affair began, but over the months they'd spent together his interest had cooled. They worked well together and were sexually compatible. Brock hadn't seen a reason to find someone new.

"I've enjoyed the time we've spent together. You're an extraordinary person and I'm honored to have known you. Tell me what I can do to make this easier for you."

"It would have happened sooner or later. I felt your interest waning even before Chevon... complicated the situation."

"What will you do?"

Luc shrugged, but his gaze became shuttered. "I've never been to Zylott. Perhaps it's time I met some of my own people."

"I'll make the arrangements whenever you're ready."

"Thank you."

"I wish you nothing but happiness."

Shaking his head, Luc swung his leg off the side of the bed. "This is all disgustingly amicable. I'm a pleasure servant and you've compensated me generously. You owe me nothing more."

Brock caught his arm and waited until Luc met his gaze. "You meant more to me than that and you know it."

"But Chevon means more to you than I will ever mean. You can't hide your feelings from an empath." Luc stood and squared his shoulders. "This is the last step in my emancipation. As Chevon said, I'm free to choose my own path now."

"If there's anything I can do --"

"She's waiting for you, asshole." Luc dispersed the tension with his smile. "Why are you still laying there?"

* * *

Chevon paced the width of the guest chamber, doing her best not to imagine what was going on in Brock's bedroom. She had no claim on Brock, didn't even understand the nature of his relationship with Luc. The image of Brock thrusting his cock into the younger man flashed through her mind. Okay, so she knew they were

lovers, but how deeply did they care for one another. Did she really have the right to interfere after all this time?

Her heart fluttered madly. She had longed for Brock long enough. He was here, ready to put the past behind them and rebuild their relationship. She would not squander this opportunity.

Luc only felt desire when Brock felt desire. Could she allow herself to care for Luc if Brock needed...

The door slid open, scattering her thoughts. Brock strode into the room, alone. Did this mean he had made his choice or was he just here to explain his position?

"I'd never encountered a Drahbin before I met Luc," Brock began. "When I heard of his abilities, I was curious."

"That's understandable."

"After the novelty wore off, I realized his empathic abilities would also be helpful in my interrogations. We were emotionally and sexually compatible, so he became my assistant."

"How long have you been together?" She tried hard not to feel jealous, not to imagine all of the other lovers Brock must have had since she fled.

"Just over a year." He strolled across the room, his gaze searching hers. "We've ended our association. Luc wasn't comfortable with the feelings he sensed while we pleased you, so he's going to continue on to Zylott."

She licked her lips and held the front of her robe together. "Are you okay with that? If you really want Luc... That is, I would be willing to..."

"I really want you. Luc is no longer an option." He cupped her cheek with his palm and stroked his thumb across her lips.

"That seems so callous."

His other hand joined the first, framing her face. "In a way I was a transition for Luc. He had never known freedom. The past year has given him confidence and skills that will serve him well as he sets off on his own."

"I still feel terrible about this."

"Are you attracted to Luc?" He lowered his hands and stepped back. "When you allowed him to --"

“I feel like a home wrecker. I only allowed Luc to touch me because he was an extension of you. Still, I didn’t set out to displace him.”

“I know him better than you do. Luc will be fine.”

She heaved a ragged sigh. The decision had been made and she couldn’t pretend to be disappointed with the result. “Where does this leave us?”

“That’s entirely up to you.” Closing the space between them, he stared into her eyes. “Say the word and we’ll start over tonight. Surely you realize I want nothing more.”

Her heart gave a little flutter and she licked her lips, already imagining the firm press of his mouth over hers. “If I ask you to leave, you will?”

He teased her bottom lip with his thumb, his voice hardly more than a whisper, “If you ask me to leave, I’ll have to apologize all over again.” Sweeping her off her feet, he carried her across the room and placed her in the middle of the bed.

“We still need to figure out how to bring Garret to us,” she said as he shrugged out of his robe. She caught a glimpse of his erection as he tossed the garment over a chair. Her body responded with a demanding throb.

“I’ve been thinking about that too.” Her gaze shot to his. Did he mean making love again or forcing Garret into the open? “Not as much as all the ways I intend to devour you, but the shifter is trying to distract me.”

She let her gaze wander the length of his magnificent body. Her nipples hardened and tension gathered between her thighs. “Why don’t you share your thoughts with me?” she suggested with a sultry smile. “It might be less distracting that way.” It might keep them from attacking each other like ravenous beasts.

“We need to take the fight to Garret. This entire time we’ve been on the defensive.” He joined her on the bed and parted her robe. “I disabled the bug, but I left the link in place. Perhaps a psychic tracker could follow it back to its source.”

“Rhys still hasn’t given you permission to attack Garret.”

“He will. He’s a bit more methodical than I tend to be, but we seem to come to the same conclusions.”

“Do you have a tracker in mind?”

“Anyone from our dimension wouldn’t be familiar with Terran entities.”

“We don’t know that this creature is indigenous to Earth.”

“True.” He trailed his index finger from the base of her throat to her navel as his gaze focused in on her breasts. “I still think we’d be better off with a local.”

“So how do we find a psychic tracker here on Earth?”

“We’ll ask Rhys tomorrow when he gives me his permission to kill Garret.” He cupped her breast and smiled. “Tonight I’ve got someone more important on my mind.”

* * *

“Only two people I know have the skills you require. Faelon and Vilok. Faelon is here with me, but Vilok should be able to assist you. If you catch him in an agreeable mood.” The subtle amusement in his tone hinted at the infrequency of such a finding.

“How do I contact Vilok?” As much as Brock would like to have spent the entire night indulging his desire for Chevon, they couldn’t risk Garret moving his hideout. Brock had left her to shower and dress while he returned to the Nexus Chamber and contacted Rhys.

“Call him. He’s ancient, like Faelon, but the Dichotomy don’t resent technology.”

“He’s not a vampire?”

Rhys shook his head and his image blurred. “Few on Earth know of the Dichotomy. They’ve worked hard to assimilate into the culture. I’ve just sent his information to you. If he won’t help, I’ll dispatch Faelon. The more I think about it, the more I agree with you. Garret is growing too bold. There are other ways to find his Midox without further risk to Earth. Report in when the mission is completed. Good luck. Rhys out.”

Brock pivoted his chair as a section of the control console illuminated and Vilok’s profile scrolled across the display. The file listed his species as Dichotomy. Brock had no idea what that meant. Vilok’s image rotated at the bottom of the dossier. Short dark hair and eyes even darker than his hair, there was nothing unusual in his appearance. He could easily pass for human. His features were chiseled and stern, his expression savage. Didn’t Rhys have any friendly contacts?

Accessing a telephone line, Brock rang the number Rhys provided.

“Hello?” a cheerful female voice greeted.

“May I speak to Vilok?”

“May I ask who’s calling?”

“A friend of Rhys.”

“Hold on.”

A moment passed, then muffled voices as the receiver was passed to a second person. “This is Vilok.”

“I’m under a bit of a time constraint, so I’ll come right to the point. I need someone with a very specific skill set and Rhys suggested I contact you.”

“What’s the nature of the... outing?”

“I’d rather not get into it over the phone.”

“Fair enough. Can you come to me?”

Brock verified the address of Vilok’s estate in northern California and told him to expect two visitors within the hour.

* * *

A thin, middle-aged woman met them at the front door and ushered them into a library on the main floor of the spacious mansion. They sat on the leather sofa in the book-lined room and waited for their host.

Vilok joined them a few minutes later, his dark gaze openly assessing both of them. In person Vilok appeared even more menacing than his file image. He offered them drinks and poured himself a whiskey when they declined.

He came right to the point, swirling the rich amber liquid around in his glass. “So, what’s the mission?”

Chevon fidgeted on the sofa beside Brock as he explained. Vilok’s dark gaze returned to her again and again, male appreciation growing ever brighter.

“Chevon is my mate,” Brock stated emphatically.

Vilok inclined his head. “I’m not willing to poach, so we’ll get along just fine.” His gaze lingered a moment longer before he composed his expression. “If the access link is still in place, I should be able to locate the source.”

“Have you heard of a being with the abilities Brock described?” She placed her hand on his leg and heat curled into his groin. He’d never tire of her touch.

“Only a succubus, but they generally stay in spirit form. She’s a mystery for sure.”

Vilok paused for a sip of his whiskey. “I’ve never gone up against the Setti directly. What makes you think you can take on this shifter even if we manage to find his lair?”

“The abilities of a Setti hybrid fluctuate according to the amount of energy they’ve consumed,” Brock told him. “If Garret doesn’t know we’re coming, he won’t be prepared for the fight.”

“Makes sense.” Vilok set his glass on the mantel and slipped his hand into the pocket of his jeans. “Do you know when he feeds? Obviously we want to catch him when he’s weakest.”

“Typically at dawn and dusk. The Setti are creatures of habit. I’d love to ambush him tonight. There’s no way he’d expect us this soon, but it makes more sense to wait until dusk tomorrow.”

“You’re nocturnal?”

Brock nodded. “The Setti have set their sights on our world. Like the cowards they are, they strike while we’re paralyzed by our solar trance.”

“There’s no one in your dimension who can protect you while you sleep? Terran Vampires form blood bonds with humans or other races and employ them as guards.”

“Our entire dimension is populated with nocturnal people. It has only been a problem since the Setti began exploiting the vulnerability.”

“What is their interest in your race?”

“We have the misfortune of being compatible with their physiology.”

Vilok shook his head, obviously understanding the significance of the statement. “Once the Setti successfully produce hybrid offspring with a species, they enslave the world until the living resources have been exhausted.”

Brock sighed and pushed his fingers through his hair. “Even with the element of surprise on our side, we’re going to need backup.”

“What are your abilities?” The corners of Vilok’s mouth curved upward. “Other than living on sexual energy?”

“I’m a Phantom Warrior. She’s a Recon Mimic.”

“And I’m a Dichotomy. Does that mean anything to you?”

Brock extended his arm along the back of the couch and conceded the point with a smile. "Chevon can take on the physical characteristics of others. She can also blend so well with her surroundings she becomes invisible. My abilities are harder to define."

"He can instantaneously move from one place to another," Chevon said. "He can teleport also, but a Phantom shift is different. He's aware of his surroundings, yet he's not in sync with them."

"That sounds like a cross between a temporal flux and the Shadow realm."

Brock scooted to the edge of his seat. "You've interacted with Mystic Keepers?"

"Frequently. When the Dichotomy came to America there was a falling out among the clans. My grandfather chose a separatist lifestyle while his brother wanted to assimilate into the human culture. The west coast Dichotomy interact with humans as little as possible."

"While the east coast Dichotomy live among them."

"Yes. They're a more civilized branch of the family and their paranormal abilities have suffered as a result. Anyway, when Rhys arrived on Earth, he contacted me not my genteel cousins."

Brock chuckled and glanced at Chevon. She was fighting back a smile. "My attendant was a Drahbin, so I've heard of the Mystic Keepers."

Vilok whistled. "Lucky you."

"What's a Mystic Keeper?" Chevon asked pointedly. Brock hid his smile. He'd be wise to avoid all mention of the Drahbin for a while.

"They're a fascinating race," Vilok said. "They manifest a fine powder called *iede* that enables them to manipulate the elements. Flame Keepers control fire, Frost Keepers control water, and so on. Flame Keepers are always handy in a fight, but what we really need is a couple Shadow Keepers."

"Any chance you could have them here by tomorrow night?" Brock asked hopefully.

"One step at a time. Let's see if there's enough left of the link to track. If I can't detect a signal, there's no reason to bother the Keepers."

Vilok moved toward her and Chevon could hardly breathe. The Dichotomy

emanated danger and barely contained savagery. Thank God he was one of the good guys. Rhys wouldn't have sent them here if he didn't trust Vilok.

Dark eyes gleaming in a harshly angled face, Vilok took her hands and drew her to her feet. He looked at Brock, his face an expressionless mask. "I'll need to undress her for this, but I promise not to touch."

Brock shot to his feet. "You're going to scan her mind. Why would you need to undress her?"

"Because this ugly sweater and baggy jeans are an insult to the body that lies beneath."

Chevon should have been affronted by the convoluted compliment, but a smile parted her lips all the same. "You'll just have to be insulted. The ugly sweater stays."

"But the jeans --"

"Just scan her mind," Brock snapped, obviously not amused.

Vilok pressed his fingers against her temples and stared into her eyes. "This won't hurt a bit." Vilok entered smoothly but his presence blazed, the sheer power of his consciousness terrifying. Brock wrapped his arm around her waist, comforting her with his strength.

"Oh, she's good," the Dichotomy whispered. "How did you detect this connection? It's a work of art."

"It was active when I blocked it," Brock said. "We were being affected by the compulsions she was transmitting."

Vilok eased out of her mind. "You're damn lucky you ever detected the link. This being might well be more dangerous than the Setti."

"Can you find her?" Brock asked.

"I think so." He looked at Chevon and started to speak, then hesitated.

"What? Is something wrong?"

"Did you suffer a recent trauma or... are you aware that a section of your memory is shielded?"

She shook her head. "My sister was murdered, but I've had more than enough time to grieve."

“No, this was an intentional block. Someone has locked away specific memories.”

“Can you undo it?” Her heart lurched and her stomach tightened as she made the suggestion. She wasn’t a coward, but everything surrounding her sister’s death had only brought her pain.

“I’m not sure I should. These sorts of blocks are usually used to protect someone from traumatic events. If you don’t remember when it was done, I doubt you’re meant to remember what it’s protecting.”

“I’m not a child. I want the barrier removed.”

He debated a moment longer, then shrugged. “It’s your mind.”

Brock grabbed his arm as he reached for her face. “This won’t harm her, will it?”

“I have no idea what’s on the other side of the barrier. I sensed nothing unnatural, just a safeguard.”

“Are you sure this is what you want?” Brock’s gaze shone with protective concern.

“What if it has something to do with whoever framed me? I have to know.”

Vilok touched her face and his being moved into her mind. A memory shield? How could she not know such a thing existed within her own mind? He pushed deeper and she groaned. Burning pain erupted in his wake. Is this how it was supposed to feel? She grabbed Vilok’s wrist as Brock moved up behind her.

Pain sliced through her brain. She cried out, shuddered violently, then plummeted into the void.

Chapter Eight

Brock swept Chevon’s limp body into his arms, his heartbeat thundering in his ears. “What the fuck did you do to her?”

“Nothing,” Vilok protested. “As soon as I touched the barrier, she went out like a light.”

Shouldering his way past the Dichotomy, Brock laid her on the leather sofa and felt for her pulse. Strong and steady. Thank the gods! Centuries had rolled off his life as he watched her crumple like a rag doll. He knelt beside the sofa and took her hand between his, watching the even rise and fall of her chest. He couldn't lose her now. It simply wasn't an option.

"Would you like me to try and rouse her?"

"No!" Brock released his pent up breath and tried to relax. "Let's give her a minute." Her long lashes fluttered and then she opened her eyes. "Welcome back, sweetheart. You scared the shit out of me."

She smiled and brushed her hair off her forehead. "Vilok was right. It's a safeguard. He dislodged it just enough that I can sense it now."

Vilok moved into his peripheral vision, staying just out of reach. "A safeguard against what?"

"Someone taking the information against my will." She pushed against the couch and sat up. "The first step is unconsciousness. The second step is death."

Brock shot to his feet and glared at Vilok. "If he had pushed a little harder, it would have killed you?"

"Why do you think I backed off? I knew there was more to it than emotional protection." He folded his arms over his chest and looked at Chevonn. "Do you know who planted the trap? What information is it protecting?"

"My sister died in my arms." She remained on the sofa, but her voice had stopped trembling. "Right before she died, she raised her hand to my face and started to speak. It's the last memory I have of her. I always thought she was trying to tell me something. In truth, she implanted... whatever this is."

"You still can't access the information?" Brock carefully kept the disappointment out of his tone. She was unharmed. That's all that mattered right now.

"Berryl was trying to protect me. She knew I'm a terrible liar, so she made sure I didn't realize what she'd done."

Brock sat down beside her, not wanting her to feel interrogated. "If you never realized what she'd done, what did she accomplish?"

"The shield would have been deactivated by our bonding."

"I thought you guys were already mates," Vilok said.

Brock ignored Vilok and stared into her eyes. “Did you tell her we were going to become soul bonded?”

“No, but she knew how much I loved you.”

He closed his eyes against the onslaught of emotion, guilt and regret, tenderness and hope, but more than anything the fierce determination to set things right. Pausing to compose his expression, he looked at Vilok and said, “I need to speak with her alone.”

“Of course.” He made it to the door before he asked, “You’re welcome to stay here until tomorrow. I’ll have Ruth prepare a room.”

“That might be wise,” Brock agreed. “It would help us both conserve our energy.”

Vilok nodded. “Just open the door when you’re finished.” He left and closed the door behind him.

“It’s just you and me now, Chevon. Can you access the information or not?” She shook her head. “Do you have any sense of what it is?”

“No. The Setti killed Berryl because of what she’d learned, so I’d venture to say it’s important.”

“Or was two hundred years ago.”

“If it has no value now, why are they still hunting me?”

Damn good question. He touched her face, then curved his fingers around the back of her neck. “You said Berryl knew how much you *loved* me. Have I ruined any chance of starting over?”

“I’m not sure I can think that far ahead. So much is still uncertain. I care about you deeply -- you must realize that -- but it will take time for my trust to recover.”

A pledge of undying devotion would have pleased him more, but Berryl’s assessment had been accurate. Chevon was a terrible liar. “Then I’ll gladly accept your affection and work on earning your trust.”

“A sound strategy.” Mischief sparkled in her eyes as she slowly wet her lips. “How long do you think he’ll be gone?”

“In a hurry to get me alone?”

“We’re alone now, silly boy.” She stood and faced him, toying with the hem of her

sweater. “Teleporting always makes me hungry. Shall we prolong our argument?”

Heat unfurled in his chest, swirled through his abdomen and settled low in his groin. She was asking for trouble. “He’s having a room prepared for us.”

“Maybe I don’t want to wait for a room.” She nudged his knees apart with her knees and sank to the floor between his legs. “Maybe I want to play right here.”

She reached for the fly of his jeans and he caught her wrist. “I fed you right before we left. Does this have something to do with the shield?”

Rocking back on her heels, disappointment swept into her gaze. “Can’t we have a few minutes just for us? Does this conflict have to color everything we do?”

“You’re right. Forget I brought it up.” He framed her face with his hands and kissed her, lips sliding, tongue delving until she was breathless and relaxed. “I love you and I will never put my responsibilities before our happiness again. If you’re hungry, let’s feed.”

He didn’t understand the sudden gleam in her eyes and she didn’t explain. She unbuttoned the waistband of his jeans and lowered the zipper click by click, her gaze never leaving his. Standing long enough to push his pants down below his knees, Brock returned to the sofa and stretched his arms out along the back.

“Do your worst, little mimic. I’ve dreamed of this for longer than you can imagine.”

“Have you now?” She squeezed his thighs and pushed his legs farther apart, pulling his hips closer to the edge of the couch. “As I remember it, you were usually in too big of a hurry to allow me to play for very long.”

“I’d rather devour than be devoured. I freely admit it.”

“But you’ll make an exception for me?” She lifted his shaft and sucked just the head of his cock into her mouth. He groaned and clenched his ass against the sofa. Her lips relaxed and she sank farther down, her velvety tongue swirling around him as she went.

Hot, wet, paradise. She cupped his balls with one hand and worked his cock with the other, focusing her sucking on his flared, ultra-sensitive head. Her fingers pumped firmly, while her tongue swirled, and Brock knew he was in trouble.

He found her head with his hands, meaning to ease her away, but it felt so damn good! She took him deeper and he tangled his fingers in her hair, not holding her in place, but not pushing her away.

Urgency gathered in his balls, pulsing with the demand for release. She clutched his

hips and tilted her head, sucking his cock to the back of her mouth. Her persistent sucking didn't stop until he surrendered his seed. He arched clear off the sofa and came in shuddering waves.

Panting and dizzy from the pleasure Brock had passed to her along with his release, Chevon gasped when he picked her up and tossed her to the sofa on her back. He attacked her jeans, jerking down the zipper and yanking the material down around her ankles. His pants were in much the same disarray. She smiled.

Her amusement was forgotten as he ducked under her bunched up pants and came up between her thighs, anchoring her feet behind his neck. "Bend your knees," he ordered, his voice nearly harsh with desire.

She didn't argue. She wanted his mouth on her pussy every bit as much as she'd wanted to feel his cock sliding against her tongue. Parting her thighs and bending her knees, she offered him free access to her intimate flesh.

He wasn't gentle. She didn't expect him to be. His lips closed around her clit and suckled as ruthlessly as she had sucked on him. Thrusting his fingers into her pussy, he soaked the digits with cream and then moved his little finger back to her other hole.

Holding her breath, she waited for the firm push, wanting it, needing it, yet dreading the instantaneous orgasm anal penetration always unleashed. She didn't want this to end so quickly. He slowed, sliding his longer fingers in and out of her core, while only teasing her sensitive anus with his pinkie.

His lips continued their firm suction. It was always explosive with Brock, intense and consuming. He dragged his fingers out of her pussy and parted her swollen folds, accenting the empty ache created by his absence.

Why had he stopped? She squirmed and rolled her hips, needing something inside her, something firm she could squeeze. Without warning, he thrust his middle finger deep into her ass and swirled his tongue just inside her throbbing core. His thumb and forefinger caught her clit, pressing on the nub until she screamed.

Pleasure burst within her, contracting her passages and sending sensations blasting through her body. She shook and arched her back, jaws clenched against the intensity.

Brock withdrew his finger and surged up along her body, thrusting his cock into her still pulsing cunt. She cried out again, his thickness launching another wave of pleasure. He held tightly to her hips and moved fast and strong between her thighs. Unable to meet his thrusts with her legs trapped by her pants, she used her inner

muscles to caress him and respond to him.

Each forceful drive brought them closer together. He was her mate. She had always known it. She was safe in his embrace. Opening her mind as she opened her body, she accepted his presence and shared herself with him. They melded and bonded the metaphysical connection more profound than the rhythmic joining of their bodies.

He wrapped his arms around her hips and drove into her with his full length. She surrendered to the orgasm they'd both been resisting. Tingling heat surged from his body into hers as he came with a muffled groan. Her climax unfolded slowly, rippling out from his intensity.

"Did you do this intentionally?" he whispered into her ear.

She chuckled. "Seduce you or use our link to deactivate the shield?"

"Both." He nipped her lobe and tingles zinged down her spine. "Am I sensing what I think I'm sensing?" He remained in her mind even as he disentangled their bodies. After pausing for a deep, lingering kiss, he crawled off the sofa and pulled up his pants.

"I had to be sure you wouldn't suggest we soul bond just so you could get at the information."

"Why would you want to be soul bounded with someone you don't trust?" He helped her up off the couch and reluctantly righted her clothing. "When you agree to bind your soul with mine, you'll have no reservations about building a future together."

"When, not if?" She smiled at his confidence, but didn't argue. "We've got work to do."

"It's a list of names."

"Names and numbers," she clarified, "coordinates maybe. Let's find paper and pen, so we can write all this down."

* * *

It took them just over an hour to compile an accurate list of the information Berryll had transmitted to Chevon. Brock decided against including Vilok in their discovery. He might be one of the Chosen, but they had just met him. Instead Brock asked the Dichotomy if he could use his Nexus Chamber to contact Rhys. Vilok escorted them to the room and left with obvious reluctance.

"Do the names mean anything to you?" Chevon asked as they waited for Rhys to

respond to their page.

“No. And don’t get discouraged if they mean nothing to Rhys. He has the power of the Guardians at his disposal. We’ll figure out what this is about.”

Rhys’ image came into focus a few minutes later. Surrounded by spindly leafless trees, he was disheveled and sweaty. “What’s so urgent?”

Had he just stepped off a training field or left a battle? “Are you sure you’re alone? This could be vital.”

“Hold on.” His image flashed out and the trees skewed the background reshaping as Rhys rematerialized. He stood in an office now, the fatigue etched into his features even more apparent. “What happened?”

“We were able to unlock the information in Chevron’s memory.” He held up the first sheet of paper so Rhys could see the names. “We think the numbers are coordinates, probably for the person’s last known location. Those are obviously dated, but the --”

Rhys flashed out of sight and joined them in the Nexus Chamber. He snatched the sheet of paper out of Brock’s hand. “How many names are on the list?”

“Two hundred and forty-one,” Chevron replied. She handed him the other sheets and glanced at Brock as Rhys read through the names.

“Your sister wasn’t a Setti spy,” Rhys said with absolute conviction. “She was trying to expose them. The names I recognize are all Setti hybrids, most of them upper level leaders. If the rest of these names are more of the same this could be the most significant discovery in the history of the resistance.” He shook his head, amazement shining in his bright blue eyes. “I don’t mean to be abrupt, but I’ve got to get this list to the Guardian Council.”

“Don’t you mean Central Command?” Brock asked. “This will clear Chevron’s name.”

Rhys shook his head. “The Setti might have murdered Berryl, but the evidence against Chevron was planted by someone within your government. She’s safer here, at least for now.” He offered a rare smile and winked at Chevron. “I can always use resourceful members on my team. You managed to keep yourself alive with both the Froswick and the Setti on your heels. Well done. Well done, indeed.” He raised the sheets of paper in a fluttery salute and flashed out of sight.

Chapter Nine

Chevon stood beside Brock as Vilok introduced them to the Shadow Keepers who had responded to his emergency page. Two were fierce-eyed men, the third a curvaceous female.

“Rahna has had dealings with the Setti in the past, so she knows exactly what to expect,” Vilok was saying.

They took a few minutes to bring everyone up to speed. The Mystic Keepers didn't seem as interested in Garret as with his mysterious accomplice. A Setti hybrid was nothing new. A pseudo-succubus on the other hand had them all intrigued.

“We'll focus on the woman and the rest of you go after the shifter,” Rahna suggested.

Vilok chuckled. “Are Shadow Keepers always so bossy?”

“That one is,” one of her companions was quick to reply.

“Am I wrong?” Rahna asked, her dark eyes flashing.

“There can only be one commander.” Vilok's tone had lost its amusement.

“And that would be me.” Brock stepped forward. “This has to be fast and vicious. No quarter, no hesitation. Does anyone have a problem with that?”

“No, sir.” Vilok offered a sarcastic salute. “Am I the only one unable to teleport?”

“It isn't my strongest ability,” Chevon admitted. “It would be better if I conserve my energy for the fight.”

“We'll navigate and they can drive.” He surprised her with a playful wink.

She sensed Brock move in close behind her and reached back to take his hand. Vilok splayed his fingers against the side of her face as Rahna took his hand. The other two Keepers positioned themselves at each end of the untidy chain.

“Here we go,” Vilok announced as he found the access link. “Stay on my heels. Subtlety is not my forte.”

Using all her concentration to stabilize her emotions, Chevon remained still and calm as Vilok projected a signal the others could follow. This was going to be tricky. Rahna propelled Vilok along the metaphysical path he illuminated. Brock struggled to keep Chevon aligned with the Dichotomy.

Chevon groaned as Vilok maintained the relentless connection with her mind. Rhys had compared Vilok with Faelon, an ancient organic vampire, one of the most powerful beings in any dimension. Brock pressed closer and entered her mind. She sensed his calming presence for only an instant before Vilok shoved him out, the mental force rocking Brock backward.

No distractions! Vilok snapped.

The image of a farmhouse erupted in Chevon's mind and their pace slowed. Selecting a copse of trees for cover, they materialized on the leaf strewn ground. Vilok indicated one of the upstairs bedrooms. *The shifter is in there. He's with a female, but I don't think she's our succubus* . It took him a moment longer to sort out the rest. *There's a group of people in the basement, mostly female. But I sense no threat from them* . Chevon waited for him to locate the accomplice. *Human guards are posted around the perimeter and on each floor* .

What about the woman? she asked when the Dichotomy didn't provide the information.

Vilok shook his head. *I sense no one else* .

Peeling paint and warped wood indicated a long period of neglect. Garret must have selected the hideout for its seclusion. The dilapidated farmhouse certainly had little else to recommend it.

Let's take out the shifter, Brock said, *then we'll search for the woman* .

Brock wasn't able to sense her, even when I could see her, Chevon said quietly. *It will probably take a woman to find her* .

Preach it, sister. Rahna's smile flashed in the twilight haze.

Brock motioned to the male Shadow Keepers. *Take out the perimeter guards* . He looked at Rahna and added, *You're with us* .

They crept across the side yard, staying low to the ground. A dog charged, growling and barking as it approached. Rahna sent a shadowy pulse toward the animal and it yelped, scurrying back into the darkness.

One of the guards darted around the corner, his assault rifle already tucked against his shoulder. Chevon scanned her surroundings, intending to mimic the yard. The

shift rippled down her body, but she was still visible.

Shit!

Responding instinctively, she released the illusion and moved into the purplish light. “Don’t shoot,” she called out, allowing a raspy quality to overtake her tone. “I am so unbelievably lost. I thought I’d have to walk all night.”

He pointed the gun at the middle of her chest, but held his position.

“Please tell me you have a phone. Is this an army base or something? What’s with the gun?”

Brock and Rahna materialized behind the guard at exactly the same time. As Rahna turned loose of Vilok’s hand, he solidified as well. Jerking the guard’s rifle out of his grasp, Brock tossed the weapon into the thick underbrush at the edge of the weed infested yard. Vilok toppled the guard with a sweeping kick and Rahna dragged his hands to the small of his back.

The Keeper flexed her fingers and glittering black specks appeared on her palms. *Iede*, that’s what Vilok had called it. She fashioned cords out of the *Shadowiede* and bound the guard’s hands and feet.

You better gag him too. Brock glanced anxiously toward the farmhouse.

They entered through the back door, creeping along soundlessly. The main floor was vacant. Dirty dishes on the kitchen table were the only signs of occupants. Instead of climbing the stairs, Rahna grabbed Vilok’s hand and shot straight up, emerging in a hallway on the second floor. With a nonchalant shrug, Brock and Chevon followed suit.

A guard leaned against the wall halfway down the corridor, eyes closed, face pale. His weapon was still hooked over his shoulder. Brock shook his head and Phantom shifted to the far side of the guard. The man came alert just in time for Brock to knock him out with a brutal punch.

Through the wall, Brock ordered. *I don’t want to tip our hand.*

Chevon held tightly to Brock’s hand as they sank through the wall. If the shifter sensed the invasion, they’d immediately attack. If not they’d pause and analyze the situation.

Garret sat on the edge of his bed. A blonde woman knelt between his legs, eagerly sucking his flaccid cock. He leaned back on his hands, looking rather bored. “Just get me hard enough so I can feed,” he grumbled.

Set in motion by Brock's sharp hand gesture, they rushed the bed. Chevon dragged the woman away before Rahna blasted Garret with clouds of sparkling, black*iede* .

Garret screamed, frantically brushing the black flecks off his face and chest. Blisters formed faster than he could rid his skin of the irritant. Brock used his Phantom speed to keep Garret from escaping. Each time he lunged for an exit, Brock was already there.

With an infuriated roar, Garret shifted. His body stretched, then expanded as his Setti nature took control. The glistening Death*iede* couldn't prevent the change.

The naked woman threw herself at Chevon, desperate to return to her master. Chevon shoved her into a corner, deflecting her wild punches and hysterical kicks.

Brock and Rahna worked together now, creating an energy cage around Garret. A second set of legs had begun to form, but hung uselessly from his thick lower body. Slamming himself against the energy barrier, Garret screamed each time his body came in contact with the sizzling field.

"Contract it," Brock shouted over the Setti's roar.

The woman tried to duck beneath Chevon's arm. Chevon swung her back into the corner. Garret shrieked suddenly and tossed his head from side to side. Chevon glanced at Vilok and found his dark eyes glowing. Taking advantage of the distraction, Rahna and Brock constricted the energy field. Tighter and tighter. The Setti screamed, unable to escape the destructive force.

Vilok spoke an incantation in a language Chevon didn't understand and Garret's head slumped forward. The energy field curled in on itself, spiraling into the Setti's body. He collapsed with a sickening thud and Brock rolled him over onto his back.

Pulling a knife from the sheath built into his boot, Brock plunged the blade into both of Garret's hearts. The woman behind Chevon went wild. Screaming and flailing. Rahna stalked toward the corner, mayhem clearly written in her eyes.

"Duck," she said and Chevon obeyed. Rahna sent a cloud of gray*iede* sailing toward the woman. An instant later she lay in an untidy heap on the floor. "It didn't harm her. It just shut her up."

Brock had not only stabbed the Setti's hearts, he'd systematically removed them from Garret's chest. Placing them on the floor beside the corpse, Brock incinerated them, wiped his knife clean and returned it to his boot.

"His accomplice has to be here," Chevon said.

"What makes you so sure?" Rahna asked.

“The psychic trail led us to her not to that creature,” Vilok agreed. “She is or was here when we arrived.”

The other two Shadow Keepers were at the foot of the stairs when they started down. “The basement is a typical holding pen for Setti mind slaves and we just cleared this level,” one of the Keepers reported.

“Both Chevon and I can identify her. I say we split up.”

Brock nodded his agreement. “Take Rahna and check those rooms. We’ll head back the way we came.”

Anxiety built within Chevon with each room they cleared. They couldn’t let her escape. The succubus was as much a villain as the Setti shifter.

“You’ll need to scan each of the slaves. If she is Sylina Tesch as Rhys suggested, that’s how she escaped once before.”

Chevon nodded, discouraged by the prospect. If all the slaves were as pathetic as that wild-eyed woman had been, the experience was bound to be disheartening.

They came to the last door on the right and found the portal locked. “You better stand back,” Brock warned.

She’d barely stepped aside when he kicked in the door. Wood splintered and stale air rolled out into the hall. Chevon pressed her hand over her nose and blinked into the dusty shadows.

“Why was the door locked?” Brock took a cautious step into the room.

Chevon spotted a head bob on the other side of the rumpled bed. *Someone’s on the far side of the bed*. She sent the thought directly to his mind.

His stride and expression remained unchanged. “Come on, let’s go.” He turned as if to leave the room, but lunged around the bed instead. A figure dove under the bed. Chevon knelt and tossed the bedskirt up, gazing into the darkness. She reached for the thin arm and the person cried out in terror.

“I’m not going to hurt you,” she said softly. “Your master is dead. We’re here to help you.” Ignoring the fingernails digging into her arm, Chevon dragged the person out from under the bed. Tangled dark hair and large frightened eyes, were Chevon’s first impression of the girl. Her emaciated body and hollow eyes made it hard to determine her age.

Brock had only to step toward the girl and she started shrieking. All of Chevon’s

reassuring words couldn't penetrate her fear. "Do you want to stay here?" she asked as the girl lapsed into silence. She shook her head and inched toward the door.

Don't let her run. I'm not sure what she is, but she's not a slave. She might be a second generation hybrid.

One of Garret's children?

Brock responded with a subtle nod.

She didn't even want to consider how that would have been accomplished. It was too disgusting to contemplate with the image of the Setti's mutilated body still fresh in her memory.

"Will you come with me?" Chevon held out her hand half expecting the girl to sniff it. After a long moment of tense silence, the girl placed her grubby hand on Chevon's hand. "My name is Chevon. What's your name?" The girl didn't answer, so Chevon led her into the hallway. Everyone stayed well back as she continued down the stairs and into the kitchen. She pulled out a chair and the girl sat down, still without speaking a word. She wasn't as young as Chevon had first thought, probably in her early teens.

"I sent for an evacuation team," Vilok told Brock. "Rhys said not to burn the place until he'd had a chance to check it out."

"Is he on his way now? We really need to dispose of the body."

"He'll be here shortly."

The girl had still not spoken when the Guardian arrived twenty minutes later. Brock took him through the house room by room, ending the tour in the kitchen. Rhys possessed the lethal stillness of a cobra. His gaze moved over the girl and his vivid blue eyes narrowed.

"What's your name, girl, and how were you related to the shifter?" he asked in a calm, expectant tone.

"I demand to be taken to Midox Genaudi. Why are you consorting with... these creatures?" The girl snapped with authority and all timidity vanished from her posture.

Rhys didn't argue with her. He passed his hand in front of her face and she slumped forward into his arms. "She's definitely Setti. I'll have to run some tests to determine the rest. If you need me, I'll be at the Terran headquarters."

"Yes, sir," Brock said and Rhys strode from the kitchen with the hybrid in his arms.

“There’s a dimensional portal in the basement. Rhys is sure that’s how Sylina escaped.”

“Then he’s sure it was Sylina?”

“He extracted several detailed images from the minds of the slaves.”

“Was he able to sense what she is, how she’s able to do what she does?”

“We were half right.” He wrapped his arm around Chevon’s shoulders and steered her toward the front door. “Her mother was a succubus. Her father was a vampire.”

She shuddered violently. “And she’s still out there somewhere?”

“She’s no longer in this dimension. We’re sure about that.”

Vilok and Rahna were helping the evacuation team load up Garret’s slaves. Only a few resisted. Most seemed nearly mindless. “What will happen to them?”

“Rhys and his team will detoxify them and reverse as much of the damage as possible. He’s well equipped for this sort of thing.”

“Why did the girl respond to Rhys when she ignored the rest of us?”

“The Setti are impossibly arrogant. The Guardians are one of the few races they acknowledge as equal. The rest of us were beneath contempt.”

They stood in the front yard bathed in moonlight. Brock caressed her cheek with his fingertips. “Rhys has the list, Garret is dead, and you are finally safe. What do you want to do now?”

Turning her face into his touch, she smiled. “I won’t say I enjoyed this, but it was exhilarating. I had no idea what the Setti threat really meant until tonight.”

“You don’t have to be afraid. They have no idea Vilok was able to unlock the memory. You’re safe and I intend to see that you stay that way.”

Her smile turned playful and she raised her hands to his shoulders, burying her fingers in his thick hair. “That might be more complicated than you think. I intend to accept Rhys’ invitation to join his team.”

“Oh, you do, do you?” He pulled her fully into his arms and nipped her bottom lip.

“I can’t have you running off to divert the next interplanetary crisis while I worry about your safety.”

“I guess we’ll have to protect each other.” He ended the sentence with a lingering kiss.

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/>.