

# Paladin's Pride 3: Her Forever Knight

## Angelina Evans

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## Prologue

### *Paladin -- Hidden Dangers*

Paladin lay on his great bed. He was naked, his cock thrusting like a lance into the air.

"You're dangerous tonight," Moulina purred, her eyes narrowed on his long, thick shaft. She licked her lips and he felt it in his gut. He wanted that rough, feline tongue licking him, working him as she sucked him.

She crawled onto the bed, her thick coppery mane tumbling in curling waves around her face and down to her shoulders. Knees spread, she sat back on her heels and cupped her breasts, her claws fully extended and kneading the slopes of her full mounds.

She licked her lips again and a pearly drop of liquid welled up in the slit at the head of his penis.

"Taste it," he ordered, his deep rumbling voice harsh. He needed release, not games. Moulina thought she could entice him to her, coerce him into formally mating with her. She couldn't. He'd been blunt with her. He hadn't found the woman he would bind his life to. It wasn't Moulina and she knew it. If she persisted he would sever their relationship. He didn't want a jealous mistress. He wanted an enthusiastic bed partner.

Moulina leaned forward, reached out and lightly scraped her claws down his rigid length. Paladin inhaled sharply but never took his eyes off her. She said there was something dangerous about him but she was the one who was dangerous tonight.

Desire and adrenaline mixed in his blood. "I want my cock in your mouth."

Her claws flexed against his shaft. He watched her, his eyes cold despite the fire racing through his veins.

She lowered her head and her tongue, pink and long, flicked out of her mouth in a fast swipe, stealing his essence from the head of his cock. The rough lick made him swear and his hips leap off the bed.

She moaned and licked him again. "I don't want to want you," she hissed, almost spitting. "But I do. I crave you. Your taste. Your huge cock splitting me nearly in half. If you wanted *me*, I could laugh in your face and leave. But you don't and you never will."

Paladin lifted himself on one elbow and fisted his other hand in the hair at the nape of her neck. "This *will* be our last night together. Do you want sex with me or do you want to leave?"

Her eyes shot green sparks. Her claws tested the steel of his arousal.

He tightened his grip on her hair and his eyes narrowed. "Don't." The one word was a warning and a promise. He'd never learned what mercy was. If she maimed him she would learn how unforgiving he really was.

At the same time, the threat fueled his need. She wouldn't tell him no and, even if she did, he wouldn't let her go. His cock throbbed. He would push his thick length into her but first he wanted her mouth. He wanted to see her lips stretched around him. He wanted to watch her cheeks hollow and listen to the sound of her sucking him.

He applied pressure to the back of her head, forcing her mouth closer to his cock as she glared at him.

"Open your mouth."

She did as she was told. Her tongue stroked over her bottom lip, touched him before her lips did. Paladin's breath caught. His eyes half-closed and his hips jerked off the bed again.

A buzzer sounded, shrill and intrusive. Paladin cursed viciously. "What?" he roared.

"Incoming communication from Kai."

Paladin's hands clenched into fists. "Forward it," he snarled. Kai wouldn't contact him unless it was important. This better be monumental.

Moulina's mouth closed over the head of his penis and she sucked hard. It felt like she was trying to pull the head off his cock. He arched into her. The veins in his neck stood out as he thrust into her mouth. His teeth bared in a grimace. Her mouth was pain and pure pleasure.

"Paladin?"

"You're interrupting," Paladin snapped through clenched teeth. "Take more of it," he ordered Moulina, his chest heaving, his heart beating heavy and fast.

"I've got a woman aboard the *Therik*." Kai named his own spaceship.

Paladin swore as Moulina took another inch of him into her mouth. Her tongue, agile and rough, swirled around him, poked and licked the crevice at the head of his cock, found and tormented the sensitive underside of his shaft just below the head. She was trying to distract him and coming close to doing it.

"I've got a woman in my bed."

"Do you trust your woman?" Kai asked, his tone cold.

"She wouldn't have my cock in her mouth if I didn't."

There was a pause before Kai continued. "I've got Genae Galaran, President Galaran's daughter. She's got her father's plans to annihilate non-human species throughout the galaxy. We need a Mriln healer on Sai-sen-Sai to retrieve the information."

"A healer?"

"The information was implanted in her heart."

Moulina's teeth sank into Paladin's cock.

Shouting a curse, he shoved her away. He rolled off the bed, one hand holding his nearly maimed penis. "How far out are you?" he demanded, his cold stare pinning Moulina where she knelt on the bed. She would pay for what she'd almost done.

"Two days."

Paladin's mind played through scenarios with lightning speed. Ryvn was near Thalanace. There was a Mriln healing facility there. It would be the closest.

If what he'd heard from the Mriln and what he'd put together himself added up to what he thought, the tides had just turned against President Galaran; at his daughter's hand.

"I'll have a Mriln healer here the day after you arrive. Sooner if possible."

"I've got three League destroyers on my tail," Kai warned.

Paladin's smile was savage. "Let them come." He would show the League the true might of his own fleet. He'd wanted to do that for a long time but the time had never been right, until now.

"Two days," Kai said and disconnected.

Paladin strode across the room and activated his connection to the communications center. "Get Ryvn. Tell him to get to Thalanace. I want a Mriln healer here in a day. Less if he can do it. I don't care if he has to kidnap one. Get them here." He closed the connection, sure his orders would be carried out, and looked back at his bed.

Moulina was on her hands and knees, her mane a wild tangle of curls around her face. Her breasts hung free, swaying slightly with each breath she took. Her lips were swollen and red.

Paladin's cock jerked to full attention. He smiled, the expression cruel. Finally, he would fight the League head on. If he died, it wouldn't matter as long as Galaran, the bastard, was brought down. The only thing that could be better would be Galaran himself being aboard one of the destroyers following Kai.

Need slammed into him, hot and wild. He stalked toward the bed, his eyes narrowed and glinting. "You bit me," he rumbled.

Moulina threw her hair back and shrugged. "It's not every day you hear that the President's daughter is with someone you know."

"League bastard," Paladin growled. He didn't like the way she said *the President*, as if he were *her* president.

She shrugged again. "Did I injure you too badly to get the job done?"

Paladin grabbed her hips, turned her ass to face him and rammed his cock into her.

"Palladiiin." She screamed his name, her back arching, her claws shredding the covers on his bed.

He grunted as he pounded into her, watched as his penis moved in and out of her. She was tight and wet, hot and wild. Her body shook each time his pelvis hit her ass. She moaned and cried out, arched and flung her head.

He felt the building pressure in his balls. He wouldn't come before she did. He wouldn't let her have that control. Reaching between her thighs he pinched her clit. She screamed. Her vaginal muscles clamped and spasmed around him. Moulina dropped her head to her forearms, her ass still raised, her cunt impaled by him.

He rode into her, as fast and hard as he could. The sensation boiled up inside him and he came, his cum shooting into her in spurts.

He bowed over her, propped up by his arms that caged her. "Finally. The League bastard falls." He savored the words as he enjoyed the feel of her inner muscles tightening around him as the aftershocks of her orgasm worked through her.

Moulina shook her head against the bed. The only one who would fall was Paladin.

## Chapter 1

### *Two Days Later*

Genae woke slowly. A smile lit her face as she stretched. She was tender from another night of Kai's loving. He was amazing. She didn't know how many times she'd climaxed. Sometimes he didn't let her come down, he just forced her higher and higher until she wasn't sure she was even bound in her own body any longer, just a being of energy and light connected to reality through him.

She wanted more time with him. The past two days aboard his ship, the *Therik*, had been the only calm she'd known in over a year and it felt wonderful. Thoughts about the information she carried intruded. There was still so much to do. Making sure the information was retrieved and got to someone who could do something with it.

She shook her head and tried to hold on to the contentment of the moment. She didn't want to give up this time she had with Kai.

She yawned and rubbed her eyes before opening them. She looked toward Kai and her jaw dropped. He was asleep. The man never, well hardly ever, slept. She itched to reach out and touch his hair and trace the hard contours of his face. It still amazed her every time she looked at him how golden he was. His thick golden mane, his gold toned skin and his old gold eyes.

She wrinkled her nose and kept her hands where they were. He needed his sleep and she wasn't going to disturb him. How he had managed to keep a close watch on League activities, see to his own vessel and spend a considerable amount of time with her, she would never know. His stamina was tremendous but even he had limitations. Not that he would ever admit to them.



A rueful smile lit her face and warmth filled her. He really was perfect. Reality, though, wouldn't be held at bay. Three destroyers were headed for Sai-sen-Sai. One of them was Rabala's.

Her stomach knotted and she pressed her hand over it. Rabala would want revenge. Kai had tricked him above YelAsta and sent him chasing a ghost. That would make the whole thing very personal to the general.

She looked out the view port and tried to take a breath around the fear choking her. There were so many planets with so many people. The information in her heart meant the difference between life and death for them. The price of saving people she would never know was so high. It could mean Kai's life. How would she live with that?

She looked back at Kai and her eyes traced over his face once more. A feeling she couldn't describe swelled in her chest. His planet and people were in jeopardy. The League destroyers weren't chasing only her this time. Kai had made her much more dangerous. Suddenly there was a chance she would succeed. They wouldn't be satisfied killing her. They would destroy the planet. They wouldn't even hesitate.

Taking a deep breath, she rolled to the side of the bed and sat up. How did she live with the destruction of a planet and its people?

A humorless smile lifted her lips. She wouldn't have to live with it. She'd be dead right along with every other person on the planet. That was comforting.

A hard arm circled her waist and pulled her back across the bed. Kai rolled her onto her back, pushed her legs apart and settled himself between them.

"Where were you going?"

She reached up and tunneled her fingers through his hair. He made a low approving sound and she smiled. He loved her touch and she loved touching him. He was truly the most beautiful male she'd ever seen and for now, unbelievable as it seemed, he was hers.

"I thought I would bathe and dress for the occasion. Naked might have been all right for YelAsta but not for Sai-two." She used the VanDai abbreviation for their planet.

Kai growled. The sound vibrated his chest and teased her nipples where he pressed against her. "You'll wear clothes everywhere except our chambers. *There* I want you naked. I like having you accessible."

He reached between them, grasped his cock and found her wet entrance with its thick head.

"Accessible?" Her breath caught as he pressed against her. His penis was huge and throbbing.

He forged into her with heavy, insistent pressure and she bit her lip as he filled her. Her body arched into his. The sensation was incredible. It crashed through her as he surged deeper.

She twisted, trying to compensate for the heavy intrusion. He stretched her almost to the point of discomfort. His pulse throbbed inside her, stimulating even when he was still. She never wanted him to leave her.

"Accessible." He groaned as he pulled back and thrust forward, the first stroke slow.

A single harsh word exploded from him. She didn't understand what he said but his tone made it a curse. She clutched his shoulders, her body moving against his, seeking the pleasure he'd taught her to expect.

"Can we talk about it later?" She moved her hips as much as she could under the press of his. The miniscule movement inflamed already sizzling nerves. Every time was better.

Kai glared down at her. "You're so small. Delicate. I should be gentle with you."

Genae smiled, slow and sensual. She didn't want gentle. She wanted Kai. "I love your power. Just take me."

Kai's lips drew back in a feral snarl. He pulled out of her, flipped her onto her stomach and pulled her hips up. He positioned his cock and plunged into her. His hips ground into hers. He pulled out and hammered into her again.

She shook and moaned. Her inner muscles tightened around him but couldn't hold him as he pulled out and lunged back in. She was on fire and he forced the flames higher.

Kai couldn't go deep enough. He wanted to sink himself in her. He wanted them to be one being. He growled as she melted around him, milked him. She was everything he wanted, everything he needed. The sound of his flesh slapping hers, her wet heat sucking his cock in as he thrust forward, slurping to keep him in when he pulled out; her hot, feminine scent, drove him on.

She would never get away from him. She would understand that in time. Whatever force had sent her toward YelAsta had sent her to him and he would never let her go.

He groaned as she clenched around him.

She cried out as an orgasm rocketed through her.

He couldn't hold back and didn't want to. He wanted his seed filling her. He wanted her bound to him in every way a woman could be bound to a man. For them, there was no going back, only forward.

He shouted as his own release caught him. His cum fountained into her, hot and thick. He rocked into her once, twice more before settling over her, covering her body with his. Her inner muscles tightened around him in unpredictable spasms as aftershocks rippled through her. It was a sensation he was becoming addicted to.

"Do you think anyone would notice if we didn't transport down to the planet?" Her voice was soft, almost dreamy.

Kai nuzzled his face into the crook of her neck and kissed her. "Paladin would send up a search party if you weren't on the first transport to the surface. No one is going to take any chances with you and the information you carry."

Genae's heart skipped a beat. *No one is going to take any chances with you and the information you carry.* His words reverberated in her head. No one would take any

chances with her until they had her where they could get the information. She didn't really have any doubt how Kai would take the news of how dangerous the retrieval process was. The chances of her surviving were slim. He'd been protective from the moment he'd seen her. He wasn't going to be happy when he found out the rest.

She murmured a protest as he rocked back and his cock pulled out of her. She had to make sure he didn't find out. Getting the information was more important than her life. She'd believed that to start with, but now it meant even more. Because of Kai. He was worth saving. Others like him were worth saving. She couldn't live with herself if she didn't do everything in her power to stop her father.

She closed her eyes as pain stabbed through her. Her father. He wasn't that. Not anymore. The man her father had been would never have thought about killing whole planets of people.

Kai ran his hand over her raised bottom, up her back and under her arms to cup her breasts. He teased her nipples, tugging at them and squeezing her full mounds. "A quick bath, we'll get dressed, and it will be time to go."

His erotic stimulation of her breasts stole the somber thoughts from her mind. "I think that's what I was doing when you started this whole thing," she grumbled as she arched into his hands. She loved the way he was always touching her. It would be interesting to see how that changed when they were both fully clothed and in the company of others. She would miss the way he caught her hand or her arm or lifted and carried her.

She groaned and shook her head.

"What?" he demanded, lifting her up and turning her so he could see her face.

She wrinkled her nose at him. "The whole time we were racing across the surface of YelAsta, the one thing I knew I wasn't going to miss was being thrown over your shoulder."

He frowned down at her. "And?"

"It just crossed my mind that I'm going to miss it and I couldn't believe I was actually thinking that."

A wicked glint lit his golden eyes. He rose to his feet, caught her arm and expertly flipped her over his shoulder. She laughed as he strode into the dressing area off the main room of his private chambers. He lifted her off his shoulder and put her into the huge pool of clean-gel and followed her in. His hands started moving over her in firm, even strokes. He slowed to cup and play with her breasts and to trace the fascinating cleft of her buttocks and explore the secrets of her sex.

"I'll carry you anywhere you want to go."

She pushed at his shoulders as he smoothed down her legs and massaged her feet. She loved everything he did to her, but it was her turn.

"What are you going to miss when we're not alone and naked all the time?" she asked.

He leaned back, his eyes closing as she rubbed his chest, paying close attention to his nipples and under his arms.

"Nothing."

"Nothing." She poked him in the side. "What do you mean? You're not going to miss anything? There has to be something."

He shook his head. "If I want to carry you, I will. When I want you naked, I'll get you that way."

She stroked down his stomach and around his erection to cup his balls. She smiled as his breath caught. He was responsive to her every touch. There was no playing with Kai, no teasing. His reactions were straightforward and honest like everything else about him.

"I won't miss being chased across the planet by laser fire." She squeezed his balls in a slow rhythm.

He grunted as her hand moved up to close around the thick evidence of his arousal.

"I won't miss having a League hunter chasing us." She closed both hands around him and squeezed. She licked her lips as a small drop of white liquid appeared at the end of his penis, disappearing almost immediately in the clean-gel.

## Chapter 2

### *One More Time*

Kai watched her through slitted eyes as she devoured him with her eyes. A low rumble vibrated in his chest as her tongue played over her lips.

“Will you take me?” He hadn’t meant to ask but wasn’t sorry when he did. They didn’t have time but he wanted her. Her mouth on him was the most erotic thing he’d ever experienced and he wanted it again before he had to share her.

That was the one thing he would miss. Yes, they had barely escaped with their lives when the destroyer had ripped apart the surface of YelAsta to kill her, but she had been exclusively his. Once they were on Sai-sen-Sai that would no longer be true and he didn’t like it.

She looked at him, her eyes heavy-lidded, her lips parted. “Stand up.” Her voice was husky, a sensual lure. Dark color started at her breasts and rose up her chest and neck and into her face. Her lips looked fuller, her nipples reddened, and her breasts swelled. Just looking at her made him ache.

He rose to his feet and watched with pure male satisfaction as she settled on her knees before him. His gut knotted as she reached for him, her small hands closing around him and testing his length with strong, pulling strokes.

“Take me in your mouth.”

She looked up at him through her lashes, her eyes incredibly blue, her short cap of black curls the perfect frame for her sweet face. “Will you let me have all of you?”

His breath caught at the question. The thought of her taking him in her mouth, of sucking and stroking him until he came was almost more than he could stand. He jerked in her tight hold. Pre-cum dampened the broad head of his cock.

“Take all of me.” It was an order and a plea.

Genae lowered her head and swirled her tongue over the end of his cock. She made a low sound of approval at his taste and her eyes closed.

Kai threw back his head. His fingers sank into her hair and he held her close as she tortured him with the sweet torment of her mouth and hands. She sucked and licked, stroked and squeezed. She released his penis to suck on his male sac, one side and then the other. When his desire welled up from the depths of his cock, she took it, savored it and demanded more.

He couldn't breathe. His hips moved against her, driving his cock into her seeking mouth. Her hands squeezed and pulled. She took him deep, deeper.

He clutched her head as he fucked her mouth. He couldn't stop himself. Low sounds of pleasure, the sounds of sucking, the slight pop as he pulled out of her mouth, all built the inferno raging through him.

"Take me." Eyes narrowed, he growled the order as he rubbed his cock against her lips, seeking entrance once more.

Genae smiled at him, blue fire flashing through her lashes. Her tongue, small and pink, peeked out of her lips and touched the end of him.

He groaned and pressed insistently against her lips. She shared the most intimate act a man and woman could have with him and he wanted it all. No holding back, no stopping short of fulfillment. She would take him all, everything he had to give in this most intimate way.

"Open for me." His voice was dark and rough, his expression fierce.

She took him into her mouth and sucked. She worked up and down his length, taking him as deep as she could as she worked his shaft with her hands. Using her tongue and lips, she drew on him until he couldn't hold back. His cock swelled in her mouth. She sucked harder, squeezed, pulled him to her.

His release rushed through him, from him as he roared. He gripped her head tight as he jerked into her, spilling the essence of life in her avid mouth. His body shook as she continued to suckle him. He wanted to stay in her mouth. He wanted to taste her feminine honey and make her explode as she had made him. There would be time. He

would share her with his people as he had to. The information she carried was important to too many species throughout the universe; it had to be retrieved. He would do what he had to do but she was his. She belonged with him. Once the information was retrieved, he would let nothing come between them again.

Wincing, he pulled his cock from her mouth and hands. She made a sound of protest that tightened his gut. He wanted to let her suck him until he was ready to come again and this time he wanted to be inside her. One day soon, when she was once more solely his, they would do this again and it wouldn't end until he had taken her every way a male could take his mate. He would reward her well for the pleasure she gave him.

Frustration made his expression harsh as he lifted her to her feet. He kissed her hard, his tongue stealing into her mouth and mating with hers in a wild foray. He tasted himself in her and a growl rumbled in his chest.

A tone sounded followed by his second-in-command's voice. "Paladin is expecting us on Sai-sen-Sai," Teer announced.

A muscle ticked in Kai's jaw. He was a member of the pride, Paladin his acknowledged leader, but he resented the summons. He wanted to take Genae and find a place of their own, a place where no one and nothing could touch them.

Honor won out over need. "Tell Paladin we'll be transporting to the surface within the hour." He had a duty to his people, to the other people of the universe, and he wouldn't walk away from it. He wouldn't have Genae exclusively to himself but she was still his. When duty was done, she would be in his arms, in his bed, a part of him and no other.

\* \* \*

Moulina watched Paladin stride into the communications center. Kai and his traitor had to be close to the planet. A full VanDai guard, six warriors all heavily armed, had been sent to Portation City to escort them back to Boujara.



She watched as Paladin strode back out of the com-center, and pretended to be busy with her chores. VanDai were considered an impressive sight and he stood out even among his warriors. *Damn him.*

He glanced at her as he passed.

Her chin rose and she glared after him as he strode away. He thought it was over. He thought he could throw her aside and search for his perfect mate.

A sneer lifted her lip. He was about to learn how wrong he was. He wasn't invincible and things would not go his way. She would see to that.

"Moulina?"

Startled, she jumped and dropped her anti-grav-vac. Celn, one of Paladin's warriors, stood in front of her.

"What do you want?" she snapped, reaching out to snatch her vac from the air in front of her.

"You were glaring at Paladin."

"How is that your business?" What was he going to do? Tell Paladin she'd been watching him? He was as stupid as all the others.

Celn's expression grew cold. "Don't cause him trouble."

She widened her eyes, the picture of innocence. "Cause him trouble? Me? What could a discarded lover, *a mere woman*, do to the great Paladin?"

Celn shook his head. "Just stay out of his way," he ordered as he hurried after Paladin.

She watched him disappear outside. She wouldn't get in Paladin's way. She was going to stop him completely.

## Chapter 3

### *Safely Home*

Half an hour later, Genae sat beside Kai in a transport captained by Teer. Part of the planet's defense system didn't allow for molecular transport to the surface so the slower transports were used. She didn't mind. This allowed her more time with Kai before the universe intruded.

It was strange to be dressed. On YelAsta, she hadn't been able to wear clothes at all and most of the past couple days aboard the *Therik* had been spent in Kai's chambers, naked and in bed with him.

Heat flooded her cheeks as she thought about all the ways they had been together. She really wanted to go back and try all of them again. It didn't matter where they were if she could be with Kai and, at least for a few moments, forget what she had to do.

She fingered the soft, flowing material of the dress Kai had provided for her. It was the same blue as her eyes. A simple sheath that covered her from her neck to mid-calf. It clung lovingly to her curves and felt like a constant caress on her skin. But it had been Kai's reaction that made her feel beautiful. He'd taken one look and reached for her, his hands skimming over her breasts and settling on the gentle swell of her hips.

"Every male on Sai-two will want you." Pride and anger had mixed in his voice and expression.

She pressed against him, needing to be as close to him as she could get. Everything she'd fought for was coming to a close. The Mriln healer would be arriving soon. The League destroyers would be in range of the planet at almost the same time. One way or another, it would soon be over.

Her heart skipped a beat and she pressed her face into Kai's shoulder. There wasn't a force in the universe that could stand against a League destroyer, let alone three of them. It would come down to how fast the healer was and if the information could be sent to others before the League destroyed the planet.

Kai wrapped his arm around her and drew her closer. She snuggled against him, soothed by the strong, steady beat of his heart and the strength of his arms. When he held her, she could believe they had a chance. He seemed invincible to her. Nothing had stopped him and she wanted to believe nothing could.

\* \* \*

All too soon she felt the slight thump as the transport docked. Her heart beat wildly in her throat, trapping her breath in her chest. She'd made it. It was impossible and yet she'd done it.

Kai stood and she stood with him. He took her hand in his and she clung to him. She'd made it because of him. Where she would have given up, he never had.

She followed a step behind him as they walked off the transport. He'd never given up. And because he hadn't, they were on Sai-sen-Sai. So why was she giving up now? Yes, there was little chance of surviving the information retrieval but there was a chance. Yes, there was little chance of the planet surviving an attack by three League destroyers, but there was a chance. Kai wouldn't give up until he lost. If his people were anything like him they wouldn't give up either, so why was she?

She raised her chin, angry with herself. She wasn't a quitter. If she had been, she would never have stolen the information from her father. She would never have tried to outrun a destroyer and she wouldn't have run across the face of YelAsta with Kai. She wasn't going to give up now and if there was a way to win, they would find it.

\* \* \*

Moulina carried her vac back to its storage cupboard. She shoved it into its space and took out the solar-powered duster. At the same time she pocketed two thumbnail-sized disks. She hadn't cleaned the arched entryway of the Palladium in two days. No one would even notice she was there.

She fingered the tiny disks in her pocket as she strolled toward the entryway. Paladin should have sent her to another city the moment he kicked her out of his bed. It wouldn't have changed what was going to happen but it would have proved him more intelligent than she'd ever given him credit for.

\* \* \*

They emerged from the shadow of the transport and were immediately surrounded by a full VanDai guard. There was nothing honorary about the contingent and no one in the docking bay thought there was. Each member of the guard was armed with a hand blaster and VanDai tazer stars.

As they moved across the large, vessel filled complex to a waiting floater, people moved out of their way. Having been raised as the League President's daughter, Genae had been used to a certain status in all her travels but nothing like this. Some of the people who hurried out of their way showed fear, shaking and cowering. Others were more formal, bowing as they moved to the side. What amazed Genae, though, was the respect. Fearful or not, every being inclined their head or placed their hand on their chest or, in the case of a Gelian trader, waved a tentacle.

Two members of the guard stepped into the waiting floater first. Teer stepped in next and Kai lifted her hand to Teer's when the other male reached out. A princess wouldn't have been treated with more care, she was sure. It made her feel warm and protected.

Kai stepped in and the remaining four guardsmen stepped in behind him. All six members of the guard stood around them as they seated themselves. The driver wasted no time. He sent the floater spinning in a tight circle and raced out of the docking bay, wending his way through other floaters and transports, clearly expecting everyone to move out of *his* way.

Genae watched the planet whip by below. The city that surrounded the docking bay wasn't very large, sprawling out in unorganized clusters of buildings and stock piles. Beyond the city was sand. The earth was red-gold, scorched by the sun and lifeless. It smelled hot, dry and dusty and made her nose tickle. It wasn't what she had

expected and she wasn't sure why. She'd never asked Kai about his home planet and hadn't really speculated about it. There hadn't been time.

"This is the Sein desert," Kai explained, leaning close so he didn't have to raise his voice above the wind rushing over the floater's half canopy. "It stretches several hundred kilometers south, north and west."

"What about to the east?"

"It drops away into the Senshi delta."

"The Senshi delta?" She shivered at the exotic sound. As the president's daughter, she'd been exposed to all different species and worlds, yet nothing had ever affected her like this. She felt shivery inside. Everything seemed new and wonderful. She wanted time to explore and learn everything about Kai, his world and his people.

Kai nodded. "It's a huge torrent where all the rivers of this hemisphere come together. It's a wild place. Dangerous and beautiful too."

"I would love to see it." She didn't realize how wistful she sounded.

Kai looked at her and smiled, his expression filled with pride. "I'll take you there when we have more time."

She smiled back at him even as doubts intruded. She wanted to believe that there would be time, that there would be something left in two days, but it was hard. She'd been raised to believe in the ultimate power and invincibility of the League. Changing that mindset would take longer than she had.

Kai slipped his arm around her shoulders and drew her close to his side. She stiffened for a moment before relaxing against him. There was no reason to worry about what anyone else would think or even if they cared. Beside him, having him hold her, was right where she wanted to be. She wasn't going to apologize to anyone about that.

Closing her eyes, she let her head settle on his shoulder. The sound of the wind was peaceful, the hot air draining what little energy she had. If she had money with her, she'd pay the floater's driver to keep going forever, away from the worries and fears that had plagued her for most of a year.

Kai shifted until his body curved around Genae's. He held her cradled against his chest. She felt warm and *right* against him. He'd been responsible for the welfare of the VanDai for years. This was the first time he'd been responsible for one person specifically. One woman. His woman.

He rubbed his chin against the top of her head, enjoying the springy curls catching on the fine hair that covered his chin. It was amazing that someone so small could be so resilient. Not once had she complained about what was happening to her. She worked with him, did what was needed and kept going. Yet her life had been one of privilege until recently. The League President's daughter.

He tensed.

Consciously he forced himself to relax. She wasn't the president's daughter any longer. She was his woman and he wasn't going to wait to claim her. The Mrlin healer who was to extract the information planted in Genae's heart would arrive on Sai-sen-Sai soon. The three League destroyers that had been sighted making their way toward the planet would arrive soon after. He wanted Genae bound to him before anything else happened. His people would take care of her because she had risked so much to get the president's plan to them. As his official mate, though, she would have more rights and more privileges and he wanted that for her if something happened to him. The VanDai vessels had a better chance of standing up against the League destroyers than anyone suspected but the outcome of the coming confrontation was by no means sure.

He rubbed his chin against her hair again and his arm tightened around her. They would be joined within the hour. Paladin would stand with him. There would be no waiting. She was his and he was claiming her.

The low, red-gold buildings of the pride headquarters came into view over a low rise. The compound was deceptively open and had been misjudged in the past as an easy target by rival prides and off-worlders alike. Genae would be safer in Boujara than anywhere else in the universe. Until the information was retrieved, she was a global treasure.

A smile lit his eyes. She probably wouldn't like all the security she would be surrounded by but no one was going to take any chances with her safety. He would see to that personally.

His expression darkened and he looked down at Genae, her face raised slightly to his, her hair a wild mop of black curls, her lashes thick black fans against her cheeks. She might not mind the security at all. No doubt she had been used to having her own guards before she'd run from the president.

He looked back up at Boujara, his expression grim. He could never provide her with the wealth and position of the president. He was a member of Paladin's pride. A VanDai warrior. His life had been and always would be the protection of his planet and people. It was a simple life and more difficult than she was used to but she would come to accept it as she came to love him.

A low moan made him aware of his unsheathed claws digging into her side. Her brows were drawn together in a frown as she shifted against him. He retracted his claws and watched the main gate of the compound open. He wouldn't accept anything less than everything from her. Her body, her heart, her very soul if that were possible.

The floater sped through the gate as it was still opening. It passed through without scraping and zipped to the main building. The driver pulled to a smooth stop and set the vehicle on the ground without jostling any of his passengers.

\* \* \*

Moulina watched the floater settle. She could barely make out the woman cradled in Kai's arms through the thick wall of VanDai warriors guarding her.

Her lips thinned and her nostrils flared in distaste as she watched the group start to exit the floater. She wanted Paladin here. Chances were good no one would be killed but with luck, there would be injuries. If Paladin were one of them, it would be very sweet indeed.

## Chapter 4

### *A Warning Given*

Two guards stepped out of the floater and turned back to help Genae but stepped back when they saw Kai would accept no assistance with his woman.

Kai's heart melted as he looked down at her. The circles under her eyes had gotten bigger and darker each day he'd known her. Her exhaustion had finally caught up with her. Even though she was on an unfamiliar planet among unfamiliar people, she was sound asleep. And he wasn't going to wake her. Anything anyone wanted to know, they would have to talk to him about. When Genae woke, she could answer questions but he wasn't going to let them bother her now.

His jaw set, he caught Genae up in his arms, rose to his feet and stepped out of the floater.

\* \* \*

Moulina watched as Kai lifted the woman into his arms. She wanted to spit. If she weren't the president's daughter, if she didn't have the information they wanted, Kai would have as much use for her as Paladin had for herself. If the woman was already in love with Kai, Moulina was doing her a favor by killing her. And it would be the first step in Paladin's capture, torture and death. She had a League general's promise on that.

Smiling, she took one disk from her pocket, rotated the inner circle of the tiny device and pushed it into a chink of the stone archway. Slowly, she finished dusting that side and moved to the other. She took the second disk, activated it and pushed it into a crack in the stone.



She looked over her shoulder and shook her head as she walked away. All those big VanDai warriors were armed and ready to fight any outside threat. Not one of them thought to look inside their own city. Not even the great Paladin himself.

\* \* \*

A tall, thin VanDai male rushed up to them. "Paladin is waiting in the main conference hall. He wants to see you and the woman immediately."

Kai ignored him and strode away from the Palladium toward his own quarters in one of the outer buildings.

"Kai! Paladin is waiting."

He ignored Jerill's panicked words and kept walking.

Thunder boomed. Rock chips and small boulders flew through the air. Kai threw himself to the ground, rolled and covered Genae with his body. He scanned the courtyard even as he reached for his weapons. The entrance to the main building was gone. The archway was filled with debris. Dust clogged the air.

"Who tried to kill us this time?" Genae asked, her tone tired, almost defeated.

Kai's eyes never stopped moving as he kept her pinned under him. He wasn't fooled by her tone. Her breasts crushed to his chest, he could feel her heart racing. He'd thought she was safe here. This was his home. His sanctuary and someone had defiled it. "I don't know, but I *will* find out," he vowed. Whoever had done this would pay.

Guards raced to surround them. Weapons drawn, they faced out, ready for anything that came against them. Thunder boomed again. Rocks exploded and showered the courtyard.

"Find out who set those charges and where they were detonated from. Bring me the body of the person who did it." The furious roar preceded the huge VanDai warrior who burst through the remaining rubble blocking the destroyed entrance. Black, pitiless eyes searched the courtyard and settled on Kai as he strode toward the small group, a tazer star in one hand and a blaster in the other.

"Get them off the ground," the huge male thundered as he reached them. His eyes never settled. He constantly searched the courtyard, the buildings on one side and the wall on the other.

Hands grabbed Kai's arms and pulled him from the ground. He allowed them to lift him but he never released Genae. He kept one arm locked around her. In his other hand he held his own tazer star. He wanted someone to kill. Someone had tried to hurt Genae again and he wanted them dead.

"Are you hurt?" The huge VanDai's voice was muted thunder as he stepped in front of Kai and Genae, his body completely blocking Genae and doing a good job of blocking Kai. He moved forward and the guards moved with him as a solid wall.

Inside the flesh and blood blockade, Kai kept himself and Genae moving forward. He searched the courtyard but there was nothing and no one to see. Whoever had set off the charges was well hidden if they were even still in the vicinity.

"No. Where to?" Who would betray the pride? He would have bet his life, *had* bet his life and Genae's that there wasn't one warrior who would dishonor the bonds of the group.

"My quarters."

Kai nodded. Paladin didn't worry much about his own security but those who followed him did. His quarters were the most secure in Boujara. If Genae was going to be safe anywhere, it would be there.

Kai kept Genae locked to him with one arm. He made sure she was between himself and Paladin. No one was going to touch her and live. Some VanDai males never found the woman they would formally mate with. He had and he wasn't going to lose her.

Fury raged through him. His own home wasn't secure. He'd brought her to Sai-sen-Sai to keep her safe and she could have died within moments of stepping foot in *his* city. Never releasing his grip on his tazer star, he half carried her up the steps as he followed Paladin.

Paladin stepped over and powered through the debris. Two VanDai warriors rushed forward to help. Kai searched the darker anterior, trusting the men at his back to watch the courtyard. They were all vulnerable and he didn't like it. There could be more charges. Someone could be hidden with a blaster or even farther out with a laser.

With a low rumble, the debris shifted. A huge chunk of rock fell from the ceiling, hit the floor and cracked, the sound earsplitting. Kai felt Genae flinch and his arm tightened around her. His jaw clenched and silently he swore. She should have been safe here. This was his home.

Paladin reached over the rubble and plucked Genae from his grasp. Kai leapt over the massive pile of stone and immediately took her back. He would trust Paladin with his life and often had. He trusted no one with Genae.

"Find the explosives and bring me a body," Paladin ordered as he led the way to the right and down a long hall.

VanDai warriors split from the gathering crowd and converged on the rubble. The crash and thunder of boulders being thrown and hitting the ground, the slithering rush of rubble falling filled the air with noise as dust plumed up in a fine, choking mist.

Genae started coughing and Kai swung her up in his arms as Paladin picked up the pace. Moments later they turned down another hall and halfway down it they stopped. Paladin touched his fingertips to a sensor lock before pressing his palm to it. The door slid open and Paladin, followed by Kai, stepped inside. The door slid shut behind them and Kai set Genae on her feet. His hands tightened into fists as he released her. He didn't want to let her go. He wanted to keep her safe in his arms but he couldn't do that and search for the traitor who had tried to kill her.

His expression turned grim as he looked at her. Her black curls were frosted with a thick coat of dust. Her face was smudged and her dress showed the effects of being flung to the ground. There was a rip over the right side of her ribs.

His eyes narrowed on the raw red mark that showed through the tear.

"Settle her then join me."

He looked at Paladin and nodded. "I want two guards at the door. I'll reset the sensor lock to admit only you, myself and them."

Paladin lifted one brow. "I thought you would demand at least four guards."

"The warriors I want will fight like six."

"Marik and Challen."

Kai nodded.

"Done." Paladin turned and strode through the door as it opened.

Kai looked at Genae and his heart beat harder in his chest. He could have lost her and he hadn't even seen it coming. "I brought you here where I could keep you safe and almost got you killed."

Genae's heart turned over at his words. "You mean I almost got you killed. Again." She reached up and touched his face, brushed her fingers over his high cheekbones, traced the contour of his lips. She couldn't imagine his fierce presence being gone. He was so solid and alive, he burned with a vitality she could only admire and marvel at. It seemed impossible that she could lose him and yet it could happen so easily.

She took a deep, shuddering breath. The League President's influence reached even here. Deep inside it hurt to think that, because of her, Kai's belief in his own people was shaken. The ramifications of what she'd done kept growing. The ripples that had started when she dropped the pebble had turned into a tidal wave.

"I'll have food brought to you. There's a cleansing pool and a bed. Use both."

Genae frowned up at him. "Are you trying to say something about my hygiene?" She tried to sound indignant but the effect was ruined as the left shoulder of her gown slid down and dust wafted into the air.

Kai smoothed his hand over her bare shoulder and pushed the material off her other shoulder. His eyes darkened and his eyelids lowered. One claw extended and he ran the razor sharp tip over her dress down the center of her body. There was a slight hiss as the material split.

Pushing the material aside, he studied her breasts. Satisfaction made his golden eyes glow as her nipples hardened, jutting toward him in silent offering.

"I'll help you get cleaned up when I come back."

She shivered at the dark sensuality of his voice. "I'll take you up on that," she whispered, her throat tight with her own need. Her heart pounded in her chest as shivers coursed down her spine and tightened her breasts.

Kai grasped her breasts and pulled her to him. He swooped down, caught her mouth with his. He forced her lips apart and entered her with his tongue. He *took* her, his breath replacing hers as his tongue dueled with hers and his hands kneaded her breasts.

He wedged his leg between hers and lifted her off her feet. She cried into his mouth as she rocked on his hard thigh, grinding herself against him.

Abruptly, Kai lifted her away from him. His eyes blazed down at her. His grip on her arms was almost punishing. "If you need anything, pull this lever." He walked to a sculpture of a great stalking cat and grasped the long tail.

"What will that do? Set off all sorts of alarms?" She glared at him. She wanted him to finish what he'd started, not leave her alone.

"Yes." He strode toward her, leaned down and kissed her, his hand grasping the nape of her neck. "Stay in this room," he ordered.

Genae opened her mouth but never got to respond as he strode away. Her breasts bare and aching, her vagina empty and weeping, she watched the door close behind him.

## Chapter 5

### *More Than Threats*

Genae watched the door for long minutes after he was gone. Why couldn't they just be together? Why couldn't her father be the man he was supposed to be? Eyes closed, she clenched her fists and fought back a scream. *Why?*

Her thoughts spun back to Kai. Her chest tight, she cupped her breasts. Her breath caught as her nipples pressed against her palms. She wanted him. She wanted his hands on her. His thumbs rubbing her nipples, his claws scraping over them, light and teasing with a hint of danger that made her insides quiver.

Still holding her breasts, she opened her eyes and looked around the room for the first time. It was stark. The floor bare, nothing on the walls except the one sculpture and it definitely had a purpose.

She wrinkled her nose, turned and whistled. Kai had called the bath a cleansing pool. It would be better named a lake. It was huge. The bed, placed in a recessed alcove, was built along the same gargantuan lines. There was no way she could sleep in it on her own. She'd never find her way back out.

She breathed a sigh of relief as some of the sexual tension started to recede. Kai had a powerful effect on her. He made it hard to think or reason or even breathe.

Hands cupped to her breasts, she walked around the room. No doubt he'd left her in a shredded gown for two reasons. She wasn't likely to leave without clothes and when he returned she would certainly be accessible.

She felt heat climb her cheeks and smiled. She didn't mind being accessible for him. But she didn't like being at a disadvantage and being naked when someone was trying to kill her felt distinctly like a disadvantage.

It took two circuits around the room before she discovered its false wall. Set at an odd angle it gave the illusion of being flush with the apparently adjoining wall but was actually free standing.

She walked around the end and her jaw dropped. One side was a garment storage area. Clothes were hung, draped and shelved. It was the other side, though, that was truly impressive.

Weapons lined the wall. Blasters. Tazer stars. Laser whips. Laser rifles. Frelik charges and other devices she couldn't name. She started to reach out and stopped. What kind of man kept an arsenal in his bedroom?

She hurried across the room and reached for a shirt.

"This room is like the VanDai. Full of hidden depths."

Genae stopped short and spun around at the sound of the voice behind her. Her hands flew to cover her breasts as she saw the woman watching her. "Who are you?" She looked past the woman but there was nothing to see except the wall.

"Moulina. I'm in charge of the domestic side of the household. And until two days ago I was Paladin's mistress."

Genae tried to smile. Moulina was the most feline being she'd ever seen. Beautiful and overtly sensual. Men would have a hard time walking past the woman without salivating. Her figure was purely feminine. Large breasts, tiny waist, full hips. Her lips were full, her eyes half-slumberous and her hair a tumble of waving curls.

She was also the kind of woman no other woman would ever be comfortable around. There was something about her that *seethed*.

"Did someone send you to see if I needed something?" Even as Genae asked the question, the hairs on the back of her neck stood up. Kai had said he was resetting the door lock for himself, Paladin and the two guards. How had this woman gotten in?

Moulina smiled, the expression sly. "Poor little rich girl," she purred. "Used to having others see to your every need. Your time with Kai must have been hard for you. Having to fend for yourself. No one to fetch and carry for you."

Genae shrugged. Her heart thundered in her chest and it was hard to breathe. The safest place on the planet and she was going to get killed in it.

"You set the charges?"

Moulina's smile grew. "There was a chance you would be caught in the blast but it wasn't likely. Having Paladin put you here? The explosion made that a certainty."

Genae edged toward the wall of weapons, her hands still covering her breasts.

"Don't." Moulina's tone was sharp, her lips curled in a sneer. She lifted one hand and waved a tazer star at Genae. "I'm going to kill you. It's up to you if I hurt you first."

Genae froze. Her heart leapt into her throat, choking her. Where was Kai? "Why would you betray your people? The information I carry will keep entire species alive. It will keep *your* species alive. Being Paladin's mistress couldn't be worth that much."

Moulina's eyes narrowed and she hissed. "His mistress? I wanted to be his *mate*. On Sai-sen-Sai he is a king. As his mate, I would have been a queen." She stepped forward, her eyes glinting as she lifted her other hand and showed Genae a silver, palm-sized device. "You've never been poor, or hungry, or unwanted, have you, Miss Privileged? You've never worried about where you would go or what would become of you if the man you were with threw you away."

Genae backed up as Moulina moved forward. The other woman was VanDai. She was taller and bigger. A fight would be unfairly balanced in the other woman's favor but she wasn't going to let herself be killed without fighting back. If she got the chance.

"I can ensure you wealth and a place of your own. A place where no one could ever throw you out."

Moulina laughed, the sound cold and grating, making Genae wince. "And how would you do that? You'll be dead, this world destroyed and all the species of the universe your father considers inferior will be gone."

"It doesn't have to be that way. Even if I die during the information retrieval, I can give you what you want. My holdings, my wealth. You can have it all."

"You think that's all I want? Wealth?"



Genae backed around the end of the room and edged back toward the opening. Moulina's brows rose. "You won't get away."

Genae shrugged. "I have to try." She had to do more than try. Somehow she had to get out of the room. She hadn't come this far to lose everything.

"You think you can buy your life? You think you know what I want?"

Genae threw up her hands. Who cared if her breasts were bare? If she was dead, it didn't matter. "You said you wanted to be a queen."

"I said I wanted to be Paladin's queen."

"And he didn't want you." Genae almost groaned as the words left her mouth.

A low, threatening hiss issued from between Moulina's bared teeth. "He'll live to regret what he's done."

Genae bit her lip and managed to keep her mouth shut. Telling the woman she could see why Paladin wouldn't want to be permanently tied to a heartless, honorless bitch wasn't going to help.

"What did my father promise you? And why would you think he'll allow you to live when every other member of your species is terminated?" She needed the advantage of even a moment more to get into the other room first.

She edged toward the opening into the hidden room. Her heart beat so hard it shook her.

"You want a head start?"

Genae's heart stuttered. What was the woman, a mind reader? She swallowed but there was no saliva in her mouth. "What do you get for killing me?"

"I get to see Paladin tortured and killed." The VanDai woman smiled and licked her lips. "I get to choose the manner of his torture and death." She undulated where she stood.

Genae shuddered. The woman's words made the gesture obscene.

"Your father might hate and fear what he calls non-human species but he *loves* sex with us. He'll have his own little alien brothel. He'll hate himself more every time he visits it but he won't be able to stay away. And those of us who are good enough will

have more power than he ever realizes. With your death I get everything I want. And I want Paladin's hide." Moulina closed her eyes and Genae ran.

"You can't escape."

Genae blocked Moulina's words as she sprinted toward the door. The tazer star flew past her. The small weapon super-heated as it spun through the air. It burned into the stone of the wall with a hissing sound.

At the last possible moment Genae turned and leapt toward the sculpture Kai had shown her. Something hit her left shoulder. Pain seared through her. Her heart stuttered and swelled. She could feel it expanding.

Her fingers brushed the great cat's tail as she fell. Her vision faded. She hit the ground hard, unsure if the blaring she heard was from alarms or the pain exploding in her own head.

\* \* \*

"How many VanDai will be here in ti..." Kai broke off as the alarm from Paladin's room pealed through the Palladium. He started running, fury at himself spurring him on. He'd left her alone. Someone had tried to kill her and he'd left her alone.

Swearing, he raced toward Paladin's door where Challen was deactivating the secure-lock. As the door opened, he rushed through it.

His heart stopped when he saw Genae. She lay unmoving on the floor, her face white. He caught a flash of color from the corner of his eye as he dropped to the floor and reacted. He whipped a tazer star from his belt and threw it, his aim deadly. He heard a feminine scream but didn't care as he dropped to his knees beside Genae. He pressed his head to her chest. A sick feeling grew in his stomach. There was no heartbeat, no rise and fall with each breath.

*He'd left her alone.*

## Chapter 6

### *Lessons Learned*

Paladin, seconds behind Kai, saw Moulina fall as Kai dropped beside the president's daughter. He understood immediately what had happened. He strode across the room and lifted Moulina from the floor. The wound in her side was gaping but there was no blood. The tazer star had cauterized as it sliced through her.

"Why?" His tone was stark, his expression cold.

Moulina smiled even as she gasped for breath. Her body shuddered with pain as the damage inflicted by the tazer star spread through her, the burn expanding. "To hurt you."

Paladin's face turned to stone. He hadn't made her his mate and she had gotten even. "Take her." He handed her to one of his warriors. "Make her end swift."

Moulina's eyes were cold. "No mercy?"

He stared at her for one long moment before turning away. "A swift death is mercy."

"Get a healer!" Kai's voice thundered through the room.

Paladin crouched beside him as a healer, already summoned, ran toward them. Kai lifted the material of Genae's top and covered her breasts with it. A small silver disk lay on the floor under one wisp of material. He lifted it and turned it over. "What is it?"

The healer, a huge VanDai male, plucked the disk from his hand. "It's a cardiac stabilizer." He looked at the setting and grimaced. "It must have felt like someone crushed her heart."

Kai's hands clenched into fists. "Heal her." It was a demand and an order. He wanted Genae healed. He wanted her in his arms, her heart beating strong and steady

and the male in front of him had to do it. If he had to hold a blaster to the healer's head, he would. He wanted her healed now.

The healer frowned at Kai.

Paladin leaned forward and caught the healer's gaze with his own. "Do what you can, Eln."

The healer nodded but a muscle worked in his jaw as he gave Kai a narrow-eyed look. He set the disk he'd taken from Kai down and took an instrument from his belt. He pressed it to Genae's chest and waited. Seconds later his lips thinned and he shook his head.

He looked at Kai as he picked up the small disk. "The setting on this could have made her heart explode. Now it's the only thing that will keep her alive." He pushed the material off her left breast and pressed the disk to Genae's chest to the left of her sternum, over her heart. He adjusted the device's micro-controls then pressed in on either side of the small sphere.

Genae's body jerked.

Kai lunged at the healer and Paladin grabbed him. He wanted to tear the other VanDai apart for hurting her. What did he think he was doing?

The healer finished adjusting the cardiac stabilizer as Kai broke free of Paladin's hold. He grabbed Genae and sat on the floor with her held tight in his arms while the guards filed from the room.

"Who tried to get me this time?"

Startled by the sound of her voice, Kai shifted Genae away from him enough to look down at her. She was alive. Pain splintered through him and he clutched her to his chest. He owed the healer more than he could ever repay. Genae was alive.

As the healer left, he stopped in the door and looked at them. "The stabilizer could keep her alive indefinitely, but what she really needs is a healer who specializes in human hearts. I don't know exactly how much damage was done but it was considerable. As long as the stabilizer is in place, though, she'll be fine."

"What can't she do?" Kai demanded, his arms tightening around Genae. He needed more than to hold her but he wouldn't touch her if it wasn't safe.

The faintest of smiles lit the other male's eyes. "Just be careful not to jar her too hard."

Genae felt heat rush into her cheeks and there was nothing she could do about it but hide. She turned her face into Kai's shoulder and stayed there. And as her naked breasts came into contact with his hard chest, her mortification grew.

Several minutes later, Kai stroked her back. "How long are you going to hide there?"

Genae refused to budge. "I thought we weren't going to do the naked thing except in private."

A low rumble vibrated Kai's chest and she wriggled, enjoying the sensation against her breasts. "Don't growl at me. You're the one who destroyed the top of my dress."

Without answering, Kai lifted her and set her on her feet. Her knees almost buckled. Only Kai's quick reflexes kept her from falling. Somehow he kept her upright as he surged to his feet. Without pausing he caught her up in his arms and strode to the bed.

Genae smiled up at him. "Something else we keep doing," she murmured but she wasn't complaining. She liked being in Kai's arms.

Kai laid her on the bed and quickly stripped off her ruined gown. He searched her for any injuries, rolled her over and then back. His gaze raked her as his hands searched her body.

He made her feel like a lab specimen. She glared up at him. "You could have just asked me if I hurt anywhere."

Kai grunted. His expression darkened as he looked at the strange disk attached to her chest. "This should never have happened." He blamed himself because there was no one else to blame. Anywhere else in the universe he would never have left her alone.

Because he had thought Sai-two was safe, he hadn't been prepared for the explosion. Because he'd believed Paladin's quarters were safe, he hadn't looked for an attack. Because he had trusted the people of Boujara, he hadn't looked for an enemy among his own people.

He stripped out of his clothes, climbed onto the bed and lay down. He pulled Genae over him and positioned her legs between his, his hard cock caught between them. He guided her head down to his chest. "Sleep."

She rolled her eyes and shook her head. At least he hadn't ordered her to eat, bathe and then sleep. She was more tired than she could ever remember being. She smiled at the thought. She'd thought she was exhausted when they had reached the *Therik* after their marathon across YelAsta. She hadn't known what tired was. She had just enough energy to close her eyes. Maybe.

Slowly, she lowered her eyelids. Yep. Just enough energy for that. Kai pulled her closer and she didn't even make a murmur. She didn't have enough energy for that.

\* \* \*

Kai woke instantly. He didn't know what had disturbed him but something wasn't right. Eyes half-lidded, he looked around the room, but nothing in the room was different from when he'd taken Genae to bed. He opened his senses and still, there was nothing.

Reflexively his hand tightened on Genae's breast. He'd gone to sleep with her heart beating against his and woken holding her breast. A smile lit his eyes but quickly dimmed. His own heart skipped a beat as he realized what was missing. He couldn't feel her heartbeat. There was no rise and fall of her breast with each breath.

His heart gave a body shaking thump. He broke out in a sweat and his hand tightened on her soft flesh. It felt like he was being ripped in two. She was dead.

His claws sprang free and a roar built in his throat. No! The healer had told them the cardiac stabilizer would keep her alive indefinitely. She couldn't be gone.

Genae grumbled a protest and shifted in his arms.

Kai's world narrowed to her. Need slammed into him. There was no thought, no rational process. The beast rose inside him and took over. He rolled Genae onto her back and forced her legs apart. Growling, his focus centered solely on the folds of her sex, he grasped his cock and pressed the head against her small opening. The sight of her tight entrance flowering to accept his broad girth freed the beast inside. She was his and he was taking her. She was alive and he would feel her response.

Genae moaned and blinked. She grimaced as he penetrated her, his penis huge in her unprepared sheath. She writhed against him, rolled her hips trying to relieve the pressure. She bit her lip and groaned.

"Kai?"

He grunted in response, his expression harsh as he forged deeper.

She spread her legs wide trying to accommodate him. "Kai? What..."

He surged forward the last few inches. She arched up, the pressure immense, so intense it stole her breath and made her heart race. His length burned inside her.

Kai felt every tremor around his cock, every quiver of her stomach against his abdomen. It wasn't enough. He needed to feel her lose control. He would settle for nothing less than the life affirming clenching of total release.

Somewhere deep inside he realized she wasn't aroused. Not completely. He had to arouse her if he was going to make her come. He had to feel the great soul-shattering release of her orgasm. He had to know she was with him, a part of him.

He reached between them and flicked and rubbed her clit. There was no finesse. No rhythm. Just focused attention as he watched her clit blossom, its color darkening as it rose to his touch. His claws, partially extended, flexed out fully. With narrowed eyes he raked the small nub with great care.

He groaned as her sheath spasmed around him and her dew started to flow.

It still wasn't enough.

He pulled out of her. Thrust back in hard and fast. There was a wet, slurping sound as her sheath sucked at him. And still he played with her clit. Rubbing. Flicking.

Genae bit down on her lip and tasted blood. She arched against him. Her legs wrapped around him. Her hands clutched at the bed. She couldn't stop the burning slide as he pounded into her. She didn't want to stop it. She felt him everywhere, in the huge, throbbing length of him as he buried himself in her over and over; in the tight pinched nipples that needed to feel the nip of his teeth, the deep pressure of his sucking; in her clit throbbing and pulsing at the apex of her sex, tortured by his constant attention.

He pushed her higher and higher yet somehow kept her from climaxing. She writhed against him, rose into each thrust, impaling herself as much as being impaled. She wanted to come, damn him. She needed release.

He slammed into her and ground himself against her. He grasped her clit and pinched, not once but over and over again, milking the small protrusion.

Genae screamed. Her body tried to arch but she couldn't move, pinned beneath his great weight.

He kept grinding against her, into her, never losing contact with her clit. She writhed and gasped, cried and swore. Her inner muscles tightened, tightened more, clenched and she screamed again.

Kai shouted, his cum spewing from him in great spurts of hot, sticky fluid. He collapsed on top of her. He stayed imbedded in her as she quivered and the deep clenching continued.

Shocked, her mind was only slowly able to focus. She stroked his back and consciously forced herself to breathe. What happened? He'd had her many times before but this time she felt *taken*. Branded. Claimed? There weren't words to describe what she felt. It was as if he had possessed her. She closed her eyes as her body shook under the lash of an aftershock. Possessed. Yes. That was what he'd done, possessed her.

She fought to take a deep breath against his weight crushing her into the bed. Her legs had fallen to either side of him and she couldn't move them if she wanted to. The only reason she could force her arms to move was to comfort him. And why he would need comforting she didn't know, but she could feel that he did.



It was that and the fact that she couldn't quit touching him. Her nipples poked into his furry chest. His back was smooth, the heavy muscles rippling under her stroking hands. His breath was slowly returning to normal as his heart beat against her in a deep, steady rhythm.

"Are you all right?" His voice, a low rumble, made his chest vibrate against her. His breath was hot against her neck and he didn't lift his head to look at her.

"I'm... good." She was more than good but again she didn't have the words to describe the deep satisfaction and wonder she was feeling. She was his. If she'd had any lingering doubts, they were gone. She belonged to Kai.

She thrust her fingers into his golden mane and massaged his scalp. "What happened?" Her voice was soft and caressing.

He pushed up on his forearms, the position thrusting his pelvis more tightly against hers as he looked down at her. His gaze burned into her, the stark emotion painful to look at. His soul was bared to her, and it hurt deep inside to know he cared for her like he did. Without words she knew and it was the most precious and most terrifying gift she'd ever been given. She wanted to keep him safe, to guard his heart, to never let him be hurt but she wasn't going to have that chance. She was going to be the one who destroyed him.

The sudden ache in her chest threatened to steal her breath again.

"I woke up and I thought I'd lost you."

His words tore at her heart. He'd thought he'd lost her. What would he do when he did lose her?

"You didn't lose me," she whispered. She wanted to reassure him. She wanted to be able to tell him everything would be fine, but she couldn't. She wouldn't lie to him and she couldn't lie to herself even though she wanted to.

"Roll over." Her voice was quiet.

He didn't move, just continued to stare down at her.

"Roll over." She frowned at him as she pushed at his broad chest. Her fingers flexed into his hard muscles as she relished the feel of him, so warm and solid, larger than life really. He was the kind of male who became a legend.

He returned her frown with interest but levered himself off her, his cock pulling free of her tight sheath with an audible pop. Genae winced, his cock dragging against her swollen inner tissues almost painful and yet at the same time innervating.

He settled on his side and she had to push again to get him to lie down on his back. When he returned from fighting the League destroyers... She shuddered as the word -- if -- tried to intrude. He *would* return, and when he did, she wouldn't be here. Everything she had to give, she had to give now. For them, there would be no tomorrow.

She traced his face with shaking hands, memorizing every curve and hollow. She wanted everything about him, how he looked, smelled, tasted, felt and sounded, so completely burned into her subconscious that even when anesthetized for the retrieval, he would fill her senses.

A smile tugged at her lips. He was still the most beautiful male she'd ever seen and that was saying a lot considering all the VanDai males she'd seen. They were a magnificent race and Kai was the most impressive of them all. He made her want to stop what she was doing.

"Why did you steal your father's plan?"

She jumped, startled by his question. Had she spoken aloud? Was he reading her mind? It was more likely they were thinking the same things because of what was coming. And hadn't she asked herself the same question a thousand times?

"When I found out, I thought about ignoring it, pretending I'd never heard of it, trying to make myself believe it couldn't be true. That would have been the easiest. Just go on with my life and never look outside my own narrow existence."

"Why didn't you?"

That was the harder question. Her heavy lashes lowered, hiding her eyes from him but hiding wasn't something she did well and she wasn't going to hide any part of herself from him.

Chin lifted, she met his intent stare straight on. "I couldn't have lived with myself if I did nothing."

"And?"

She closed her eyes and took a deep, steadying breath. "And I had to do something for my brother." She opened her eyes, met his steady stare and smiled.

"Your brother?"

"Yes. The beautiful little boy my *father* didn't let live." Her hands fisted and she glared at Kai. How could a man kill his own child? How could he hate enough to destroy his own flesh and blood?

Kai grasped her head and pulled her face down to his. His lips were hard, forcing hers apart so his tongue could plunge deep. She was breathless when he released her, thinking of nothing but him. She started to rise off the bed but he clasped her to him.

"Come with me." She tried to push away from him again.

Kai's eyes narrowed in warning. "I want you right here in my arms."

She glowered down at him. "I want you in the bathing pool with me so I can do wicked things to your body."

His brows lifted. "Wicked?"

She felt the heat rush into her face but didn't let embarrassment stop her as she smiled. "Wonderfully wicked."

Kai sat up, lifted her off the bed and quickly stood beside her. She couldn't look away from his half erect penis. It made her mouth water and the wet heat between her legs run. She'd never dreamed she would enjoy a man's cock in her mouth, his taste as he spilled himself in her. With Kai, the thought made her burn. She wanted everything with him. Everything in every way.

Taking his hand, she led him to the huge pool and took the steps into it first. His free hand cupped her ass and squeezed as she touched the bottom of the pool and the clean gel rippled just below her breasts.

She wriggled against him and started to lean back before she caught herself. This was for his pleasure, not her own, though she would enjoy every moment. Touching him was a pure sensual delight.

With one last wriggle of her bottom, she turned to face him. He towered over her. His shoulders were so wide they made her feel small. She ran her hands over the hard planes of his chest and closed her eyes. His skin was rougher than hers, the hair on his chest more furry than coarse.

And his smell...

She took a deep breath, trying to inhale the warm musk of maleness that was uniquely his. It was a wonder that everywhere he went, he didn't end up with women throwing themselves on him. Given half a chance, she would.

"What are you doing?"

She looked up from smelling him and had to smile at the quizzical expression on his face. "Memorizing you. How you feel. How you smell. How you look."

"Everything about you is fixed in my mind." His eyes caressed her face, skimmed down her neck and chest and lingered on her breasts. He murmured a low sound of satisfaction as her nipples hardened, their color deepening as blood rushed into them.

Her hands rose to her breasts and she cupped them, lifting them to offer to him. She licked her lips as she looked at his mouth. He lowered his head and sipped one breast into his mouth, the pressure light, his tongue flicking the swollen tip.

Her head fell back and she clasped his head with her hands. She felt every gentle tug, every stroke of his tongue from her nipple to her heels. Her sheath clenched and her fingers massaged his scalp.

He moved to her other breast and sucked all around her nipple, drawing on her flesh but never taking the pebbled nub.

Desperate, making a low keening sound she'd never heard herself make before, she reached down and grasped his cock. If he was going to torment her she was going to return the torment.

She wrapped one hand around him and pumped. She used the hard, fast pace she knew he liked. Her other hand weighed and played with his balls. The clean gel left no trace of pre-cum but in her mind she could picture the welling of silky white fluid in the slit of his broad head.

"Kai --"

He latched onto her breast, stalling her words and thoughts and making her cry out. Her body jerked. Her hands tightened on his cock. He sucked hard. His hips thrust at her, his cock twitched in her fisted hand.

Genae grasped him tighter, her lips drawn back and her head moving from side to side. His mouth attached to her breast, sucking, pulling, crushing, was more than she could stand. She grimaced as the pulling sensation arrowed down to her womb. She melted inside as every muscle in her body knotted.

Her mouth opened, her cry silent as a fierce orgasm ravaged her body, driven by his mouth on her breast.

Kai finally released her. He didn't want to, but his cock throbbed with the need for attention. He knew his appetite was driven by fear but he didn't care. He was VanDai and he would face even this straight on.

Genae lay half bowed over his arm. His mouth curved up in a satisfied smile as he looked at her. Her left breast was red from his fierce attention, her nipple swollen and almost bruised looking.

His cock jerked between them. He wanted her hands on him again. He wanted more than that. He wanted her mouth.

Lifting her in his arms, he strode to the edge of the pool. It was slightly shallower there. The perfect height for him to sit on the rim as she loved him with her mouth.

He lowered her legs and held her until he was sure her feet were solidly placed on the bottom of the pool and she could keep herself upright. He took a step away from her, turned and levered himself up to sit on the side of the pool.

He studied her face as he grasped his cock. Her eyes were dark and dreamy. Her expression soft, but it was her mouth that caught and held his attention. Full and softly pink, he knew it would become puffy and red after she sucked him, her lips rubbing against his cock as her mouth swallowed him.

She licked her lips and a shudder raced through him. His balls tightened. He looked down and saw pearly liquid crowning the great head of his penis.

He opened his mouth to tell her that drop of life was for her but he never got the chance. She swooped down, her tongue swirled his essence from his cock, and she swallowed him deep. Deeper than she'd ever taken him before.

Kai braced himself on his arms, elbows locked, and watched her. Her head bobbed as she tried to swallow him. Her lips rode up and down his length, stretched by his girth.

His breath broke as she retreated, sucking and licking the head of his cock as if it were candy. He fought the great spurts of cum threatening to explode from him but fed her with small wellings he couldn't withhold.

The sight of her lapping up his offering, licking and suckling, the sound of her happy murmurs and noisy slurping drove him to the brink.

"Take me deeper," he ordered and grasped her head to ensure she did it. The beast inside rose and he thrust into her mouth, fucking her with fierce, short jabs.

"Suck me," he directed, his voice guttural, and groaned when she did it.

"Suck harder."

His face contorted as she tried to suck his soul from his cock. He grabbed her hand, forced it around his cock and held it in place as he rode into her mouth. His fingers laced with hers, both squeezing as her mouth took him and he thrust.

"Yes!" He yelled his release as the inferno raced through him. He pulsed into her mouth, came harder as he watched her take him. Even when he was spent, she sucked, working his softening flesh with mouth and lips and hands.

Kai let his head drop to his chest. If someday he forgot everything else, he knew he would remember this moment. Sated, content, even happy. His woman giving him everything and the world around them quiet in spite of what was to come.

He kneaded her scalp and slowly drew her head back, pulling his cock from her avid mouth. She murmured a protest and he wanted to howl his own. In her mouth or her cunt was where he wanted his cock to be.

His heart rate settled as he lifted Genae out of the pool to sit beside him. She immediately leaned into him, her eyes drifting shut. He laid her back on the floor, his hands smoothing over her breasts and stomach when she mumbled a protest without opening her eyes.

Slowly, his legs more unsteady than they had ever been before, Kai rose to his feet. He admired Genae stretched naked at his feet, lust kicking hard and fast. He savored the burn of it even as he cursed his undisciplined body. They had only hours. If either of them was to survive what was to come, they needed sleep, not more sex.

Reaching down, he scooped her up in his arms and strode to the bed. He settled her before climbing onto the bed and settling himself beside her. When he had her wrapped in his arms, held tight to his chest and one of his legs pinning both of hers, he breathed a contented sigh.

## Chapter 7

### *The Gathering*

A strident tone filled the room. Kai felt Genae jump but his arms tight around her and his leg pinning her to the bed kept her from moving.

“Kai. The *Zolsum* has arrived. Ryvyn is transporting the Mriln healer to the surface. They’ll be here within the hour.” Paladin’s voice was like a physical presence in the room.

“How far out are the League ships?”

He watched Genae’s eyes close and her face crumple. She wrapped her arms around him and held tight. She cared, and that was good. She was afraid, and that wasn’t.

“The destroyers will be in orbit by the time the retrieval begins.”

Kai crushed Genae against him. The Mriln healer would be working on her heart. A heart that had already been weakened. His and the other two VanDai ships would have to keep the destroyers away from the planet. Even one strike could make the difference between life and death for Genae if it disrupted the process at a critical moment.

His eyes narrowed as he stared at the ceiling as if he could see through it and into space where the League ships were. With the information Genae carried, the balance of power in the universe was about to change.

Deep satisfaction welled inside him and pride in the woman he held. His woman. Because of her, everything the VanDai had done to keep the president from wresting power from the planets of the League and destroying lives would mean something.



"We'll meet you in the communications room." Kai loosened his grip on Genae as he spoke. They would have to be ready. Three destroyers against three VanDai vessels. It would be interesting.

He rolled off the bed, stood up and reached for Genae. He lifted her in his arms, kissed her once; a hard, thorough claiming of lips, tongue and teeth. When he lifted his head, his expression was arrogantly satisfied. He let her legs slide down his body, being sure she stayed in contact with him the whole time, her belly prodded by his erection.

Genae stepped back and he let her go. He was amazed at the rush of color into her cheeks. That she could be embarrassed by anything, especially something as simple as his hard cock poking her belly, amazed him.

"What should I wear?"

Kai's eyes darkened with instant arousal. A simple question and it made him throb. He'd have to learn to control that when they were in public. A muscle jumped in his jaw as he looked down at her breasts with their swollen nipples. He reached out and cupped the full globes. He rolled the distended tips with his thumbs. "You should wear me." He squeezed her tender flesh, making her breath catch and her nipples stand out even more.

Genae's head fell back and her eyes closed. Her breathing was fast and shallow and when she spoke, she sounded breathless. "I don't think that would work. The healer might find it hard to work if you're attached to my breasts."

Kai released her breasts, ran his hands down her sides and around her flanks so he could cup and squeeze her ass as he drew her tight against him once more. Her skin was smooth and soft, her body small and tight. He would have to keep a tight rein on her when this was over or someone would steal her away.

He pushed the disturbing thought away. No one would take Genae anywhere without him.

"The Mriln are inventive. The healer could find a way."

Genae kissed his chest before pushing against him so he would let her go. "You still haven't answered my question of what to wear. I don't have any clothes here and I don't want to run around naked *or* wearing you."

Kai's hands clenched but he let her get away. He strode into Paladin's secret room and came back with clothes for both of them. Genae didn't ask how women's clothes had come to be in Paladin's room and Kai didn't volunteer the information.

As covertly as she could, Genae watched Kai dress while she got herself into the loose, flowing gown he'd found for her. She loved the way his muscles bunched and rippled when he moved. She bit her lip to keep from smiling when he had to tuck his erection into his pants. When he grimaced, she couldn't help but laugh.

Kai's expression was dangerous when he looked at her. "You think it's funny?"

Genae, still smiling, nodded. He might look dangerous but she knew better. He would never hurt her and he would do anything in his power to make sure nothing else hurt her.

That thought wiped the smile from her face. She couldn't let him find out how dangerous the retrieval was. Especially not now. His attention had to stay focused completely on the League destroyers.

"What is it?"

Hard hands clamped down on her shoulders. Startled, she blinked up at him. "What?"

"You looked sad, almost as if you were in pain. I'll call the healer to look at that cardiac stabilizer."

She caught his arm as he started to turn away. He looked over his shoulder at her.

"I'm fine, Kai. I was thinking about the destroyers. It wasn't my heart."

Kai turned, wrapped his arms around her and held her tight to his chest. She felt the instant hardening of his cock but neither one of them acknowledged it. This was a time for reassurances, not sex.

"Have faith in your mate. If I didn't think we had a chance, you would be light years away from here. If I couldn't protect you from the League, you wouldn't be here."

Genae smiled and rubbed her face against his chest. One thing Kai didn't lack was confidence. Then again, why would he? From what she'd seen, there hadn't been anything that could stand in his way. Maybe the same would be true now.

"Ready?"

Stepping back, she straightened her shoulders, lifted her chin and nodded. It was time. Everything that had happened had brought her to this moment. If...

No. She wasn't going to think if. When the information was retrieved, her father's plan would be stopped. So many people had already died. There would be no others.

Kai walked to the door and disabled the security lock. As it slid open, she walked toward him out of the room. The two VanDai guards stepped in front of her, barring her from leaving and anyone from getting close to her.

"To the communications room."

Both men nodded at Kai's curt words. They turned and marched off.

Kai's hand settled at the base of Genae's spine and urged her forward. Warmth seeped into her from his hand and she realized how cold she'd become. This was it. Impossible as it seemed, this was it.

\* \* \*

They walked through the huge corridors and people stepped out of their way. Genae didn't blame them. The two VanDai guards leading the way looked as if they wanted an excuse to fight.

She looked up at Kai and shivered. His expression was just as harsh as the other two VanDai yet his hand at the small of her back was gentle. He always made her feel safe.

The two VanDai stopped outside the communications room. Kai urged Genae through the surprisingly narrow door and into a room that had her gasping for breath even as she rubbed her arms against the chill air. The room was filled, almost literally,

from floor to ceiling with equipment. Aisles too narrow for more than one VanDai to walk down at a time wended through the machine canyons.

And it was cold. Chill bumps rose on her arms and her nipples hardened to painful points. Not the most comfortable of things to happen in a room full of observant VanDai males. She grimaced but managed to keep from crossing her arms over her chest and drawing even more attention to herself.

Paladin came toward them out of the maze. His shoulders were canted at an awkward angle, too wide to walk through the narrow space without turning slightly.

"How long until the healer arrives?" Kai asked.

Paladin grunted as he wedged his shoulders between two pieces of equipment to face them. "Twenty minutes."

"We won't have time to get to the docking port and up to the ships before the destroyers reach Sai-two space."

"We'll use molecular transportation."

Kai nodded, apparently not surprised while Genae was shocked. Kai had explained to her that the inability for anyone to molecularly transport to the surface was the backbone of Sai-sen-Sai security. Yet now, when League destroyers were entering their space, they were going to disable their greatest security measure.

Even as she thought it, she wanted to kick herself. If the League won and the planet was destroyed, there wouldn't be a need to keep anyone from transporting down.

Minutes dragged by as she squeezed herself against the door to keep from getting smashed by the huge VanDai males moving around the room.

She had no idea how much time passed when the door behind her opened and she almost fell through. Hard hands caught her and set her on her feet. She looked over her shoulder and up and her breath caught in her throat. The VanDai male standing over her was the most sensual looking being she'd ever seen. His mane was black, his eyes topaz and his skin bronze. His lips were thin with an almost cruel cast that only added to his dangerous sexual air.

"You're mine." Kai spun her and wrapped his arms around her, her back to his chest.

Genae's lips twitched but she managed to keep from smiling. He had to know there was no reason to be jealous but his possessiveness sent warm thrills chasing through her. "Was I drooling?" she asked, her voice a whisper.

His fingers flexed against her stomach. "Almost."

"You can't blame me," she murmured. "He's beautiful."

Sharp teeth nipped her neck as his claws teased her stomach.

"You're sexier," she assured him. She wanted to rub herself against him but there was no way to do it without everyone seeing.

"If you two are finished with your foreplay, I need to speak to Paladin."

Genae gasped at the beautiful stranger's cold tone and harsh words.

"Frustrating trip?" Kai asked.

Genae looked from Kai to the stranger and back. There was an undertone to Kai's voice she didn't understand but apparently the other male did. He grimaced and nodded.

"Let me introduce you to Llaryn, the Mriln healer I brought back with me." He stepped to one side and motioned to the woman behind him.

"I didn't mean to be a frustration to you, Ryvn."

Genae was speechless. The woman had the melodic voice of all her species. She was tall, over six feet by at least two inches, yet she was the most fragile looking woman Genae had ever seen. The most fragile and the most beautiful.

Her eyes were huge, the pupils a darker shade of lavender than the iris, another Mriln trait. Her elaborately plaited hair fell to her waist in a flowing fall of black silk. She was pale, her features made up of gentle curves and angles that made Genae think of angels.

Ryvn merely growled a wordless response to the Mriln healer's words.

"Frustrating indeed," Kai said as Ryvn forced his way past them.

Genae elbowed him in the side and winced. There was no give to the man. Every inch of him was solid muscle.

"Paladin." Ryvn's tone sounded angry and overly loud in the confined space. "Your Mriln healer is here."

Paladin's roar came from the other side of the room. "Get what you need and stand by to molecularly transport back to your ship. The destroyers are closing in."

Without a word, Ryvn spun and stormed from the room.

"Kai. Be ready to transport in the next ten minutes."

"I'm ready now."

Paladin looked thunderous as he strode from the dark recesses of the room. "Get your woman and the healer to the procedure lab and get back here. I'll have Eln meet you there." He looked through the open door and froze.

Genae leaned back against Kai, her startled gaze moving back and forth between Paladin and the Mriln healer.

Paladin walked forward until he stood in front of the Mriln woman. He was well within her personal space and Genae was sure the woman could feel the heat rolling off Paladin's huge body. He towered over her, his whole body screaming possession, his eyes devouring her.

Llaryn's expression was a mix of panic and fear. Her lashes lowered and her head bowed. It was like seeing a flower close in on itself and Genae couldn't blame her. Just by his size, Paladin was overwhelming.

"I'll take them to the procedure suite." Kai stepped forward, his body pressing into Genae's and forcing her forward too.

"I'll go with you." Paladin gestured to his left. When the Mriln healer turned, he moved to her side and his hand settled low on her back. "This way." His voice was a low, rumbling caress.

Genae shivered and Kai pinched her. She looked up and smiled at him. There really was no one else in the universe she wanted but Kai.

It took only minutes for them to reach the room where the extraction would take place. Genae bit her lip to keep from smiling as Llaryn tried to step away from Paladin. The woman looked everywhere but at the big VanDai. She kept moving away from him and he just kept following her.

"Would you have done that to me?" Genae asked on a whisper.

"I did do that," Kai reminded her, his mouth brushing her ear.

Genae smiled and shook her head. He was right. During their time on YelAsta, onboard his ship, even since arriving on Sai-two, he was constantly touching her, close enough so she would feel his heat and be enveloped in his scent. Even now his arm was around her, his chin resting on top of her head.

"The poor woman doesn't stand a chance."

"No," Kai agreed, "she doesn't."

She wanted to hit him for his arrogance and at the same time she wanted to hug him.

Ryvyn strode into the room, a small case in one hand. "Here are your supplies," he told Llaryn as he set the case on a tabletop. His brows rose as he saw Paladin stalking the Mriln healer but he didn't say anything about it. "The techs say the molecular shield is ready to come down on your order, Paladin."

Llaryn moved away from Paladin. He visibly tensed but this time he didn't follow her. "There will be guards posted outside the room. At any hint of trouble, let them know and they will contact me."

Llaryn didn't respond and after a moment, Paladin turned and strode out of the room. Ryvyn followed close behind.

Kai, his hands gentle, turned Genae to face him. His face, as usual, gave nothing away but the look in his eyes made her throat tighten. There was love there, and fear. Not for himself, she knew, but for her. If he could take her place, she knew he would.

His hand settled over her left breast as his gaze locked with hers.

Tears filled Genae's eyes and for once she didn't care. "I love you."

Kai leaned down and his mouth took hers. It was slow and hot. His lips pressed to hers, his tongue entering her mouth, retreating, his teeth nipping her bottom lip before he suckled it and finally released her.

He stepped back and pinned the Mriln healer with his burning golden gaze. "Remember, healer, it isn't only her life and heart you hold in your hands." Without another word or a backward glance, he strode away.

Genae bit her lip to keep from calling him back. Her choices had been made before she ever met him. She had a promise to keep, to herself and more importantly, to a child who'd never had the chance to live.



## Chapter 8

### *Fighting for Life*

With the exodus of all the VanDai, it was as if the air had been let out of the room. Genae slumped where she stood. Until that moment, she hadn't realized how much energy Kai generated just by being in the room.

"Are all VanDai like those three? Like the others on board the *Zolsum*?"

Genae nodded as she looked at Llaryn. "All the ones I've met."

The beautiful Mriln woman seemed to think about it for a moment before shaking her head, the motion seeming somehow elegant and graceful. "It's fortunate I'll be leaving soon after the retrieval." She walked forward, her gait flowing, more gliding than stepping. She took Genae's hands in her long, slender ones and met her eyes directly.

"You were told the odds of a successful retrieval?"

"Aevyn said getting the information back had proven very successful."

"And your survival?"

Genae's eyes didn't waver but a tremor shook her hands caught in Llaryn's grasp. She took a deep, shuddering breath and nodded. She didn't want to die but if that was the price to be paid, she would pay it. "He told me my chances of surviving the retrieval were less than one tenth of a percent."

"Yet you agreed? Does Kai know?"

Genae jumped. She turned to glare at Eln. "Do you always listen in on conversations that are none of your business?"

"I'm Llaryn's second in this procedure." He glowered down at Genae. "Now answer my question. You agreed to this?"

She nodded.

"You were fully aware of the consequences?"

She nodded again.

"Does Kai know?"

"No. And you're not going to tell him."

"Do you understand what a VanDai's mate means to him?"

Genae closed her eyes against the pain tearing at her. She couldn't think about Kai and what he would feel. She would have oblivion but he... he would be the one left behind.

She opened her eyes and faced Eln. "I know what he means to me, how I would feel if he were the one to die. I wouldn't want to live. That's why he can't know." She stepped forward and took the healer's hands in hers. "He has to be focused on living."

Eln looked at Llaryn. "Did she tell you about the damage done to her heart?"

Llaryn frowned and stepped forward. "No."

"A VanDai woman used a cardiac stabilizer to try and stop her heart. The only thing keeping her alive is the same instrument that almost killed her. For all I know there may be no information left for you to retrieve."

"When did this happen?"

Eln explained when it happened and exactly what happened. "Her heart needs to be repaired. Whatever this *information* is, I'm sure it can be gotten another way."

Genae shook her head. "The only places this information exists are in my heart and in the president's head."

"The president?"

"Yes." Genae turned her back on him and faced Llaryn. "Can you do it?"

"I can retrieve and even reconstruct the viral DNA strands, yes. I don't know if I can save you."

"If it comes down to a choice between my life and the information, get the information."

Llaryn nodded.

Genae studied her, looking for any hint of hesitation. Once she was out, she wouldn't know what was happening and she needed to know she could trust the Mriln healer.

"Promise?"

"I promise."

"Then tell me what to do."

Eln watched as the two women worked together. One small and delicate, the other tall and fragile. How the fate of so many had come to rest in their hands, he would never know. He wouldn't disturb the precarious balance of fate. Kai would find out when he returned if the procedure had been successful or not. And if he didn't return, it wouldn't matter anyway. They'd all be dead.

With those fatalistic thoughts, he stepped forward and began to help with the preparations.

\* \* \*

"Ready?"

Kai nodded to the tech manning the molecular transport controls. As the room disappeared and the *Therik* materialized around him, his thoughts centered solely on Genae's safety. The League could not be allowed to make even one strike against the planet. The retrieval process could not be interrupted. He should have called a halt to it until the League vessels had been dealt with.

His jaw tightened as he strode out of the room with a curt nod to the tech manning the controls. He and Paladin had talked strategy briefly. When Ryvn had been briefed on their plans, he had agreed; attack with the intent to kill. No engaging the enemy. No trying to outmaneuver or disable. Each one of them would go for the kill.

He strode onto the command deck and a quick glance showed him everyone at their post. He seated himself in the command chair and swung the command arm around in front of him. His fingers moved with speed and surety over the interactive

screen. Paladin's intelligence had the three destroyers entering Sai-two space from the Roithen quadrant.

"Set a course for Dysyn." He named the last planet of the Roithen quadrant. They wouldn't wait for the League ships above Sai-two. The three League vessels would never get within viewing distance of the planet.

He settled back in his seat and watched the huge view screen that dominated the front section of the command deck. Planets, suns, moons, stars, the universe lay all around him. He'd always loved the freedom of space, yet now all he wanted was to be on Sai-two.

He sat forward and reviewed the plan for the coming battle in his mind. He could do nothing for Genae on Sai-two but he could keep the League away from her in space.

\* \* \*

"Are you ready?"

Genae looked back at Eln and nodded when what she really wanted to do was tell him an emphatic no. Consciously she relaxed her hands and tried to take a deep breath. It felt like a huge weight was sitting on her chest and she wanted it to go away.

"The mind is as responsible for health as the body." Llaryn pressed something to her forehead and another to each of her temples. "These are neural stimulators. You won't remember when you wake up but while you're unconscious only your most joyful memories will fill your mind."

Genae's lips pressed together and her brows furrowed. Joyful memories? She couldn't think of one. She'd been happy occasionally as a child but mostly she'd been content. She'd always been alone, the daughter of the most powerful man in the universe.

The closest she'd come to knowing joy was her time with Kai. A smile lifted her lips as the neural stimulators began to work.

Llaryn looked at Eln, her lavender eyes solemn. "Tell me if her body starts to falter. I won't be able to monitor anything but her heart."

Eln nodded, his expression grim. Llaryn checked all of her equipment -- tiny instruments that attached to her fingertips that had fibers allowing her to work on a submolecular level. Her scanning microscope goggles and the router that would keep Genae's blood flowing as she worked on her heart.

It took only seconds to sterilize her hands, the equipment and Genae's bared chest. The damage to Genae's heart hadn't been as extensive as Eln had feared but it added another complication to an already impossible surgery.

Llaryn gently reprimanded herself. There was no surgery that was impossible, only the ones that hadn't been done successfully yet. She would be successful today.

Eln kept one eye on the monitor tracking Kai's woman's vitals. He also kept a close watch on Llaryn. The initial part of the surgery was nothing special. She cracked the chest, set the router and readied the heart. At that point, the Mriln woman placed submolecular tips on each of her fingers and he learned why the Mriln were considered wizards of medicine.

Llaryn's attention was focused solely on the woman in front of her. Never once did a thought enter her mind except what she was doing. Time was meaningless. Her fingers flew, removing DNA strands, reknitting the ends together. She found the electrical pathways disrupted by the cardiac stabilizer and meticulously repaired each cell.

Her fingers cramped and she glanced at the timer she'd set. Her heart jumped. She'd been working for two hours. That only left four hours and she'd done the barest fraction of Genae's heart.

"Eln?" She met the older man's narrowed gaze.

"She's weakening but it's not critical yet."

Llaryn nodded once and went back to work. Her fingers flew, almost faster than she could see them. She closed her mind to the time and focused on her task. Her body seemed to fall away. Energy coursed through her, leaving her free of any limitations.

Eln watched, stunned by what he saw. If Mriln healers were wizards, this woman was more. If Genae stood a chance, it was because Llaryn was her healer.

\* \* \*

Kai watched the space close between the *Therik* and the League destroyers. He could see Paladin's ship, the *Kadre*, and Ryvn's ship, the *Zolsum*, to his right.

Laser fire sliced through space in a brilliant flash. Paladin's ship shuddered but held.

"Get us within weapons' range. Return fire at will." Kai's voice was harsh as he studied each move made by every ship on the command screen in front of him. His mind calculated as fast as his computer and he adjusted speed and direction even as the commands blipped onto the screen.

The *Therik* shuddered as laser fire raked their shields. Kai recalculated the distance. They had to be closer. The beam had to be tight or the disruption would be too extensive and they couldn't risk that. An ever expanding hole in space would make the problems they now faced insignificant.

"The lead destroyer is firing up her Woyer."

Kai looked at his weapons specialist. The Woyer was a world destroyer. "How long before she can fire?"

"Ten minutes. No more."

Grimly, Kai turned back to his screen. He needed half that time to be close enough to discharge his own weapons. Blinding streaks of power ripped through space. More shots hit than missed on both sides. The *Therik's* warning system began to shriek. Their shields wouldn't survive many more direct hits. He could read the destroyers' signatures as well as the other two VanDai ships and knew the other VanDai were all in similar shape.

"Faster, you bastards." His voice was a low growl as he watched the distance between them close. He grabbed the arms of his chair as the ship bucked under the lash of laser fire. A little closer and all would be won or lost and one way or another, Sai-sen-Sai and every life on it would be safe. He, Paladin and Ryvn would see to that.

\* \* \*

Llaryn blinked hard to clear her blurring eyes. The muscles of her neck and shoulders burned. Her fingers ached and threatened to spasm. She ignored every discomfort and limitation as she battled time and the too-fast deterioration of the heart she worked on.

"She's critical."

The VanDai's words drove her harder. She wouldn't lose this woman. What she had gone through to make it this far was a matter of speculation but if even a tenth of it were true, she deserved more than to die handing over the information she'd risked everything to make known.

"I won't lose her."

Eln wasn't sure she even realized she'd spoken aloud. Her ability to focus amazed him. Three and a half hours into the surgery and she hadn't even paused. That Genae still lived amazed him even more. Her body had come close to shutting down more than once only to have a surge in her vital signs. The woman's will to live was beyond anything he'd ever seen. If she survived, it would be almost as much her own doing as Llaryn's.

\* \* \*

Kai cursed as he watched Paladin and Ryvn being pounded. His own ship bucked and shuddered with each strike. They fired back but they didn't have the laser power of the League ships.

Pure white light flashed under the belly of the lead destroyer. They were firing up their world destroyer. The charge would take out all three VanDai ships.

The muscles in his jaw worked as Kai calculated their distance. They had to be closer or their own weapons would be ineffective. It would be only minutes until the destroyer could fire its weapon.

"Kai. Ryvn." Paladin's voice crackled through the room, interrupted by laser strikes. "We'll use their charge against them. The dimension wave should follow the power trail back to their ship."

Kai's lips thinned and his jaw tightened. It was a daring move and their only chance. It would take split second timing and they would all have to act as one. His ship shuddered and faltered.

"Divert all power to the forward shields." His expression grim, he watched the light under the lead destroyer start to blaze. He pulled his control panel around and ran the initial sequence for his weapon.

"Wait for the strike," Paladin ordered.

Kai's hands closed over the arms of his chair and gripped tight as another strike threatened to spin them. Part of each blast was getting through his shields. The damage was extensive but it would hold. He wouldn't allow anything else. Genae's life was at stake.

Light flashed.

"Now!" Paladin's voice sounded like thunder.

Kai jabbed the control panel and activated his weapon. The view screen radiated white. Everything froze.

Black lashed back along the line of pure, pulsating power the League vessel had released. A lightless void wrapped around the lead destroyer, caught the other two in its rolling wave and collapsed in on itself. Where the destroyers had been, only empty space remained.

For one moment there was silence then Paladin's voice filled the void.

"Let's go home." Paladin's voice was quiet, almost subdued.

Kai understood his leader's feelings. They had destroyed three of the most powerful vessels the universe had ever seen. Their own weapon, its power tested in combat for the first time, had proven itself.

"Get us home." His expression grim, Kai leaned back in his chair. Damage reports scrolled across the screen of his control panel. The damage was extensive but the *Therik* would hold until they got back to Sai-two. Until he got back to Genae.

He started to lift his hand to open communications with the planet but stopped. He would find out from the healers in person how the procedure had gone. Good or



bad, he didn't want to hear the news on board his ship with his crew listening and nowhere to go to vent whatever emotions he would be feeling.

With grim determination he focused on his ship. His fingers flew over the control panel as he directed what repairs could be done while they were in space.

\* \* \*

Llaryn's eyes teared as she fought to keep the woman on the table alive. She didn't know anymore if the tears were from exhaustion or emotion and she didn't care. She'd never fought so hard for anything. As she'd worked, the battle had become personal. She would not lose this woman. Yet the faster she moved, the harder she fought, the closer the woman came to dying. She paused to wipe the sweat from her forehead and silently cursed the loss of seconds.

Eln watched, awed as Llaryn reconstructed Genae's heart. She was no longer just removing viral DNA, repairing the genetic code and moving on, she was building tissue, rebuilding DNA one building block at a time but faster than he could see.

He glanced at the monitor and his shoulders slumped. The pit of his stomach burned. "We're losing her."

The flickering motions of Llaryn's fingers never faltered. "Increase the load of the recirculator."

Eln opened his mouth to protest but quickly closed it again. Increasing the amount of blood flowing through the recirculator would decrease the blood flow through the heart. The lack of oxygen to the tissue would increase the rate of the heart's deterioration. The Mriln healer had to know that.

"Do it." Her order was quiet but laced with steel.

Eln did as she said. It wouldn't change the outcome. The result of the procedure was already set. Genae was dying. Not even the Mriln wizard operating on her could save her.

Llaryn's fingers slowed and finally stopped. She lifted her hands from Genae's chest, removed the fingertips and took off her goggles. When she looked up at Eln, her lavender eyes were clear, her expression serene.

"Leave me with her for a moment."

He nodded, turned and walked away.

## Chapter 9

### *Heartbreak and Homecomings*

"Disable the molecular transport inhibitor," Kai ordered for the second time. When he got his hands on the tech manning the MTI, he was going to rip his throat out.

"You don't have the authorization to..."

"I do." Paladin's voice whipped through the communications system like a lash. "Disable the inhibitor."

"Yes, sir."

Kai gritted his teeth. His hands clenched hard enough on the arms of his command chair to bend metal. With a vicious curse, he launched himself out of the command chair. In four strides he was across the room. Minutes later he was in the molecular transport room. The MTI tech rushed in behind him.

Kai closed himself in the transport cubicle. "Is the inhibitor down?"

The young VanDai nodded.

"Then transport me," Kai snapped. His claws flashed out, fully extended. The back of his neck prickled. Unease clawed through his belly. Something was very wrong.

Before he could make the order a second time, the *Therik* disappeared and the molecular transport center in the Palladium materialized around him. He ripped open the front closure of the cubicle and started running. He wasn't surprised when Paladin caught up with him but didn't pause to acknowledge him. Something was wrong. Very, very wrong.

As he rounded the corner to the procedure suite, he saw Eln stepping out of the room. He looked gray, his shoulders slumped.

Killing rage exploded inside Kai. His claws extended and his fingers flexed as he raced toward the healer. He slid to a stop in front of the other VanDai.

"Genae?"

Eln looked at Kai, his eyes dull, and shook his head.

Kai roared and charged the door.

\* \* \*

Llaryn waited until the door closed behind Eln. She looked at Genae's motionless face, the color seeping from her cheeks as life drained away. She wouldn't let the woman die. Not when there was another choice.

Meticulously she removed the router and closed Genae's chest. By every vow and tenet of her people, she was forbidden to use the true art of the Mriln on an outsider. She had always agreed with the laws her people had created for their own safety. But she couldn't let the woman die. Even if it cost her own life, Genae would live.

Placing her hands over Genae's chest, her left hand over Genae's heart, Llaryn focused her life's energy into her hands. The door opened and the VanDai, Kai, stormed through, his expression murderous. The big VanDai leader ran in behind him, followed closely by Eln.

Llaryn closed her eyes and sank into herself. If she could have pulled back in time to live, that option had now been taken from her. She had revealed the nature of the Mriln to outsiders. Her life was forfeit.

\* \* \*

Kai stared. He didn't know what he was seeing. The Mriln woman glowed, her lavender eyes lit from within before they closed. Her hands, pressed to Genae's chest, pulsed with golden light.

Eln rushed forward to the monitor. "It's not possible," he muttered. "She's alive."

Kai felt as if a fist slammed into his gut. He looked at Genae, watched as color seeped back into her face. When she blinked, the strength drained from his legs and he went to his knees beside the table, her small hand caught in his.

"I take it the good guys won."

Her voice was soft, sounded almost rusty but was the most beautiful thing he'd ever heard. He raised his head, his eyes moving restlessly over her face. The drama going on around them couldn't penetrate the moment.

"You doubted it?" His brows rose and he tried to look arrogant.

She smiled and shook her head. "I never doubted you."

Kai pulled her away from Llaryn and into his arms. He wanted to crush her against him but cradled her gently instead. Until he knew she was healthy, she was the most precious and delicate creature in the universe.

"I love you."

Kai lifted his head enough to look down at her. His mouth settled over hers, a slow melding of lips and tongues. When he lifted his head, they were both breathless.

Her arms wrapped around his neck and he held her close. The feel of her breasts rising and falling against his chest with each breath was a miracle he would never take for granted.

As Kai dropped beside Genae, Eln grabbed the monitor and swung it toward Llaryn. Her vital signs were deteriorating rapidly.

"She's killing herself to save Genae."

Paladin vaulted the end of the table and grabbed Llaryn around the waist. She collapsed over his arm, her body limp.

"Bring her in here."

Paladin followed Eln into the next suite. When the healer motioned for him to lay Llaryn on the table, he had to fight himself to release her.

As the VanDai healer swung the monitor into place over Llaryn, Paladin knelt by her side. He captured her hand in his and studied her face with dark, brooding eyes.

Eln injected her with something. She winced but Paladin couldn't be sorry, it told him she was alive.

"She'll live," he said.

It wasn't a question but Eln answered it anyway. "She'll live. Whatever she did drained her to the point of collapse. Her vital signs aren't strong but they are stable. With enough rest and quiet, she should be fine."

"Leave us," Paladin ordered, never looking away from Llaryn's colorless face.

As the door closed behind the other VanDai, Paladin rose to his feet and leaned over Llaryn. His eyes glittered with a cold, consuming fury as he stared at her. He reached out and grasped her face.

"Llaryn. Look at me." His tone was one of pure command. It reached her even in the depths where she had sunk inside herself. She tried to resist, tried to pull away but he wouldn't let her.

"Llaryn. Open your eyes and look at me."

She had to fight to get her lashes to lift. They felt impossibly heavy, dragging her eyes closed. And when she saw Paladin's face, harsh with rage, his eyes on fire with it, she tried to close them again. She didn't want to face him. She couldn't face herself and what she'd done.

Paladin's hands tightened around her face. "Open your eyes."

She couldn't disobey his order.

"You tried to escape me." His voice vibrated with the force of emotion raging through him. "You will never escape me. The moment I saw you, you were mine. I claimed you and when you're stronger, I'll mate you. You *are* mine."

Llaryn's lashes fell and she escaped him the only way she could, in the depths of her own mind.

Paladin released her, strode out of the room and returned with a chair. His brooding gaze never left her as he watched her sleep. He had questions he wanted answers to and when she woke, he would get them. What had she done to save Genae? Why would she have killed herself to do it?

And he had expectations he wouldn't compromise on. The first of them being that she never put her life in danger again.

He settled back in his chair to wait. Waiting was something he was good at. When she opened her eyes, the first thing she would see was him. Until he was sure of her, she would never be out of his sight.

**Epilogue**  
*One week later*  
*Forever*

Genae's breath rushed out as Kai thrust into her. Her inner muscles clenched around him and they both groaned. In the week since the retrieval, he hadn't been out of her for more than an hour at a time. She was deliciously sore with aches inside and out from his vigorous loving.

"I'm not sure I can take much more." All he had to do was enter her and she came; she was so sensitive to his touch. His constant presence kept her quivering and ready for him and anything he wanted to do.

"You can take anything I have to give." Kai pulled out of her one slow increment at a time, his nubby texture rasping her silken walls. When only his broad head stretched her, he paused. "Everything," he murmured, his eyes blazing, and thrust forward in a fast, hard slide.

Genae shuddered, her orgasm shaking her. She moaned as he pounded into her, sending her higher. Minutes later she could barely breathe as he came, great jets of hot cum filling her.

He rolled them over so she lay on top, her legs straddling him, his cock still lodged inside her. She snuggled her head against his chest and listened to the sound of his heartbeat as it slowed. It wouldn't be long before he needed her again. How long it would take for him to get over the fear of losing her, neither of them knew. At times she was overwhelmed by his intensity yet she would never change one single thing about him.



Neither of them, though, had to worry about the League coming after them. The fallout from the information she had carried was still being felt. Galaran had been removed from the office of the president. The actions of his generals were under scrutiny and prosecution wouldn't be far behind. All because Kai had helped her.

"Do you know anything about knights?" she asked.

A low rumble vibrated his chest against her. "They happen at the end of every day."

She turned her head and nipped his chest. Inside her his cock stirred, his thickening length making her shiver. "Not that kind of night. On old Earth in ancient times, there were warriors called knights. They wore plate armor and chain mail shirts. You remind me of them."

"I remind you of men who went around encased in metal?" He sounded indignant.

She lifted her head and looked down at him. His expression was as disgruntled as his tone. She scooted up his body to kiss him and as she did, his cock was pulled from her wet heat.

He growled, rolled her over and pushed her legs wide. He spread her labia with one hand and grasped his cock with the other. He wasn't fully hard but managed to wedge the head of his cock inside her anyway.

"Don't move," he growled.

She rolled her eyes. "I wouldn't think of it."

He settled his weight over her, keeping himself propped up on his elbows, so he didn't crush her. "Tell me why I remind you of these metal men."

For a long moment she just stared at him, her attention focused between her legs where she quivered and wept around him. She needed a deeper penetration, not the tease of his head just inside her.

"Tell me."

She blinked and focused on him. "You would do anything to protect me and keep me safe," she said simply, her words a husky whisper. "Just like a knight with his lady."

Kai's eyes gleamed gold in the dim light. Still propped on his elbows he managed to grasp her breasts, his claws barely extended as he squeezed the tender mounds. At the same time, he pushed against her, his burgeoning flesh stretching her and delving deeper as he hardened, lengthened and *grew*.

"So I'm your knight?"

There was a wicked gleam in his eyes that made her laugh even though her breath broke as he thrust into her. She threw her arms around him and hugged him tight. "Forever," she purred and gave herself up to his loving once more.

**The End...**

**or the beginning, depending on how you look at it.**

## **Angelina Evans**

Romance. Who can live without it? Certainly not Angelina Evans.

Born, raised and still living close to the Canadian border, she enjoys visiting her neighbors to the north when she's not busy writing. Writing has been a part of Angelina's life since she could first string words together. Seeing her books in print is a dream come true. Her sincerest wish is that readers will enjoy reading her stories as much as she enjoys writing them.

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