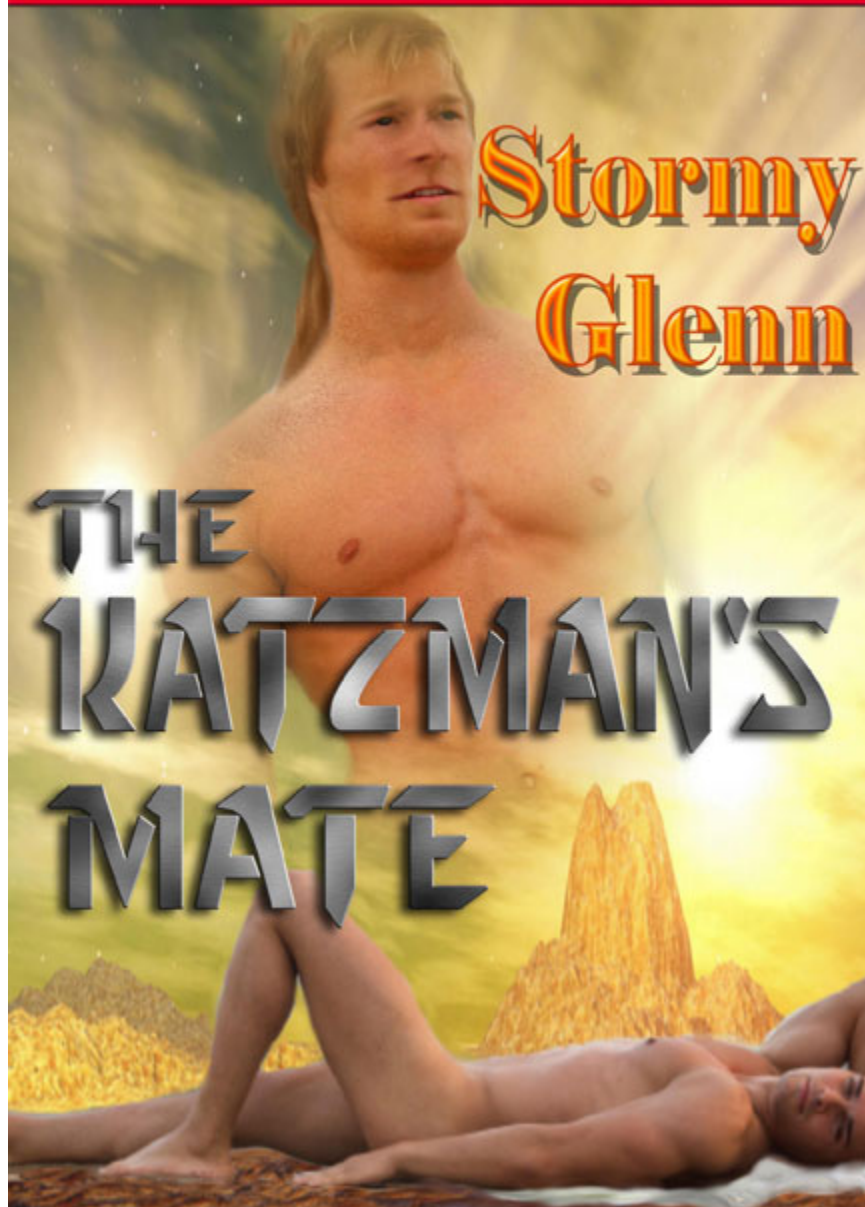


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THE
KATZMAN'S
MATE



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Stormy Glenn

EROTIC ROMANCE



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THE KATZMAN'S MATE

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DEDICATION

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STORMY GLENN

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Chapter One

2374 AD

The invasion ended before it barely began. Without enough soldiers to fight off the invading forces of the Federation of Planets, the High Ruler Vortigern Vedek had surrendered. His son and heir, Viorel Vedek, having fled during the chaos, left his father to deal with the conquering warriors.

Commander Chellak Rai walked into the great hall liked he owned it. And, to an extent, he did. His family ruled the planet three decades ago. On the edge of the Federation borders, they were separated from most of the known universe.

When Vortigern Vedek and his associates had landed on the planet as part of a trade venture thirty years ago, they overthrew the peaceful government with their superior technology.

It had taken Chellak Rai and his brother, Ciprian, three decades to train and build their forces to reclaim their home world.

“Ciprian, report,” Commander Chellak demanded as he glanced around the opulent room. Vortigern Vedek sure liked to live the high life. The throne room was much changed from the days of his father’s rule.

It now boasted an opulent golden throne at the end of the room sitting on a high dais. Chairs lined the high walls from the dais down

to the two large doors that went from floor to ceiling. A long red and gold carpet went from the two doors to the bottom of the dais. Many colorful tapestries hung from the high walls giving the room a medieval keep feel to it.

“Two ships got away. One believed to be carrying the Viorel Vedek. His father is still here, though. He’s being escorted here as we speak.”

“Casualties?” Chellak asked as he glanced around the room. Something in the room...a scent maybe, made him edgy. He could just barely detect it. So slight, he could not pin point its direction.

“Just a few. The resistance was low once we landed. Most of the royal guards have either flown or given up. Those that are loose are being hunted down as we speak. The wounded are being attended in the temple.”

“Good, let me know when Vedek gets here. I want a ship prepared for him. I want him and his associates off this planet as soon as possible. The sooner he is gone, the sooner we can begin to put this place back to the way it should be.” Chellak shot Ciprian a worried look. “Has Yerik joined you yet? He is safe?”

“Yes, Yerik is tending the wounded. He will join us soon.” Ciprian smiled, warmed by his brother’s concern for his mate. “What do you want us to do with them?” He gestured towards the small group of scared and frail looking people off to one side of the large room. Some stood, others knelt. They all looked afraid.

Chellak glanced briefly at the small group, his lips twisting in a grimace at their sad condition. Just another reason to get rid of Vortigern Vedek. He treated his people very badly.

“Who are they?”

“Mostly servants, I think. I haven’t really been able to figure it out. We found them huddled together in one of the rooms downstairs.” Ciprian glanced sadly at the group. “Chellak, they were locked in, and the door was booby trapped. If a single one of them had attempted to open the door, they’d all be dead.”

Chellak could feel the anger building inside of him at the conditions of the people that were his once again. He fisted his hands as he took several steps towards the group, stopping when he saw them start shaking with fear. Not one of them looked up at him. Chellak squatted down near an old woman.

“Tell me your name?” he asked in his softest voice.

“I am called Sorina, master,” the old woman replied quietly.

“Who are you, Sorina? Do you work here in the palace?”

“I am Sorina, master. I belong to Master Vedek. We all do.”

“You work for him, you mean? Are you servants then?” Chellak asked in confusion.

“No, master, we belong to Vedek. He is our master.”

Chellak could see her glance up at him through her lashes before quickly looking back down at the floor.

“Do we belong to you now?” she asked quietly.

Before he could answer, the main doors flew open, banging against the wall, and Vortigern Vedek walked in as if he were still king of the castle. He frowned when he saw Chellak talking to Sorina. He could not hide the look of anger and distaste that crossed his face.

Chellak watched Sorina shrink back when Vedek glared at her. It made him even angrier. He couldn't stomach bullies who preyed on people weaker than them. As he stood to confront Vedek, he saw him eyeing the small group of people as if he were looking for someone specific. Chellak wondered who.

“Vedek,” Chellak addressed him coolly, not even giving him the respect of addressing him by his title as high ruler. He stood straight and proud, his arms crossed over his chest, daring Vedek to step out of line. He would like nothing better than to have a reason to kill him.

“Commander, it would seem you have me at a disadvantage. Your... forces have over run my capitol, seized my palace, and taken that which does not belong to you. I wonder what the Federation would think of this?”

"I have the full support of the Federation, Vedek. Maybe if you had agreed to a peace compact with them, they would not have been so... put out. However, your reluctance to cooperate with them has been to my advantage. As the new High Ruler of Katzmann, I have already signed a peace compact with them."

Chellak smiled to himself as he watched Vedek's face turn red with rage. He had refused to sign a peace compact with the Federation of Planets. He hadn't wanted to give up any of his power or agree to the Federation's guidelines. Chellak had no such problem as he agreed with most of their guidelines anyway.

"As a gesture of good faith to the Federation, I have agreed to let you and your family leave this planet without hindrance. You are allowed to take only your personal possessions with you. You have one hour. A transport ship is being prepared for your departure as we speak. If you are not ready by then, you leave with what you have."

Vedek started to argue but the steely-eyed look Chellak gave him made him reconsider his words. "Very well. But mark my words. I will be back. This is my kingdom."

"No, it was never yours. You took it by force. I took it back. Now go. Remember, you only have one hour to gather your belongings and leave *my* kingdom."

Chellak felt a lot of satisfaction when Vedek turned to leave knowing that he had beat him and reclaimed his father's throne. He hoped that his father would be proud of him.

Vedek paused briefly at the door and looked over at the group of cowering servants. "Sorina!" he bellowed, "Come. I need my belongings prepared for departure."

The old woman stood quicker than Chellak thought possible for a woman of her age and began scuffling slowly towards Vedek. Once she reached him, Vedek leaned down and started quietly talking in her ear. Unknown to Vedek, Chellak had superior hearing and heard every word he said.

"Where is the brüter? Did it leave with my son?" Vedek asked.

"I do not know, master. Your son left so fast..." Sorina replied meekly.

"What do you mean you don't know? I told you myself to make sure the brüter got on that transport. You stupid woman!" Vedek yelled as he slapped the old woman across the face so hard that she fell to the floor. He took a threatening step towards the group of servants.

"Vedek!" Chellak yelled before storming over and leaning down to help the old woman to her feet. "My gesture of good will is wearing thin. You now have half of one hour to gather your personal possessions and leave Katzmann."

"But...but...I am only attempting to make sure that all of my personal possessions go with me, as you said. It would seem that something which belongs to me has been...misplaced."

"And that would be?" He asked curious as to what the brüter was. He had never heard that particular word before.

"Uh...the brüter. It is mine. I paid for it. Bought off world with my own money, and I have the ownership papers to prove it. It belongs to me."

Vedek seemed very possessive of this brüter. Chellak still didn't know what it was, but he knew he would have it, even if it was just to make Vedek pay for killing his father.

"Not anymore. I claim it in reparation for my father's life, which you took. The brüter now belongs to me. You will bring me the ownership papers before you leave and sign it over to me," Chellak demanded smugly as he crossed his arms over his chest again. He raised an eyebrow, begging Vedek to argue with him.

"Varl, you will ensure that Vedek returns with the ownership papers for the brüter before he leaves," he commanded of his friend and pridemate, Trajan Varl.

Chellak was proud of those he considered his pridemates. His pride was small, just a few men he considered his brothers, even if they had no blood relation, but he trusted each of them with his life.

Pridemates were like that. Katzmen were grouped together at an early age with others like themselves. They lived together, trained together, and fought together. They were a family, a pride.

Vedek sprouted a few choice words as Varl escorted him from the room to gather his possessions. He would be under guard until his transport ship lifted off and left their space. Chellak didn't trust him as far as he could throw him. Chellak stood watching Vedek leave, hearing his brother walk up behind him.

"What in the hell is a brüter?" Ciprian whispered in Chellak's ear.

"I have no idea. But Vedek seemed to want it real bad. That means he definitely doesn't need to have it. Whatever it is, it's mine now," Chellak replied before turning back to the old woman and softly holding her hand.

"Matriz," He respectfully addressed her as benefiting her age and status as an elder, "Can you tell me where this...brüter...is?"

The old woman braved looking into Chellak's questioning eyes, staring at him for several moments. She seemed to be considering him, measuring his worth. Chellak stood there under her perceptive eyes, giving her the time to make up her mind.

"Why do you want the brüter?"

"I need to know if it's something that Vedek can use against us to try and regain control of Katzmann. The more information I have to fight him, the better. Besides, if Vedek wants something that desperately, he shouldn't have it," Chellak answered honestly.

The old woman shook her head sadly at his words. "Then I am sorry, master, I can not give you the brüter. I will make sure he never has it, but I will not give it to you either," she said defiantly. "I can promise you that the brüter in no way a threat to you or to Katzmann."

"Can I ask why you won't give it to me? I understand that you do not trust me. Trust has to be earned. But am I not a better choice than Vedek for possession of this brüter?"

"Oh, I have no doubt that you would be a better choice than Vedek. Anyone would be a better choice than that snake. But the

brüter is a precious treasure, more valuable than words can even express. As of yet, you have not earned the right to possess this gift.”

Chellak thought this over for several moments before nodding his head. If the brüter was indeed just a treasure and not a weapon, he could wait awhile to have it. He had more pressing matters to deal with, like getting Vedek off world.

“Alright, Matriz. You keep your little brüter safe and sound until I have earned your trust. I leave this...precious treasure...in your hands. Do not let Vedek have it.”

“I have spent many years keeping the brüter from Vedek and his vile son. Sometimes I didn’t do a good job, but mostly the brüter has been safe. I will continue keep the brüter safe until the breath leaves my body, master.”

Chellak had to wonder at the tenacity of her words. What made the brüter so special that this old woman would dedicate her life to keeping it safe? The more he heard about this brüter, the more intrigued he became. Maybe he would have to find out more about this brüter when he had the time.

“I understand your need to keep the brüter safe, but can you help me with a few other matters? You’re been here a longtime, you know who is who, what is what. I need to know who I can trust and who is going to stab me in the back.”

“You would ask me this?” the old woman asked in wonder. “Why, master?”

“Anyone that would argue so vehemently to keep something from Vedek can’t be all that bad. Besides, as a servant working in the palace, you probably know more of what goes on here than anyone else. People tend to...overlook servants.”

“Especially little old ladies?” she cackled. “I have been a servant for Vedek and his family for nearly thirty years. I have heard and seen a lot more than they think.”

“Exactly. Now, would you mind having a refreshment with me while we talk? I think we have a little time before Vedek comes back with the ownership papers. Tell me everything you know.”

Chellak held out his arm and waited for Sorina to take it, then escorted her to a table in one of the side alcoves to talk. He had just a little time to learn as much as he could from the old woman before Vedek returned. The more he knew the better.

He held out a chair for the old woman before sitting down across from her. He poured them both a glass of danga juice from his pouch. Taking a small drink of the sweet tasting fruit juice, he set his glass down on the table and looked at the woman.

“So, what should I know?” he asked.

Sorina set her glass down on the table and looked at the lion man who had conquered her planet in the last few hours. He looked like a strong man, and a just man. Whether he really was, remained to be seen.

“I remember you from when you were a boy. You are Seanna’s son.”

“Yes, I am Seanna’s son, but, I don’t remember much about her. She died when I was very young.”

“She was a good woman. She would have been proud of you for coming back and avenging your father, just as your father would have been. You can do a lot of good here, master.”

“Please don’t call me master. Call me Chellak or commander, if it makes you more comfortable.”

“Are you not now my master?” she asked skeptically. It had been many years since she had addressed someone of Chellak’s rank as anything other than master. It was the way of things now.

“No. I am the high ruler, true, but I am not your master.”

“It is not acceptable to address you as anything other than master. As a slave, I know that well. If you are not our master, does that mean we still belong to Vedek?” This worried Sorina.

“Slave? Vedek had slaves?” Chellak nearly yelled his outrage at the thought. He knew that many out lying planets still had slavery, but the Federation had outlawed slavery many years ago. He supported that ideal. Slavery disgusted him.

“Of course, don’t you own slaves?”

“No! That’s one of the reasons I signed a peace compact with the Federation of Planets. They’ve outlawed slavery.” Chellak ran a hand through his hair in agitation. Reclaiming this planet would be harder than he thought. Vedek apparently had implemented a lot of things that he was against. It would take time to undo it all.

“Ciprian, I need you to write something up about the rules against slavery as dictated by the Federation of Planets,” Chellak said. “Better yet, draw up a list of all the new federation laws and have it posted through out the kingdom. I want any and all slaves freed immediately.”

“Master...uh...Chellak, if you plan on making it against the law to have slaves, you need to be prepared for the number of displaced people you will have on your hands. There are many in the realm that own slaves. If it is against the law, they will just throw them out in the street. These people will have no where to go.”

“Damn! You’re right. I didn’t think of that,” Chellak said, wondering what else he hadn’t thought of. No wonder his father often had a headache when he came home at night. This leadership stuff took a lot of work.

“I have an idea, if I may,” Sorina interjected. At Chellak’s look of interest she continued. “Since it is against the law, or at least it was before Vedek, and apparently is now again. Why don’t you fine all those who have slaves? I’m not really sure that laws against slavery were ever really taken off the books. People just sort of started getting them when Vedek did, mostly his cronies and those that are very rich. If you fine them, that might help pay for these newly freed people to live.”

“That’s a great idea, Sorina. In fact, I’m putting you in charge of that. Decide what needs to be done, go over it with Ciprian, and do it.”

To say she felt shocked that Chellak was giving her, a mere slave, such a responsibility and outlawing slavery, would have been an understatement. Maybe he was strong enough to keep the brüter safe after all.

Sorina jumped in surprise when the main doors flew open and Vedek walked in, his long purple robes flowing behind him. She quickly stood up from her seat and took a step towards Chellak for protection.

Vedek stomped up to the table and slapped an ownership disk down on the table. “Here! Is this what you wanted?”

Chellak picked up the disk and carefully went over the data. He handed it to Sorina for her consideration. “Is this everything I need for ownership of the brüter?”

Sorina read over the data as carefully as Chellak did before shaking her head as she handed the disk back to him. “No, while this is the correct data file, there is still the official certificate of ownership and the ring.”

Vedek huffed and puffed. “How dare you, you insolent slave. You will be severely punished for this, Sorina.”

Sorina stood up tall and proud as she could and she looked Vedek right in the face, defying his dictate of thirty years that said she couldn’t and smiled. “You can’t punish me, Vedek. I don’t belong to you anymore.”

“Oh, and you think your new master won’t punish you? He will, mark my words, he will punish you,” Vedek sneered.

“Oh, but that’s where you’re wrong, Vedek. Chellak’s not my new master. He just freed me. I won’t be punished by anyone, certainly not you.” The astonished and outraged look on Vedek’s face was almost worth the last thirty years...almost. Taking the brüter from him would be the icing on the cake.

“Now, Vedek, I believe that Matriz Sorina said something about an official certificate and a ring of ownership? Please hand it over to her.”

“To her? Why would I give it to her?”

“Because I am putting Matriz Sorina in charge of the brüter.”

Vedek shot glares of hatred at Chellak and Sorina. He dug out the official certificate of ownership out of his robes, tossing it on the table. Pulling the ring off of his finger, he tossed it down as well.

As guards escorted Vedek from the room, Sorina smiled bigger than she had in years. She turned to Chellak to thank him only to be surprised when he handed her the data disk, ownership papers, and ring.

“When you believe I am ready, Matriz Sorina, when you feel you can trust me, please return these to me. Until then, I leave the brüter safely in your hands. If anyone gives you any problems about it, come to me and I will take care of it.”

“I believe you’re ready now, Chellan Rai,” she stated as she handed everything back to him. She nodded to the small group of people on the other side of the room.

Chellak turned to the small group, surprised when their ranks divided to reveal a small figure in a white hooded cape. The small figure came forward several steps before stopping in front of Sorina.

“Chellak Rai, I give you the brüter, Demyan. Demyan, you’re new master.”

The small figure dropped to his knees before him and small delicate hands reached up to lower the hood, revealing the exquisite man beneath.

Chellak felt the world drop out from beneath his feet at the sight of the beauty before him. As one of the katzmen race, he immediately knew he looked at his future, his mate.

The brüter was small and delicate looking, his features fine boned, and nearly pearly white. He couldn’t have been more than 5’4” and maybe 125 pounds. A soft white leather shirt stretched over his chest,

white leather pant covered his legs. A long, white blond braid fell nearly to his knees.

Chellak felt the blood in his body begin to boil at the site of the young man. He had never seen anyone so perfect in his life. The smell of delicate moonflowers and summer rain filled his nostrils to overflowing. His cock thickened in his tight leather pants.

But the scent of fear overshadowed his pleasure and brought Chellak back to reality. The small man kneeling before him, head bowed, was terrified. His submissive behavior provoked Chellak's possessive instincts, while his vulnerability called forth his protectiveness.

He had an overwhelming need to take the fear from the small man, protect him from the world, and to possess him for himself. Chellak had never felt anything like it, ever. It was all he could do to not pull the delicate man into his arms and spirit him away.

The little man still would not raise his head to look at him. Chellak looked over at Sorina, confused by the man's presence. She had said that this beautiful man was the brüter. But how could that be?

"Sorina? I don't understand. *He* is the brüter? I thought it was a jewel or something. Not a man."

"In his own way, he is the most precious of jewels. And now you are his master. He belongs to you," she smiled indulgently as if she knew something he did not.

"Belongs to me? Sorina, I can't be his master," he said disgusted at the thought of owning another person, but unable to deny that joy filled him at the thought of having this beautiful creature to himself. "I'm trying to outlaw slavery, not encourage it. How can I possibly do this to him? Wouldn't it be easier if I just set him free?"

"You can't. He can never be set free. It is a condition set down by his original owner. He has to have a master. If you don't take him, Vedek can reclaim him. Why do you think he gave in so easily? He

knows you agreed with the Federation to outlaw slavery. He's counting on that."

"What in the hell am I supposed to do with him?" He sighed deeply when he felt the small man trembling. Leaning down, he grabbed the young man's hand and pulled him to his feet, feeling a small tingle shoot through his hand at the touch of their hands.

He felt the little man flinch from him as he gently held his face and tilted it up to his. The brüter had to tilt his head all the way back just to look up at Chellak. His eyelashes were lowered submissively. Everything in Chellak screamed for him to protect this beautiful little man, to keep him safe.

"How do you feel about all of this, beautiful? Do you understand that I do not like slavery? I would rather set you free. Don't you want to be free? Make your own decisions? Have a life of your own? Be your own master?"

The brüter's only response was to lower his eyes back down to the floor and shake his head. But not before Chellak saw the panic and overwhelming fear in his eyes. He gently patted him on the back, afraid if he touched him any harder he would break the fragile looking man. "It's alright. We'll figure something out," he assured him.

"Does that mean you'll keep him then, Commander? You'll keep him safe and not let Vedek have him? Vedek would destroy him."

"Yeah, I'll keep him. I still do not support slavery. But I will not let Vedek have him," He replied reluctantly as he looked down at the little man before him. "Why *does* Vedek want him so bad? Why is he so special?"

"He is a brüter, commander."

"Brüter...what is that? I don't think I have ever heard that term before."

"A brüter is a brüter. That is what he is."

"I still don't understand. What is a brüter? Is that his race? Where he's from? What?" Chellak looked back down at the brüter. "I have never encountered someone that looks like him, and I have met a lot

of different races in my time. But never one as...beautiful...as he is,” he said, his voice dropping off to nearly a whisper in the end as he gazed down at the lovely figure before him.

Chellak felt confused by the emotions swirling around inside of him. He abhorred slavery in every fashion. But this once, just this single time, part of him was grateful for the practice. It would give him the means to keep the little man for himself.

“His people are from the Quentara sector, the planet Elquone. They tend to keep to themselves and don’t have much to do with off worlders. The brüter was raised there for several years until Viorel Vedek became aware of him during a trade mission. Viorel is easily...distracted from his duties. Vortigern Vedek saw an opportunity to control his son by giving him the brüter, something to keep him occupied with instead of creating havoc around the realm.”

Chellak didn’t know what to think of that. Vortigern Vedek had bought the brüter to give to his son to keep him from being distracted? Distracted by what? He would have thought that the brüter would be a bigger distraction than anything else.

“Alright, so what do I do with him?” Chellak wondered out loud, not that he didn’t have a few ideas as to what to do with the beautiful man. However, most of them involved the nearest flat surface and some privacy.

“He belongs to you. You can do anything you wish with him. He is yours now.”

“Well, hell, okay, you’d better come with me then. And try to keep up,” Chellak stated to the little man. “Do you have a name? I can’t just keep calling you *the brüter*.”

“His name is Demyan, Commander,” Sorina replied for him as she reached over and carefully pulled the white hood back up to cover his head.

“Is there some reason you keep answering for him? Can’t he speak for himself?” Chellak asked curiously.

“No, commander. Viorel damaged his vocal cords when Demyan... denied him. Viorel tried to strangle him. He became very angry that time. I wasn’t sure Demyan would survive. It took a lot to bring him back. He has not spoken a word since. That happened over three years ago.”

“That time? There have been others?” Chellak asked horrified.

“Yes, Demyan has been punished many times by Viorel for his disobedience. Despite his training, Demyan is not an exemplar slave. However, I can not blame him. I would not want Viorel’s hands on me either. Viorel has damaged more than one slave from his...exuberance.”

“Hmmm, yes, I can imagine what that must have been like.” And he could. Chellak had met Viorel several times through out the years and he was an evil cruel man that delighted in the pain and misery of others.

Many brothels throughout the system refused to have Viorel as a patron because of the damage he did to their pleasure workers. Chellak hated to think of what kind of damage Viorel might have done to Demyan. Being so delicate and small, Viorel would have taken great pleasure out of *mastering* him.

The protective instincts bred into his kind for centuries rushed forward and Chellak decided there and then that Demyan would never be hurt by anyone again. He would protect him.

“Come on, beautiful, we have work to do to get this place back into shape. Stick close to me, okay? I don’t want you leaving my side until I say so. Understand?”

He nodded his head and turned to stand a small step behind him. Chellak just shook his head wondering what he would do with Demyan. He wanted to claim him as his mate, but he would never force himself on someone, no matter how much he wanted him.

Demyan was terrified that the katzman would turn him over to Viorel if he didn’t do exactly as ordered. He had been punished before, many times, for his disobedience. He didn’t have any idea

what sort of punishment the katzman would take out on him, but anything had to be better than being given back to Viorel Vedek.

Sorina had often suffered punishment for hiding him from Viorel and he would forever be grateful to her for shielding him. But he also felt a great amount of guilt over the punishment she had received. It hadn't been right that someone else should suffer for his misdeeds.

Demyan had been very excited when the bombs had started to fall on the Capitol City and the invading forces had stormed the palace. Sorina had hidden him and told him not to come out until she called for him. Viorel had been looking for him and Demyan knew that if Viorel got him off world, he would not survive it. So, he had hid, even when the palace had been seized.

When he had first seen the large katzman when he had stormed into the great hall, the power and strength emanating from him had intrigued him. Demyan had been hiding amongst the other slaves, hoping to stay hidden. And he had watched the katzman, captivated by his self-assured presence.

The katzman was the biggest man he had ever seen, bigger than even Viorel. He had to be at least a foot taller than Demyan, if not more, and well over a hundred pounds heavier. But he carried it well, like a warrior.

Demyan had been intrigued with how well the katzman's tight black leather pants hugged his thick muscular legs. The vest covering his well-muscled chest only added to the large man's allure.

He had been confused by the deep desire he had to run his fingers through the man's long golden hair, pulling it from the tie that kept it back from his face. He had never felt that way before, but this man had captured his attention.

His features were neither man nor cat, but both. He had small pointed ears on the top of his head, a small protruding cat like nose, and what seemed like a fine misting of fuzzy hair all over his body.

His eyes were what fascinated Demyan the most, though. They were deep, black, and intense, as if the commander knew exactly what

someone thought just by looking at them. So much so that Demyan had ducked behind the other slaves when the katzman began asking about their small group.

Then the high ruler had walked in escorted by armed guards on each side of him. Demyan had wanted to jump for joy when he had heard the katzman say that Vedek had to leave the planet, until he said that Vedek could take his personal property with him. Demyan knew he would be considered property because of his slave status. Did that mean he had to leave with Vedek?

When Vedek had been ordered to turn over ownership of the brüiter to the katzman, Demyan didn't know whether to be happy about it or not. Almost anything had to be better than Viorel. The katzman was an unknown. Would he treat Demyan better or worse than Viorel?

Demyan had watched Sorina talking to the katzman, wishing he could hear what they discussed. He knew it had to be about him. Sorina kept gesturing to the papers that Vedek had returned to the katzman.

He nearly fell to his knees when Sorina gestured to him and the crowd parted for him to walk forward. He took a deep breath and walked towards the katzman, his legs shaking the entire way.

Kneeling in front of the large katzman, he held his breath again, hoping Sorina knew what she was doing by giving his ownership papers to the commander. What kind of master would he be? When the katzman had grabbed his hand and lifted him up, Demyan had been puzzled by the shock that had run through his hand at the touch.

Then he had heard the words that had sent terror shooting through his heart. The katzman didn't want him. Even Demyan had known what that had meant. Vedek could claim him if he didn't. He had not been able contain the trembling in his body.

He had watched the katzman from beneath his eyelashes as Chellak had considered him. His unwavering eyes were so very watchful. What did he see when he looked at Demyan? Would he see

a slave, a possession to use as he saw fit like the Vedek's had? Or would he see a person, a living breathing person? Would he even care?

But now...now the katzman had decided to keep him. Sorina seemed overjoyed with the prospect. Demyan would reserve judgment until he found out what kind of man he actually was.

For now, he would make sure he did everything the katzman ordered him to do. He still felt the aches and pains from the last time that Viorel had punished him. He didn't know if he could take any more right now.

Chapter Two

Chellak thoughts were more chaotic than he would have liked as he walked down the hallway, Demyan and Ciprian close at his heels. He knew he should be considering all the things that needed done to make the palace and surrounding city secure, but he couldn't seem to stop thinking about Demyan.

The little man was breathtakingly beautiful. Just looking at him made Chellak harder than he could ever remember being. Knowing that the small man walked behind him, just a step away was almost more than he could manage.

Chellak could smell the fear and apprehension emanating from Demyan. He seemed terrified and Chellak couldn't blame him. He knew from the serious look that Sorina had given him that Demyan had been through a lot. Chellak just hoped he would get a chance to prove that he wasn't a monster of Vedek's ilk.

It would be a long road to get Demyan to trust him. He was scared, uncertain, and in an unknown situation. Demyan's submissive demeanor, and small size, inflamed Chellak's dominant nature.

Born a katzman of the warrior caste, being possessive and wanting to protect his mate were natural behaviors for him. And he knew without a doubt that Demyan was his mate. He had known it the moment he had laid eyes on his.

But it had started even before that, when he had first walked into the room. He now knew that the unusual fragrance he had smelled then was the sweet smell of his mate.

The scent had grown stronger as Demyan had walked across the room, swirling around Chellak, enfolding him in a sweet aroma that

made Chellak want to roar in exultation. He had found his mate. The people of his race looked all of their lives for their other half, their chosen one.

A katzman celebrated with great jubilation when he found his mate. It was a much-anticipated event. It also created a whole new set of problems for Chellak. When a katzman found his mate, he went through a mating cycle, which was a precarious time for everyone involved.

Chellak knew that his possessive instincts during the mating cycle would make him overly sensitive to any perceived threats to his claim on Demyan. That made him more dangerous than normal. The slightest misstep by another could make him react in a way that would be detrimental to convincing Demyan that he wasn't a monster.

He would be very protective of his new mate also. If anyone harmed him, tried to harm him, or even seemed like they were thinking about harming him, Chellak knew he would not be able to stop himself from protecting Demyan in whatever way he saw fit.

The overwhelming need he had to physically claim his mate only added to his problems. Demyan was definitely not ready for the more sexual side of their new relationship. Chellak knew he wasn't even thinking in those terms.

No, it would best if he took things nice and slow, and got Demyan to trust him before trying anything sexual. He had to teach him that the natural instincts of a katzman were acceptable. Katzmen were very tactile creatures. They loved to rub and touch their mates. They did it a lot.

Teaching Demyan wouldn't be that hard of a process. He needed to get Demyan to accept his touch first. He hoped it would give him a sense of security, telling him that he was not alone in the world, much as holding hands or having Chellak sleeping next to him would. It would make him feel safe and wanted. Touching didn't always have to involve something sexual.

With this thought in mind, Chellak turned to Demyan and grabbed his hand, pulling him close to his side. He felt him flinch when their bodies touched, smelled his fear at the contact.

He leaned down to whisper quietly in his ear, wanting to reassure him. "It's okay, beautiful. I won't let Vedek have you. I promise. Just stay close to me and I'll protect you."

Demyan nodded, but Chellak didn't think he understood or accepted his words. If Chellak could talk with him, tell him he had nothing to fear from him, it would be so much easier on Demyan. Maybe Yerik could do for his damaged vocal cords. Then they could communicate.

"Ciprian," he said as he turned to his brother, "do you think Yerik can do anything for Demyan's vocal cords? Make it so Demyan could talk?"

Ciprian shrugged his shoulders as he raised an eyebrow at the tight hold Chellak had on Demyan's hand. "I'm not sure, brother, but we can always ask him." He cocked his head to one side curiously. "Why are you so concerned?"

He had an idea why Chellak acted the way he did. And if he was right, he felt both elated and apprehensive for his brother. Finding a mate was a wonderful experience. One he had experienced with his own mate, Yerik.

He couldn't describe the feelings he had knowing his other half, his soul, waited for him. He knew the moment Yerik felt his presence that he would open his arms to him and be very pleased at his devotion. Knowing that he had someone that cared for him, for his wellbeing and happiness, filled him with so much warmth he could burst.

On the other hand, if Demyan turned out to be Chellak's mate, his brother would be very unpredictable. A katzman needed to claim his mate, to protect him and cherish him. To not be able to do that would make Chellak very frustrated. And a frustrated katzman usually meant trouble of some sort.

Chellak pulled Demyan to his side so that he could more easily hear his words. "I know Demyan can hear me when I talk, but being able to answer me, to tell me what he wants, that is just as important as my being able to talk with him. He needs to have a say in his future."

Demyan started to look up, amazed at the katzman's utterance, but caught himself at the last moment. Looking directly at his master was forbidden. He must remember that at all times. That had been one of his biggest transgressions with his previous master, but not his only one, and certainly not his biggest.

He absently wondered how long it would be before his new master punished him for something he did wrong. He would have to be attentive in understanding what his new master wanted from him, what the rules were so that he stayed out of trouble.

The trio made their way through the long winding hallways of the palace and out through the courtyard to the temple. Demyan looked around him with trepidation as they walked up the steps to the ornate structure.

In all of his time on this planet he had never been allowed into the temple. It had been prohibited for anyone to enter the hallowed building except the priests and royal family. To do so was punishable by twenty lashes of a whip.

Chellak felt a tug on his hand as Demyan's steps faltered before the great doors of the temple. He stopped and looked down at him. "What is it, little one?" he questioned softly.

Demyan shook his head, his body trembling. He pulled his hand from Chellak's and started to back down the steps when his body collided with Ciprian's. Demyan turned and looked up, and seeing the inquisitive look on his face, realized what he had done.

His face drained of all color as he swung his gaze back to Chellak's. He did not see the concern on the larger man's face. Just the hand reaching down towards him. He knew he had broken a

nearly sacred rule and would be punished. He just hoped he lived through it.

Chellak's watched in horror as Demyan collapsed to his knees on the ground, covering his head with his arms. Demyan's body shook so much that Chellak feared he would fall apart. The scent of fear and resignation coming from the little man nearly brought tears to his eyes.

He gave Ciprian a helpless look, not knowing what to do. Ciprian seemed just as confused. Neither man had dealt with someone like Demyan before. He was so delicate and fragile that he brought out the protective instincts in both men, one as a mate, the other as a brother.

"Demyan," Chellak whispered softly as he sat on the steps next to the small figure and picked him up. Sitting Demyan in his lap, he wrapped his arms around him, holding the beauty close to his body's warmth. "I'm not going to hurt you. You are mine now, beautiful. I would never hurt that which is mine."

Demyan just folded his hands together and held them close to his chest, his eyes downcast to show his respect for his new master. The tender handling of the big katzman confused him.

"Ciprian, would you go find your mate? I think it would be a good idea for Demyan to meet him. Yerik might be able to make Demyan feel a little more comfortable."

Ciprian knew what Chellak hinted at. His mate, Yerik, being of the Tedish race, appeared nearly as small as Demyan. Yerik exemplified his race. His bone structure nearly that of a bird, so fine and delicate that Ciprian was often surprised at how strong his mate actually was.

"Of course, brother. I have no doubt that Yerik would like to meet your new...treasure," he smiled as he walked past his brother into the temple, leaving Chellak to deal with the shaking body wrapped in his arms.

Chellak pulled the hood of Demyan's robe back, revealing his pale face. Cupping his chin with his hand he brought Demyan's face up watching as his eyes quickly looked up then darted back down.

"Demyan, I will not hurt you. It's okay to look at me. Do you understand?" He wasn't surprised when Demyan shook his head. "Look, beautiful, I know that we have to keep this whole master and slave thing going for your own safety. But it's only for pretense. You're not a slave anymore. It's okay to look at me or anyone else you want to."

Demyan didn't move. He couldn't. He was too afraid. He wasn't stupid enough to look him in the face. It violated one of the highest rules for a slave.

"Come on, Demyan, look at me...please?" Chellak asked as softly as he could. He gently caressed Demyan's cheek, marveling at the softness of his pale skin. "You're such a pretty little thing. Are all of your people as beautiful as you are, or am I just lucky?"

Elated when Demyan shook his head because it was some sort of response, Chellak leaned in closer. "So which is it, beautiful? Are all of your people as beautiful as you are?"

Demyan shook his head again. He knew he was considered more beautiful than most on his planet. That is why he had been chosen as a brüter. Only those with superior genetics were chosen as brüters. It didn't matter much to Demyan beyond the fact that being beautiful had made him a slave. If he were ugly, he might be home.

"So I'm just lucky then?" Chellak asked.

Demyan shrugged his shoulders. He didn't know if his new master would consider himself lucky to own him or not. Only time would tell that. Demyan knew that he could be a lot of trouble. He had been punished enough times to have that beaten into his mind.

"Would you please look at me? I would really like to get a look at your eyes. I don't even know what color they are. Please, Demyan?" he pleaded softly as he lifted Demyan's head up to his gently.

He inhaled deeply when Demyan slowly raised his deep, sea blue eyes to his. They were beautiful, only adding to the allure of the rest of him. "Beautiful," he whispered, awestruck by the loveliness before him. "I am very lucky, Demyan, very lucky indeed."

Feeling the nervousness and fear in Demyan, he stomped down on his growing arousal and started talking about mundane things, things that had no real meaning to Demyan beyond getting him used to Chellak's voice.

He tucked Demyan's head against his chest and continued to hold him, softly caressing his arms, rubbing his back. He wanted Demyan to get used to his touch as well as his voice so he would not be afraid when he touched him.

He just wished Ciprian would hurry up and get here with Yerik. He was sure Yerik's size and calming demeanor would help relax Demyan somewhat. Or at least, he hoped so.

* * * *

Ciprian searched each room for his mate. He sensed his mate almost instantly, detecting his beloved scent from all the others in the building. Following that scent, he walked to a room on the side of the main temple room. He found Yerik bent over a warrior, tending to his injuries.

He stood and watched Yerik work, the mating difficulties Chellak was experiencing making him appreciate his mate even more. To Ciprian, Yerik was the most beautiful creature in existence. The long pure white hair, the dark blue eyes, the soft bluish tint to his skin, the little pointed ears, the long lithe body...it created a lover who could have Ciprian begging in an instant.

Yerik's intelligence only added to his charms. He was their doctor, having special healing abilities that Ciprian still did not fully understand. But it had saved his and Chellak's life on numerous occasions.

He smiled when Yerik's head suddenly snapped up and turned towards him, a wide loving smile crossing his face. That Yerik loved him was the greatest gift of all.

Ciprian opened his arms, catching his precious mate in his arms and held him close as he nuzzled his hair before kissing his eager lips.

"How goes it, my own? You have been safe?" Ciprian had to fight himself every time his mate left his sight to care for the sick and wounded, especially during a battle. His protective instincts screamed at him to keep Yerik locked away from any harm that might befall him.

"I'm just fine, love. Not a scratch on me." Yerik looked up at his mate, softly caressing the side of his face. "You?" He worried when Ciprian went into battle but knew he must. Hopefully, with the taking back of their homeworld, fighting would be a thing of the past for him.

"Except for your absence from my side, I am unharmed." He glanced around the room to the few injured warriors. "Can you leave? Chellak has need of you."

"He is injured? Why didn't you say so?" He started to turn to grab his medical bag only to be stopped by Ciprian's strong arms.

"No, my love, we both made it through the battle undamaged. He needs you for another reason." Ciprian could tell that Yerik was confused by the satisfied smirk on his face. "I believe he has found his mate and he has no idea what he's doing."

Yerik wanted to laugh but he did indeed feel for Chellak. He had given Ciprian and Yerik quite the hard time during their mating cycle, not understanding the difficulties involved with the mating process. It had all been in fun but it hadn't helped at all.

"Really? And who is this paragon of virtue?" he asked curiously.

"That's the interesting part. He's a slave. He belonged to Vedek and his son before Chellak demanded his ownership papers." Seeing the look of disgust on Yerik's face, he tried to reassure him.

“Don’t worry, Chellak has every intention of freeing him and outlawing slavery on the entire planet. He just can’t do it yet. Apparently there is a special provision set down by Demyan’s original owner that he may never be freed or Vedek can reclaim him. So, until Chellak can figure out what to do, Demyan must remain his slave.”

“That’s horrible. Chellak must be in such turmoil. And that poor young man, he must be so confused.”

“That’s why he needs you, my love. Both Chellak and myself are big men. Demyan is not. In fact, he is smaller than you. We hoped your calming presence might make him feel better. At least less afraid.”

“Of course, take me to him. I’ll do whatever I can to help.” With his quick acceptance, Ciprian was reminded once again of the loving nature of his mate. He didn’t have a viscous bone in his beautiful body.

Ciprian held Yerik’s hand and led him out of the temple and down the front steps to where Chellak still sat with Demyan on his lap, talking quietly to him.

Yerik ran forward and wrapped his arms around Chellak’s shoulders from behind. “I’m so glad you’re safe. I’ve been worried about you,” he said as he kissed him on the cheek.

Chellak laughed at his exuberance, wrapping his free arm around Yerik’s neck and hugging him back. “I’m just fine, little bird.” He pulled Yerik around to sit on the steps in front of him. Ciprian stood behind Yerik, guarding them all.

“Yerik, I want you to meet someone very special. This is my Demyan. He...he belongs to me now.” Chellak didn’t know quite how to explain what Demyan was to Yerik without scaring Demyan. Chellak knew Demyan wasn’t ready for everything that their relationship would entail. That would take time and a lot of finesse.

“I know who he is, brother. Ciprian explained it to me and I’m extremely happy for you. I’ll bet you were surprised,” Yerik winked.

“You have no idea,” Chellak laughed, “Never in my wildest dreams did I expect to find my...cherished one here. He was definitely a surprise, but a welcome one. Unfortunately, I believe he is scared out of his mind right now. I thought you might be able to reassure him somewhat.”

Yerik looked over at the little man buried in Chellak's embrace. He did look scared and apprehensive, much like Yerik thought he must have looked the day Ciprian had claimed him. He had been terrified of the large katzman until he learned that he was actually a kitten in disguise.

“Hello, Demyan. I'm Yerik. I'm mated to the big gorgeous guy behind me. I am honored to welcome you into our family.”

Demyan watched Yerik, surprised by how calm he seemed among the chaotic aftermath of the battle. He could see splatter's of blood on his shirt and wondered if he had been hurt. For some unknown reason he had to know. He tugged lightly on Chellak's vest then pointed to the blood on Yerik's shirt.

Chellak tried to hide his surprise at the touch, looking to where he pointed, wondering what could induce Demyan to touch him voluntarily.

“Yerik, have you been injured?” he asked indicating the blood when he raised an eyebrow in query.

Yerik quickly looked down at his shirt and frowned when he saw the dried blood. “Oh no, Chellak, that's not my blood. I was tending to the wounded warriors. Luckily, there were not many. We only lost a few in the battle and not one afterwards. These katzmen of yours are a hearty bunch, Chellak.”

Chellak nodded gratefully before continuing to rub Demyan's back and arms. “See, he's just fine. But I thank you for bringing it to my attention, beautiful. Yerik is a very important to me, and I would be greatly upset if anything were to happen to him.”

He looked down at the little head on his chest, feeling the emotions inside of him growing towards the little man. “Just as I

would be if anything were to happen to you. You are very special to me and we must make sure you stay safe like Yerik,” he whispered before placing a whisper of a kiss on Demyan’s head.

“I want you to listen to me very carefully, Demyan. This is important. Look at me.” Chellak had to wait several quiet moments as Demyan gathered the courage to look up at him, but when he did, Chellak gave him a wide grin.

“Good. Now, if anything happens to me, if we get separated for any reason, or if you get scared and you can’t find me, find Yerik or Ciprian. Either one of them can protect you. Do you understand me?”

Demyan looked over at Yerik, then up at Ciprian, not quite meeting his eyes before nodding his head in understanding.

He watched with curiosity as Chellak pulled a small leather pouch out of his vest. He rooted around for a moment, then pulled out a small silver ring before closing the bag and putting it back in his vest. He grew concerned when Chellak placed the small ring on his finger.

“Demyan, this will keep you safe. Any one of my warriors will recognize it. If you can’t find one of us, find one of my warriors. Any one of them would give their lives for you.”

At the peculiar look Demyan gave him, Chellak asked, “Why you wonder? Because this ring says that you belong to me. You must make sure that you have it at all times, and you never take it off.”

Demyan nodded his head that he understood even as some of the light in his eyes began to fade away. He felt deceived, even though he knew that it didn’t make sense. He understood exactly what Chellak meant by giving him the ring. It showed ownership. His master had said it himself. It meant that he belonged to the katzman.

He laid his head down on Chellak’s chest as he gazed at the ring on his finger and despair filled him to his very soul. He had hoped, for a brief moment, but now realized that no matter how much he wanted it, he was never going to be free to love whomever he wanted.

Maybe his problem stemmed from that. He wanted to be able to choose who he loved, and who loved him. He knew a slave shouldn’t

hold dreams like that, but he had never been able to give it up. One of the many reasons he had been punished so many times by Viorel.

. Looking at the ring, he realized he wasn't going to find that here. He hated the silver ring and wanted to fling it across the courtyard to never be seen again. It felt cold on his finger.

But he knew he wouldn't. Not only because he would be punished if he did, not that he cared about that anymore, but also because it no longer mattered. He was unloved and still a slave no matter what the katzman said. That sudden insight caused something deep inside of Demyan to crumble.

He might as well give himself willingly to the katzman. He finally understood what Viorel had been trying to beat into him all of this time. Love and caring were not meant for him. The thought saddened him but also made things much clearer.

Demyan felt that he had suddenly grown up and finally understood his place in the world. His master could do whatever he wanted with him and he had nothing to say about it. He was a slave, property. He had no free will of his own unless his master gave it to him.

More than anything right then, Demyan just wanted to go back to his room, crawl under the covers on his bed, and go to sleep. He wanted to hide from the mind numbing pain filling him. But he couldn't even have that. He couldn't ask.

Chellak knew that something was terribly wrong with Demyan. Moments before he had been calming but now he gave off feelings of utter heartache and despair.

He had thought the ring would reassure him that he was cared for and safe. Instead it had taken the light out of his eyes. They were filled with hopelessness as if nothing he did would change his fate, so he had simply given up.

Chellak looked over at Yerik and Ciprian to see if they sensed the same emotions from Demyan that he did. As mixed up as he felt with the mating he couldn't be sure of the emotions swirling around him.

Yerik had tears in his eyes, Ciprian a frown on his face. Yep, they felt it too.

“I think we are all a little tired, and I know I’m hungry. Maybe we should see about going to our quarters and hunting down some food and getting some rest?” Ciprian asked as he pulled Yerik to his feet.

“Oh, that sounds wonderful, love. I could certainly do with a bath. How about you, Demyan?” Yerik asked.

Chellak’s heart sank a little when Demyan just shrugged his shoulders as if he didn’t care what happened to himself. He stood up in one fluid motion, Demyan still wrapped in his arms. Some food would be a good idea. Demyan barely weighed a thing.

“I think that’s a wonderful idea. I just have one question...where are our quarters?” he laughed as they started back towards the palace doors.

“As the new high ruler, wouldn’t they be father’s old rooms?” Ciprian asked.

“Probably. Demyan, you know where the high ruler’s rooms are, don’t you? Can you show us the way?” Chellak asked. It had been nearly three decades since he had been in the palace. He wasn’t sure he remembered where it was.

Demyan pointed down the hallway as Ciprian opened the palace doors, then up the stairs. He knew exactly where the high ruler’s quarters were. He had never been inside himself, but he had heard enough about them to be apprehensive about going there.

He pointed down another hallway then to a set of strong steel doors. Ciprian placed Yerik behind Chellak and pushed the doors open, walking in ahead of them to check the room for danger. Once the room had been cleared, he gestured for them to come in.

Even in his apprehension, Demyan couldn’t contain his curiosity, so he lifted his head and looked around the large room. It seemed to be a sort of a salon living room.

A large stone fireplace stood against one wall. A couple of couches and tables surrounded it. Several bookshelves full of books

lined the wall next to a large window. French doors were directly across from the main doors with two other doors on each side of the room.

As Chellak carried him around to investigate, Demyan saw that one door led to a bedroom. It contained a very large mattress on the floor against one wall, covered with blue and white colored pillows. With the exception of a chest, a couple of chairs, and a large fireplace on one wall, the room was bare. A small bathroom could be off to one side, the tub larger than Demyan's room alone.

The door on the other side of the living room led to another bedroom, the same as the first one but the colors more blue than white. It too had a large bathroom and a fireplace. The entire place appeared more ornate than anything Demyan could remember ever having been in.

Relief flowed through Demyan when Chellak laid him down on the bed. Being close to the katzman unsettled him. He watched as he walked to the main door and opened it to talk to a passing warrior before closing it and coming to join him on the bed.

He would have squeaked if he could have when Chellak pulled his cape off and threw it onto the floor before pulling him to sit on his lap. He couldn't contain his cringe when Chellak's arms wrapped around him and pulled him back against a hard naked chest. He didn't remember Chellak pulling his vest off but apparently, he had.

Ciprian sat on the bed across from them, Yerik wrapped in his arms. When he heard a knock at the door, Ciprian got up and answered it, bringing back a large tray covered in food. He set it down in the middle of the bed and crawled back into his position holding Yerik.

Grabbing some bits of cooked meat, he began feeding Yerik, who happily ate the food given him. Chellak picked up a piece of meat and held it to Demyan who simply shook his head no. He placed it in his own mouth and grabbed another piece. He offered it to Demyan, who again shook his head no.

Chellak and Demyan did this several times before Chellak realized Demyan wasn't eating anything. Chellak knew Demyan had to be hungry. He could hear his stomach rumbling.

"Eat, Demyan. You need to get food in your stomach before you waste away." Chellak was confused when Demyan shook his head no again. Why wouldn't he eat? Was he afraid?

"Demyan, I want you to eat something," he demanded quietly but firmly. He picked up another piece of meat and held it in front of his closed mouth for several seconds before Demyan reluctantly opened his mouth and accepted the meat.

Yerik watched the whole episode with apprehension, not mentioning the tears he saw forming in Demyan's eyes as he chewed the meat Chellak had given him. He didn't know if Chellak had done the right thing by forcing Demyan to eat, but the little man did need food.

He leaned back and looked up at Ciprian's face to see if he had witnessed the exchange between Chellak and Demyan. When he nodded that he had, Yerik grabbed his arms and pulled them tighter around his chest. He needed to feel his mate's body against his.

"So, brother, what are the plans for the rest of the night?" Ciprian asked after a few moments of snuggling with Yerik.

Chellak smiled as he looked up from feeding Demyan more meat. "It's been a rough day. Unless I'm needed for anything specific, I plan on spending the rest of the night right here, getting to know Demyan a little better."

"Sounds good," he said nodding, "Mind if Yerik and I take the other bedroom?"

"Good idea. Having you close by is for the best anyway. You should make that your room for now. Having Yerik close by might make Demyan feel better too. It will give him someone to talk to."

"That reminds me... Yerik, Demyan's vocal cords were damaged a couple of years ago. Is there anything you might be able to do for him?" Ciprian asked, looking down at his mate.

"I don't know, but I'm more than willing to give it a try." He sat up and leaned forward. "Demyan, do you mind if I look at your throat?"

Demyan glanced up at Chellak for permission. Once he nodded his okay, Demyan leaned forward and sat quietly as Yerik began feeling around his neck with his hands. He felt a bit of heat coming from Yerik's hands, but other than that it wasn't painful.

After some moments, Yerik sat back shaking his head sadly. "I don't know if I can do anything. His vocal cords are pretty damaged. If we do some healing treatments maybe there's a chance. But it's going to take some time before we see any results, if any."

Chellak nodded somberly. He desperately wanted to be able to talk with his little man, to hear his voice talk back to him, whisper his name, hell, even argue with him. Anything was better than the blank silent looks he got.

"It's okay, Yerik, whatever you can do would be greatly appreciated. I don't care how long it takes. I'm sure Demyan has a lot of stuff he'd like to say. Don't you, beautiful?" He asked of Demyan as he nuzzled the top of his head.

Demyan wanted to nod his head but wasn't sure it would be a good idea. His master had no idea the things he wanted to say. Having no way to voice them wasn't necessarily a bad thing. It kept him from getting in big trouble.

He couldn't contain his yawn as his eyes started to droop close. All of the apprehension and nervousness of the day was starting to catch up with him.

"Uh oh, looks to me like someone needs some beauty sleep," Ciprian laughed as he climbed to his feet. "We're going to head to our room and we will see you in the morning. If you need us, you know where we'll be."

Chellak nodded as he watched Ciprian pull Yerik to his feet and lead the young giggling man from the room, shutting the bedroom door behind them. He lifted Chellak up and set him down on the bed

before standing to his feet and walking into the bathroom. After a few moments he came back out and picked Demyan up and carried him into the bathroom.

When Demyan gave him a curious little glance, Chellak chuckled softly, "Time for us to have a bath, beautiful. I don't know about you, but I stink." He set Demyan down and stepped back.

Demyan watched, both fascinated and afraid as Chellak began unbuttoning his pants before dropping them onto the floor. Demyan caught just a glimpse of tanned flesh before he lowered his eyes to the floor.

Chellak chuckled again as he watched the flush cover Demyan's face. He stepped into the bath, enjoying the feel of the warm water covering his aching muscles as he sat down and leaned back against the side of the large tub.

"Come on, beautiful, time to get clean." Chellak waved him towards the tub. "Get those clothes off and get in."

Knowing he had to obey his master, Demyan reluctantly began pulling his clothes off, his eyes downcast and his face red with embarrassment. Dropping his vest to the floor, he reached for the buttons of his pants, his eyes darting over to see if Chellak was watching.

He felt relieved when he saw Chellak leaning back in the tub, his arms crossed behind his head, and eyes closed. He quickly dropped his pants on the floor and clambered into the tub, sitting as far away from Chellak as the tub would allow.

Demyan nearly jumped out of his skin when Chellak reached under the water and grabbed his leg, slowly pulling him across the tub until he was sitting on his lap.

Chellak grabbed a washcloth, added some soap, and began washing Demyan. He could feel him shaking beneath his hand as he slowly ran the washcloth over his soft skin. He knew that Demyan was nervous, not knowing what he would do.

Demyan had a right to feel nervous. Chellak didn't know what he was going to do. Holding Demyan's naked body in his lap was almost more than he could take.

He wanted to touch him in ways that Demyan wasn't ready for. Even the mere touch of his hand made Demyan tremble, and not in a good way. He just had to show him that he would not take anything Demyan didn't offer, despite the raging hard on he had.

Demyan felt the hard cock beneath him, pressing hard against his naked flesh. His breath hitched in his throat at the feel of the long, thick length. Would his new master force him as Viorel had tried to do? Or beat him when he didn't do what he wanted, as Viorel had?

Despite his fear of this unknown master, Demyan also felt some curiosity. Something he had never felt with his previous master. All of which had Demyan more confused than he could ever remember being.

Chellak slowly finished washing Demyan, letting him get used to the feel of his hands on him. When he was done, he sat Demyan on the bottom of the tub between his legs and washed his hair.

Once his little man was clean from top to bottom, he sat him back on the bench beside him and scooted down to sit on the bottom of the tub between Demyan's legs. Handing him a jar of shampoo he said, "Here, wash my hair," and waited.

After several moments, he felt Demyan start washing his hair. Tilting his head back he moaned, "Hmmm, that feels good, beautiful." The feel of his mate's hands on him was making his cock throb.

Under the cover of the water, he reached down and gave his hard cock a couple of long strokes. He wanted nothing more than to bury himself deep within his mate's sweet body. Just the thought of Demyan's tight body surrounding him made his cock jump.

Chellak dropped his hand from his aching flesh. He was so close to release he knew a few more strokes and he would erupt, and probably scare Demyan to death. As much as he needed to cum, he

didn't want to scare the little man. There would always be time for pleasure later, after Demyan had gotten used to him.

Once Demyan finished washing and rinsing his hair, Chellak stood up and climbed from the tub. He grabbed a towel and began quickly drying himself off.

Demyan couldn't stop himself from shaking as he watched Chellak dry off. Chellak's body seemed so massive. A little over six and half feet tall, built of solid muscle, his strong chest, thick arms and thighs showing his power and strength. A light dusting of hair covered most of his body, growing thicker down his abdomen and leading to a small patch at his groin.

He couldn't help but swallow hard at the sight of Chellak's hard cock jutting out of that small patch of hair. He was long and thick, much bigger than Viorel had been.

While Viorel had threatened to use him sexually, Demyan had fought him every time. That was usually what got him knocked around. Viorel would demand service and Demyan would deny him. The beatings he received were painful but not nearly as much as his heart and soul would hurt if he had given in.

His denial hadn't kept Viorel from trying, though. He had tried to force Demyan to do everything from blowjobs to actual intercourse. He couldn't count the number of times he had fought off Viorel's sexual assaults. It seemed like hundreds.

He had also been able to avoid most of the sexual side of the abuse because of Viorel's father. Vortigern Vedek had kept promising to Demyan to his son but had ultimately kept his son from forcing sex on him, no matter how many times he tried. Dangling Demyan in front of his son had been a power thing for Virtigern, a way of keeping him in line.

Still, Demyan knew the basic mechanics of sex. It had been part of his brüter training before Vedek had acquired him. But nothing he had been taught had readied him for a man of Chellak's size.

Chellak smiled to himself as he saw the awed expression on Demyan's face from the corner of his eye. Maybe his waiting would not be too long. Hiding his grin, he reached for another towel and held his hand out to Demyan.

"Come on, beautiful. Time to get out before you wrinkle up."

Demyan stared at his hand for several moments before grabbing it and climbing from the tub. He shrank back when Chellak reached out to begin drying him off.

"It's okay, Demyan. I'm just going to dry you off," Chellak tried to assure him, "I'm not going to hurt you."

Demyan tried to stand still as Chellak ran the towel over his naked body. He tried to remember that so far his new master had been nothing but kind to him. He tried to remember he was still a slave and had no right to choose when or who took his body.

As much as he was concentrating on not bolting from the room, it took him a few seconds to realize that Chellak had stopped drying him and had walked back into the bedroom.

"You coming, beautiful? It's time to go to bed."

He felt his heart sink at the thought of joining Chellak in the other room. He knew from past experience what was expected of him once he stepped into the bedroom. He would be forced to service his new master. If he refused, he would be beaten yet again.

He didn't know if he had it in him to fight anymore. Chellak was way bigger than Viorel had ever been. Demyan was sure that he wouldn't take no for answer.

Knowing there was no hope of escape, no hope of refusal, Demyan slowly shuffled into the other room. He saw Chellak standing beside the bed waiting for him.

His heart sinking into his feet, he walked over and dropped to his knees before him. Reaching out he grasped his hard cock with trembling hands and brought it to his mouth.

Chellak watched with shock as Demyan took him into his mouth. The feeling of his lips wrapped around his throbbing flesh, his tongue

lavishing him, felt glorious. He wanted nothing more than for the exquisite pleasure to continue.

But the tears in Demyan's eyes told him that Demyan wasn't doing this because he wanted to. He was doing it because he thought he had to. Chellak wanted Demyan, but not like that. He wanted him willing and he would wait until he was, no matter how long it took.

"No, Demyan," he whispered regretfully as he pulled him off his cock and lifted him onto the bed. Chellak lay down next to Demyan and pulled the covers over them both before pulling Demyan's back up against his body, wrapping his arms around him.

"Sleep, beautiful," he whispered as he nuzzled the top of Demyan's head where he had buried under Chellak's chin. *Sleep...yeah right. Like he could sleep with a raging hard on pressed up against the naked body of his mate.*

Demyan only started to relax once he heard Chellak start snoring softly in his ear. The entire day began playing over in his head. He was so mixed up by the turn of events, the changes to his life.

His new master seemed to want him, had even said that he did. He had given him a ring of ownership so that all would know he belonged to Chellak. But when he had tried to pleasure his new master, Chellak had said no.

Demyan didn't understand. Why else would Chellak claim him? He had even fed him meat, ensuring that he would be fertile when they had sex. Why would he have done that if he didn't plan on having sex?

Had he done something wrong when he had taken him in his mouth? Maybe his new master didn't like to be pleased in that way. Maybe he hadn't done a good enough job. That must be it. He hadn't done things the way his new master wanted. With a sad smile Demyan started to fall to sleep, determined that he would do better next time.

Chapter Three

Chellak woke to the most wonderful feeling. He knew he had to be dreaming. Warm lips were wrapped around his morning erection. A hesitant tongue swept over the small slit in the top. He never wanted it to end.

Opening his eyes, he looked down to see Demyan kneeling between his thighs, his mouth on his cock, lavishing his sensitive flesh. His hands clenched in the sheet as he pumped his hips a couple of times, wanting the pleasure to continue, before he reached down and grabbed Demyan's head, trying to stop his movements.

"No, Demyan," he moaned regretfully as he started to push Demyan away from his aching cock but Demyan was having none of it. Before Chellak could remove him, Demyan started gently massaging his silky sac with his fingers as he increased the motion of his mouth and tongue.

Chellak groaned, his hips jerking as the pleasure Demyan was giving him detonated inside of him. His hands clenched in soft white hair, Chellak roared out his release, his sensitive cock pulsing as Demyan continued to lick at him until he had nothing else to give.

His heart beating rapidly, Chellak reached down to grab Demyan, pulling him up to cradle him against his chest. He slowly caressed his back, running his fingers through Demyan's long hair as he tried to control his breathing.

He could smell the confusion and worry in Demyan, but not a scent of arousal. That reaffirmed his decision that Demyan wasn't ready for this side of their relationship. He should have stopped him

earlier. Demyan hadn't been aroused by the act. He was doing it out of a sense of duty and Chellak didn't want that from him.

Chellak held Demyan for a few more moments, enjoying the feel of his body next to him before sitting up and sliding to the side of the bed. He grabbed his pants and slid them on before reaching for his shirt.

"Get dressed, Demyan, and we'll go get something to eat," he said as he tossed Demyan his clothes. "I'll be right outside when you're ready to go."

Demyan had confusion written all over him as he watched Chellak walk out of the room. He didn't understand why his master hadn't said anything about what he had done.

Tears of frustration fell down his cheeks as he began getting dressed. He was frustrated that he could not communicate with his master. He couldn't ask him what he had done wrong or if Chellak actually wanted him to pleasure him.

If only Chellak would tell him what he wanted, he could do it. For a brief moment he thought that maybe Chellak didn't want him sexually until he remember the night before in the tub and they way he had moaned when Demyan had pleased him this morning.

As inexperienced as he was with the actual act of having sex, even he knew when someone desired him. So, that left only one answer. He had done something wrong and not fulfilled his master's desires.

He had no skills beyond that as the brüter. He couldn't read and write, or cook, or even fight. He had no skills other than caring for and pleasuring his master. That was supposed to be his entire life. If he couldn't please his master, then what good was he? Why would his master keep him?

Demyan knew he would have to do better. If his master became unhappy with him, he might sell him or give him back to Vedek. Or sell him to a stranger or give him to one of his warriors as a reward. There were many possibilities. And Chellak seemed to be a better master than most.

No, he had to try twice as hard to please his master, do everything he said, obeying him instantly, and making his life easier. That was his duty as the brüter to Commander Chellak, High Ruler of Katzmann.

With a new conviction in his mind, Demyan opened the bedroom door and walked into the living room where Chellak was speaking with Ciprian and Yerik. He nodded respectfully to each of them before taking his customary place a step behind Chellak folding his hands demurely in front of him.

“Good morning, Demyan, did you sleep well?” Yerik asked as he came to stand in front of him. Demyan looked to Chellak for permission to answer, not quite meeting his eyes. Chellak had a curious look on his face but nodded his permission anyway.

Demyan nodded his head to Yerik, giving him a small smile. Yerik smiled back, a little confused by the master and slave routine that was playing out before him. He wondered if Chellak knew what he was doing.

“Anyone hungry?” Ciprian asked as he watched the interaction between everyone.

Before anyone could answer him, a loud knock could be heard from the door. Chellak strode to the door and opened it, admitting one of his warriors and a pridemate, Bogden Wuher.

“Chellak, we have a problem. Some of Vedek’s royal guards have holed up in a building near the town square. They’re demanding transport off world. They have hostages.”

“Well hell, there goes breakfast. Okay, gather a regiment together and surround the building. I want them fully armed. Make sure the area is cleared of any civilians.”

He turned to grab his side arm and belt it to his pants. “Yerik, you need to get your medical kit and meet us down there. I’m sure we’re going to need you too. Ciprian, you go with Yerik, keep him safe.”

Demyan watched as Bogden, Ciprian, and Yerik left the room to do as Chellak ordered. He wondered what duty he would be given. He

knew nothing of fighting or strategy. What would Chellak expect him to do?

Chellak wrapped his arms around Demyan and gave him a long hug before placing a soft kiss on his forehead. "I want you to stay right here, beautiful, where you'll be safe. Don't move from this spot until I get back, understand?"

Demyan swiftly nodded his head that he did. This, he could do. "Good. I'll be back as soon as I can. You remember what I said, Demyan." With that, Chellak left the room, closing the door behind him and headed towards town.

Demyan looked around the room after a few moments. The wind blew softly through an open window. He could just hear the noises from outside coming through the open window. There were a few sounds of people walking outside in the hallway. Other than that, all was quiet.

He tried to see out the window but couldn't quite look past the curtains from where he stood. He tried to pass the time by counting the different colors on the tile in the floor. He braided and unbraided his hair. He counted pebbles from a small bowl he could just reach on the table.

As night began to fall, Demyan's legs began to stiffen. Knowing his master said he wasn't supposed to move, he knelt down on the floor and wrapped his arms around his body to keep himself warm from the cooling wind coming through the window. He closed his eyes and waited for his master to return, hoping to pass the time by sleeping.

Demyan woke to a gentle hand shaking his shoulder. Looking up he saw a worried Yerik kneeling next to him. Ciprian standing right beside him, also looking worried. He looked around the room for Chellak but he wasn't there.

He looked to Yerik for answers but received a confused look in return. Ciprian reached down to grab his arm and help him up but

Demyan shrank back, quickly shaking his head no. Chellak said not to move until he got back.

"Demyan," Ciprian said as he reached for the frightened young man again, "Have you been here the entire time?"

Demyan nodded his head that he had.

"Have you eaten anything? Where's Chellak?"

Demyan shrugged his shoulders. He didn't know where Chellak and no, he hadn't eaten. His rumbling stomach told them that.

"Well, come on, let's get you fixed up and we'll get some food in you. I'm sure you are as hungry as we are." Ciprian reached for Demyan again only to pull back when he started shaking his head vehemently.

"Demyan," Yerik said, trying a different tactic, "Don't your legs hurt? You've been here since yesterday. Look," he pointed towards the window where Demyan could see the morning light streaming through, "it's daylight out. You need to get up and stretch your legs some."

Again, Demyan shook his head no. He pointed to the floor where he sat and shook his head again. Yerik looked up at Ciprian at his motions, confused, before looking back down to Demyan.

"You need to sit?" he asked.

Demyan shook his head. He looked around the room desperately, trying to figure out how to communicate with them. He made a wide arch with his hands in the shape of a body and then pointed to his ring.

"Chellak?"

Demyan rapidly nodded his head yes. He motioned speaking with his hand and then pointed to himself, then the floor, slapping it several times.

"Chellak wants you to sit?" Ciprian asked.

Demyan slapped the floor again and motioned to his ring then to himself. He used his fingers on the floor to make a walking motion then shook his head no and slapped the floor again.

“Oh hell, Chellak told him to stay here and not move,” Ciprian whispered in astonishment. “So he hasn’t moved. Am I right, Demyan?”

Demyan nodded his head in relief. They had understood what he was trying to say to them.

Yerik looked horrified when he glanced back at Demyan. “Demyan, I’m sure that’s not what he meant. He just wanted you to stay in the room. He didn’t mean you had to stay right here, in this very spot. It’s okay to get up. Chellak won’t mind. I promise.”

He reached to help Demyan up but Demyan leaned away shaking his head rapidly again. He slapped the floor, telling them that he wasn’t going to move from this spot until his master told him to. Chellak told him to stay in this spot and disobeying him wasn’t an option.

“Ciprian, you’d better find Chellak. I don’t think he’s going to move until Chellak tells him to.”

Ciprian nodded his head as he started out the door. He agreed with his mate. Demyan wasn’t going to move until Chellak said he could. Damn Chellak! He needed to take better care of his mate before he lost him.

While Ciprian went to find Chellak, Yerik grabbed a blanket off the bed and wrapped it around Demyan. At least he could keep him warm until they got back. Going to the door, he opened it and asked the guard outside to bring them some food. He could feed Demyan too.

The longer it took Ciprian to find his brother, the angrier he became. His hands clenched into fists as he tried to control his rapidly beating heart. He felt an overwhelming urge to knock his brother upside the head.

He was enraged by the time he found Chellak in the high ruler’s office giving orders to one of his warriors. As angry as Ciprian was by the treatment Chellak had given his mate, he couldn’t stop himself from walking up and punching his brother right in the face.

Chellak reared back from the attack and looked at his brother in bewilderment. "What the hell did you do that for?" he yelled as he took up a defensive stance.

"You ungrateful moron!" Ciprian shouted back at him as he took another swing. "How dare you treat your mate so carelessly. All the times you berated me for how I treated Yerik when we were first mated but not once, *not once*, did I ever treat him as poorly as you have treated Demyan. You're not worthy of having a mate."

Chellak looked at Ciprian with absolute confusion. What the hell was he talking about? He hadn't done anything to Demyan. As shock filled him at Ciprian's words, he failed to dodge his next swing. It took two warriors to hold Ciprian off of him.

He wiped his bleeding lip as he glared over at his brother. "What in the hell is going on with you? Why did you attack me?"

"You, in your infinite wisdom, told your mate to stay put, to not leave where you left him until you came back for him. Right?"

"Well, yes," Chellak said still confused, "It was for his own safety. I wanted him away from the battle. Why? What's going on?"

"He stayed where you told him to stay, *exactly* where you told him to stay. He hasn't moved from that spot since yesterday morning. He hasn't eaten or had a bath, nothing. He did exactly what his *master* told him to do. He stayed put!" Ciprian growled at Chellak, wincing when all the blood drained from Chellak's face.

Okay, maybe his brother hadn't realized what he had done when he had told Demyan to stay put. But he should have checked on him before now. It was his responsibility to care for his mate, to protect him and keep him safe, even from himself.

"He won't move from that spot you left him in until you tell him to. He's following your words exactly. Yerik can't even get him to move. He has no covering or anything and he stayed there, all night long, with the window open."

Ciprian knew he was just adding to his brother's guilt by being so direct with his words, but Chellak needed to understand that he could

not be careless with his mate. It was a wonderful thing to have a mate and he needed to appreciate the gift he had been given.

Ciprian shook off the warriors that were holding him before leaning into Chellak's face until their noses nearly touched. "Be so careless with your mate again and I will challenge you for him myself!"

Chellak raised his grief filled eyes to Ciprian's. "I'll let you."

He turned and ran from the room, Ciprian hot on his heels. Flinging the chamber door open, he came to a complete stop, his heart crumbling to his feet. Just as Ciprian had said, Demyan kneeled on the floor exactly where he stood when Chellak had left him the day before.

He ran across the room and picked Demyan up in his arms, cradling the shivering man close to his chest. "Yerik, would you draw a bath for Demyan, please," he whispered. Chellak buried his face in Demyan's hair, the soft fragrance of moon flowers and summer rain calming him.

Silent, Chellak carried Demyan into the bathroom and sat down on a bench, Demyan in his lap, and began undressing him. He carefully placed him in the warm water and began bathing him.

He gently ran the washcloth down each arm and leg, massaging away any aches and pains he might have as he went. He couldn't look Demyan in the face. He didn't deserve to. But he knew Demyan watched each move he made.

Part of him wondered why Demyan wasn't fighting him or at least pulling away. Instead, he just watched, not resisting anything Chellak did. Maybe this was Demyan's way of punishing him. He certainly deserved anything Demyan did to him.

Lifting Demyan up from the tub, he sat him down on his lap again and dried him off. When Demyan was completely dry Chellak carried him into the bedroom. He smiled grateful for the plate of food someone had placed on the bed.

Sitting in the middle of the bed, he placed Demyan on his lap and wrapped the blankets around his naked body. Pulling the plate closer he picked up some meat and held it up to Demyan, hoping he would eat.

Demyan looked at Chellak once, then opened his mouth to receive the food. Chellak picked up another piece and fed it to him. This time Demyan took it with no resistance. Chellak did this over and over again until all of the food had been eaten.

Chellak set the empty plate on the floor then laid Demyan back on the pillows, tucking the blankets around him. He lay down beside Demyan and wrapped his arms around him, pulling his head down to rest on his chest.

"Sleep, beautiful," he whispered softly, knowing that Demyan would obey his every word. He had proven that.

Chellak felt Demyan's body relaxing as sleep started to claim him. He had no idea how to get Demyan to stop behaving like a slave. When he had said to stay put, he meant in their quarters, not in that exact spot. He didn't know if the situation had been good or bad for the progress of their relationship.

He realized he might never have a normal relationship with his mate, not like Yerik and Ciprian had. He didn't want a slave, someone who did exactly what they were told with no thoughts of their own. He wanted a partner, someone to share a life with. Maybe that just wasn't in the cards for them.

Demyan closed his eyes and waited for sleep to take him. He had been surprised by the gentle treatment from his master. He had been so caring, so kind. Maybe it had been his reward for obeying him and staying where Chellak told him to stay.

Despite what Yerik had tried to tell him, he knew he had done the right thing. His master's treatment of him proved that. *Why else would he have been so caring?* Was Demyan's last thought as he fell asleep.

Demyan woke in the night feeling cold. Something seemed out of place. Feeling beside him, he found the space beside him empty. He turned over to look and saw that Chellak was gone.

He hadn't said that Demyan had to stay put or told him he couldn't leave the room so Demyan crawled from the bed, wrapping a blanket around himself and went searching for Chellak. Opening the bedroom door as quietly as he could, he looked around the room.

He spotted Chellak sitting naked on a low cushioned couch, his elbows on his knees and his head buried in his hands. He was confused by how upset Chellak seemed to be. What could have made this strong katzman so upset?

He quickly wondered if he had done something wrong. He couldn't remember any order that he had not obeyed. Maybe it wasn't him. Remembering the battle from the day before he wondered if it had gone wrong. Had Chellak lost someone close to him? He was a little surprised how much that thought bothered him.

Walking quietly across the room he knelt down at Chellak's feet and grabbed his arms, pulling them away from his strained face. Knowing it was wrong for him to do so, he looked up at Chellak, reaching up with his hand to smooth back the hair at his temple.

With his fingers, he gently caressed his cheeks, trying to wipe away the lines of stress. Feeling slightly brave, and a little reckless, Demyan leaned up and gave Chellak a gentle kiss on his lips. He was totally unprepared for Chellak's reaction to his kiss.

Strong arms wrapped around him and pulled him flush against Chellak's naked chest. Chellak's mouth plundered his, his tongue sweeping in to brush against his. Hands reached under the blanket and roamed over his naked flesh.

Demyan barely registered it when Chellak picked him up and carried him into the bedroom to lay him down in the middle of the bed.

Chellak pulled the blankets completely off of Demyan and crawled over to lie between his legs. His lips reclaimed Demyan's as he pushed his cock against his.

Chellak groaned as he felt his hard cock press against Demyan's naked flesh. The warmth of his skin against his, the soft feel of Demyan's body...it all aroused Chellak to a fever point. He had to have him. He couldn't stop himself this time. He didn't want to stop himself. He had to claim his mate.

Using one sharp claw, he sliced a small cut in his chest just above his heart. He rolled onto his back and pulled Demyan's lips to his chest, holding his mouth against the cut. "Take it, beautiful, drink from me," he ordered, groaning when Demyan began sucking at the small wound.

"Gods...yes...Demyan..." He groaned as he felt his release coming closer. He pulled Demyan from his chest. Rolling him back under his body, Chellak sank his teeth into the soft skin between Demyan's neck and collarbone, growling at the sweet taste of his mate.

Licking the small bite closed he reached into the small basket beside the bed and grabbed a small bottle of oil. Pouring a small bit on his fingers, he reached down to rub them against Demyan's tight hole.

As he softly bit down on Demyan's nipple, he inserted one finger, moving it around, stretching him until he could add a second finger, then a third. All the time he licked and nipped Demyan's soft skin.

When he felt that the tight skin around his fingers was stretched enough to not hurt, Chellak lifted his hips until his cock pushed against Demyan's hole and pushed his hips slowly forward until he felt his balls press against Demyan's ass. The feeling of Demyan's tight heat wrapped around his hard cock was pure ecstasy.

Grabbing Demyan's legs with his hands he wrapped them around his waist and held them there as he rocked his hips against him. He

thrust into Demyan as deep as he could go before pulling out until just the tip remained, then thrust forward once again.

His mind a haze of passion, Chellak hammered himself into Demyan until his cock erupted. His back arched up as he roared out his release, the knot at the end of his cock extending to lock him into place, filling Demyan with his seed.

He had never experienced the katzman's knot before but as his orgasm continued with each pulse of his cock, he was eternally grateful for it. It was something only to be shared with one's mate, reinforcing his knowledge that Demyan was his.

Demyan watched in awe as Chellak came, his head thrown back, the muscles in his neck tightened, and his jaw clenched tight. He couldn't remember ever seeing a more beautiful sight.

He was bewildered as to why he felt that way until Chellak collapsed on top of him, his head buried in Demyan's neck. Chellak's tongue occasionally licked the small bite there, sending electrical shocks through out his body with each swipe of his tongue.

Just when he started to get uncomfortable with Chellak's weight, he rolled to his back pulling Demyan with him.

"Sleep, beautiful," Chellak murmured quietly as he pulled the blankets up over the both of them. He tucked Demyan's head under his chin. His hands gently stroked Demyan's back and hair.

Demyan closed his eyes, too tired to figure out what had just happened. He would worry about it in the morning. Right now, all he wanted to think about was how good Chellak's arms felt around him, how safe he felt for the first time in years.

Chellak held Demyan way beyond when he fell asleep, unable to sleep himself. He had just claimed his mate and he knew that Demyan had no idea that it had happened. He was sure that Demyan had no idea about the mating rituals of the katzmen.

By exchanging blood, they had started the process that would cement their relationship, binding themselves together as mates. There would never be another for either of them. Not that Chellak

wanted anyone else. He had known from the moment that he had laid eyes on Demyan that he was the one for him.

To him, Demyan was nearly perfect. The only issue that they really had between them was the whole master and slave problem. If Chellak could figure that one out, Demyan would be truly his.

Chellak did briefly wonder if Demyan's race had the same type of bonding that his did. Would their mating mean as much to him as it did to Chellak? Could Demyan desire another? Leave him for another? Care for another?

Which brought another thought to Chellak's head. His brother had been right. He hadn't taken very good care of his mate. It was his responsibility to see to his health and safety. And in that, he had failed miserably.

He knew he had no right to ask Demyan's forgiveness. He had dishonored his mate greatly with his disregard for his welfare. How could he possibly expect Demyan to come to care for him when he showed such disrespect to him?

Chellak felt anguished as he realized how badly he had messed up. He wouldn't be surprised if Demyan never acknowledged him again. Not only had he screwed up by not taking proper care of his mate, but the first time Demyan had made any gesture towards him, of his own free will, Chellak had attacked him.

He hadn't given Demyan any chance to deny him. He had just taken what he wanted, what he felt was his due. He had practically forced Demyan. He knew Demyan hadn't wanted him. He hadn't even enjoyed what they had done together. There had been no desire in him, no passion. Hell, Demyan hadn't even gotten hard.

Demyan clearly didn't want him, not the same way that Chellak wanted Demyan. He didn't desire Chellak in that way. Maybe he preferred women and had only taken what Chellak had done to him because as a slave, he thought he had to.

Chellak never thought about it before. He had just stupidly assumed that Demyan would want him. By sharing blood with him,

Chellak realized he had truly taken Demyan's choices away from him. He had treated him just like a slave.

His stomach rolled at what he had done. Jumping from the bed Chellak ran to the bathroom and emptied the contents of his stomach. When he finished he cleaned his mouth before walking back into the bedroom to gaze down at the sleeping beauty in the bed.

Demyan so very beautiful, the most exquisite creature Chellak had ever seen. Chellak decided there and then that he would never force himself on Demyan again, no matter how much he desired him.

He would teach Demyan everything he needed to know to exist in the real world, how to read and write, how to defend himself, how to survive. And if the time came and Demyan wanted to leave him, Chellak would let him go. He owed at least that to his mate after his dishonorable behavior.

Getting dressed Chellak left his sleeping mate to arrange for some food when he woke up. Remembering the way he had not wanted to eat meat he ordered a variety of fruit and cheeses instead. He wanted Demyan to have a choice, always a choice.

He waited as long as he could before waking Yerik and asking him to help teach Demyan how to read and write. He knew from Yerik's sleepy expression that he should have waited a bit more but he was in a hurry. He wanted everything set into place before Demyan woke up.

Chellak chuckled when he saw Ciprian lift his head from his pillow and glare at him as he wrapped an arm around Yerik and pull him back down to the bed. Guess not everyone was excited about this as he was.

Chellak walked back into the other room, trying to decide what to do next. What would make his mate happy? A warm bath? Was he cold? Would he appreciate a warm fire? Clothes...he needed clothes. He had worn the same clothes for days.

Chellak went to the door and opened it, looking at the guard who stood outside his door. "Ah, Semyon," he said as he recognized the

warrior at his door, "I need you to find a seamstress. Better yet, find that old woman, Sorina. Bring her to me."

"Yes, Commander, right away." Chellak walked back into the room, shutting the door securely behind him. Walking into the bedroom, he gathered up Demyan's soiled clothes, took them to the living area, and waited for Sorina.

When the knock came at the door he almost jumped out of his skin. He quickly opened the door and admitted Sorina.

"Thank you for coming so quickly, Matriz Sorina. I need your help." He grabbed the bundle of dirty clothes and held them up for her. "Demyan has been wearing these for days. Does he have any other clothing? Or is there a way to get him some new ones?"

"Yes, Commander, he has a few changes of clothes. I believe that everything is still in his room."

"His room? Where is that? Can you take me there?" he asked curious about where Demyan called home. "Why hasn't he brought his stuff to our quarters before now? Why is everything still in his room?"

"I would be happy to show you Demyan's room," she replied as she led Chellak out the door and down the hallway. "His room is downstairs in the servant's quarters. And, I believe he hasn't brought his stuff up because he didn't know he could. Before now, he has always returned to his room after being with his master."

As they walked, he saw several things he wanted to change. Most of the servants he saw did not look happy. He wondered if they too were slaves and not just servants.

"How is Demyan? Is he doing okay?" Sorina asked nervously. It wasn't her place to ask the high ruler anything, but she hoped that he wouldn't be offended by her inquiry. She had cared for Demyan for many years and felt responsible for him.

"He's doing well. We have had a few communications problems, but nothing we can't work out. I'm hoping Yerik can teach him to read and write."

“You’re going to teach him to read and write? It’s against the law for slaves to read and write, Commander. He could get into a lot of trouble for that,” she cried worriedly.

“I’m hoping to change that. Besides, if he’s my slave, doesn’t he have to do whatever I tell him? If I tell him to learn to read and write, wouldn’t he be in bigger trouble for disobeying me?”

Sorina thought about before nodding her head. “Yes, the master’s orders are always more important. Well, I’m glad then. He is a very intelligent young man. I have no doubt that he can learn anything he sets his mind to.”

“That’s good then. I plan to teach him to defend himself also. I want him to be able to survive in the world if anything happens to me. My brother will always protect him but there will be times when I will not be around. I don’t want anyone hurting him.”

Sorina nodded her head, agreeing that it would be a good idea. She still felt that Viorel Vedek would try and get his hands on Demyan. He wasn’t going to give up so easily.

She led Chellak to a small damp room under the kitchen stairs. “This is where Demyan lives?” Chellak asked in disgust, appalled at the conditions of the room. It was no bigger than a closet. It just barely fit a small chest and a pile of blankets on the floor. There wasn’t even a stool to sit on.

Chellak walked into the room and opened the small chest on the floor. It held a few changes of clothes carefully folded, a holo disk, and a small leather bag. It wasn’t much. He closed the lid and picked up the chest.

“Is this all he owns? Is there anything else?” He growled, trying to keep the anger out of his voice.

Sorina just shook her head. “No, Vedek didn’t allow him to have anything else. He had a few more things when he first arrived but Viorel destroyed them in a fit of anger when Demyan refused him.”

“Refused him? He did that?”

“Most of his punishments were for refusing Viorel. Demyan...had a hard time understanding that he didn't have the right to refuse his master. He didn't want to be with Viorel. He hated him.”

Sorina sighed deeply as she fingered the edges of her worn dress. “You have to understand, Demyan wasn't always a slave. There was a time in his life when he had a family, a mother and father, brothers and sisters. When Vedek saw him on one of his trade missions and decided he wanted Demyan to give to his son. Demyan had been trained in the ways of the brüter and was sold by his family. He never saw them again.”

“Never? But they just let him be taken away and sold?”

“I'm not sure they had a choice. Their king decreed it. The only concession he gave to the family was that Demyan would always have a master, someone to take care of him.”

“That's not a concession. He could have ended up with Vedek for the rest of his life. I think I'd rather be dead,” Chellak replied, disgusted.

“Many times he wished the very same thing. Viorel was not a kind master, especially when Demyan refused him. He could be quite...creative...in his punishments of Demyan. But Demyan never complained, never uttered a single sound, no matter how harshly he was punished. I think that's why Viorel tried to strangle him. He had finally had it with Demyan refusing him. Believe it or not, Vortigern Vedek saved him.”

“Vortigern Vedek? How?”

“He had told Viorel when he gifted him with Demyan that he could not...consummate...their relationship until Viorel earned his Victorial Shield by proving his fitness to lead his men in battle. I think that Vortigern knew his son didn't have the temperament to earn it, so it was a way of controlling Viorel. When Vortigern heard Viorel tried to force Demyan, he intervened and stopped him. After that, Demyan was kept under lock and key, only allowed out for Viorel to play with when he had done something to please his father.”

“Oh gods, he’s been through hell. No wonder he’s so afraid of me. I thought he was just scared of having a new master, but that’s not it at all. He’s actually afraid of me, of what I will do to him now that Vortigern no longer has him under lock and key.”

“Oh, I’m sure he doesn’t mean to be that way. It’s my fault really. I wanted to comfort him and told him he needed something to believe in. I guess I was just trying to make him feel better but he really took it to heart. That’s when Viorel really started hurting him.”

“Why? What changed?”

“Demyan has this idea that some day he will find someone to love him, someone he can love in return. Even though he’s a slave, he doesn’t want to be with anyone but the person he imagines in his dreams. That’s when things really started getting bad for him. He refused to even touch Viorel. Viorel went crazy and tried to strangle him.”

“And before that?” he asked quietly, realizing how much he had betrayed Demyan.

“Demyan told me that Viorel made him do things...touch him...pleasure him...things like that. I know Demyan didn’t like it because he was always sick when he came back. He would just curl up in his bed and cry, not eating or talking to anyone for days.”

Chellak looked around the dirty barren room with despair filling his heart. Once again, he had taken his choices away from him. He hadn’t realized how much so earlier when he had forced himself on Demyan.

Demyan had a dream of finding the one person in the world that would love him, who he could love in return. From what Sorina told him, Chellak didn’t think he was the one that Demyan dreamed about.

“Come on, I need to get back. Demyan’s going to wake up soon and I want to make sure he gets a warm bath and something to eat. He had a hard day yesterday.” Chellak turned and walked out of the room, carrying the little chest.

“Sorina, do you know if his family is still alive? Where they live?” he asked curiously, formulating plans in his head.

“On his home world, I assume. Why do you ask?”

“How do you think they would feel about moving here? Or maybe just a visit, if they don’t want to move? I want Demyan to see his family. I also want to find out if there is any way to break the ownership contract so Demyan is no longer a slave.”

“That would be wonderful. He would be so happy,” Sorina replied. She was so glad Chellak had come into Demyan’s life. He seemed like a kind man who would take good care of him.

“I want you to tell me everything you remember about his homeworld. I need to know as much as I can before I send someone there. Hopefully, it won’t take too long to learn what we need to know. Don’t say a word to Demyan. I want this to be a surprise.”

Sorina nodded, telling Chellak everything Demyan had ever told her about his homeworld. This was so wonderful. Demyan would be pleased by his new master’s thoughtfulness. She knew she had made the right decision when she had given Chellak the brüter.

Chapter Four

Demyan stretched as he woke, feeling better than he had in years. He had slept like a baby, curled up next the Chellak's warm strength. Looking around he saw that once again, he slept alone.

He wondered suddenly if Chellak was in the living room again. Jumping up from the bed, he looked around for his clothes. Not seeing them, he grabbed the sheet and wrapped it around his body before running into the other room. It was empty.

He walked to the other bedroom and knocked softly on the door. He nodded and smiled at Yerik when he opened the door, then pointed to his ring, then around the room, and shrugged.

"Sorry, Demyan, I don't know where he is. I know he had some stuff to do, so maybe he's just off doing things. He didn't tell you to stay put again did he?"

Demyan shook his head no. He pointed to himself then motioned that he had been sleeping when Chellak had left.

"Well, then, I'm sure he will be back soon. Have you had anything to eat?" When Demyan shook his head, he pulled him into the bedroom. "Come on, I have plenty."

Demyan followed Yerik into the bedroom to sit on the bed in front of a plate of food. He eagerly picked up a piece of meat and began eating, listening to Yerik talk.

"Chellak talked to me earlier and asked me to teach you to read and write. I think this whole communication gap the two of you has really bothers him. Are you interested in learning?"

Picking up another piece of meat and plopping it in his mouth he pointed to his ring and lifted an eyebrow in query.

“Yes, Chellak knows all about it. As I told you, he’s the one that asked me to teach you. Are you up for it? We can begin later today if Chellak says it’s alright.”

Demyan nodded his head enthusiastically. He couldn’t believe his master wanted him to learn to read and write. It was nearly unheard of for a slave to read and write. His master must truly be pleased with him to reward him this way.

They were busy eating and somewhat discussing their day when Demyan heard the door open. He turned with a big smile when he felt Chellak standing in the doorway watching him.

The smile slowly began to fall from his lips at the look in Chellak’s eyes. Demyan didn’t know if he was displeased, angry, or both. But he didn’t seem happy. That much Demyan could tell from the closed look in his eyes as Chellak looked down at him.

Demyan realized suddenly that he was sitting in someone else’s bedroom, on their bed, and he only had a sheet wrapped around him. To make matters worse, he was eating without permission. Since he had met his new master, the only time he had eaten was when Chellak fed him.

He suddenly felt very guilty. Chellak had been so nice to him and he had gone and messed it all up. He wished desperately that he just stayed in bed and waited for his master to return.

He jumped to his feet and wrapped the sheet more closely around his nakedness before walking over to stand in front of Chellak, his head bowed down to his chest. If he could talk, he would beg forgiveness. He had to do something.

Grabbing Chellak’s hand he squeezed past him then pulled him towards their bathroom. Shutting the door behind them, he turned on the water in the large tub before coming to stand in front of a confused looking Chellak.

When he started to unbutton Chellak’s vest, hands were suddenly holding him still. Demyan peaked up at Chellak, wondering if he had over stepped his bounds.

“No, Demyan,” Chellak whispered.

Demyan thought for a moment then dropped to his knees and began unbuttoning Chellak’s pants only to have Chellak stop him again. “No, Demyan,” he said a little louder this time. “You need to stop.”

Demyan didn’t know what to do. He didn’t know how to make Chellak happy again. Anything they had done before seemed wrong now.

Chellak pulled Demyan to his feet and pushed him back a little. He needed a little space between them. Standing next to Demyan, smelling his sweet fragrance almost hurt knowing that he could not have the little man.

When Demyan dropped the sheet around him to the floor and stood before him naked, Chellak couldn’t take the torture anymore. He grabbed the sheet and pulled it back over Demyan’s body, hiding his nakedness.

“Go, Demyan. I’ll be out in a few moments,” Chellak said as he pushed Demyan towards the door. When Demyan paused at the door, looking back at him with his confused eyes, Chellak broke.

“Go, Demyan, now!” he yelled. He regretted the harsh words as soon as they were out of his mouth, but it was too late to keep the hurt look from filling Demyan’s eyes as he hurriedly turned and ran into the bedroom.

Damn! He had done it again. He knew Demyan just wanted to make him feel better, and he had shot him down. But at this point, nothing would make him feel better. He didn’t know if he would ever feel good again.

Chellak walked back into the bedroom only to stop suddenly at the sight before him. Demyan lay in the middle of the bed completely naked, the sheet in a pile on the floor. He just stared in awe for several moments before letting out a strangled groan and walking swiftly to the living room, slamming the bedroom door behind him.

Demyan jerked when the door slammed behind Chellak as he practically ran from the room. He grabbed the blankets and slowly pulled them up over his head, his whole body suddenly freezing, and curled under them.

He wanted to shut out the light, sound, everything. He made no noise as the tears fell down his face. He wanted to laugh as he realized that he had no sound to make. Nothing.

He couldn't even scream out his frustration at himself. He had screwed up again. He had somehow thought after what had happened last night that maybe Chellak wanted him, that he might have finally found someone to love him.

When Chellak had come in so upset, he had been sure he could make him feel better. When he had said no to the bath, he had thought for sure that pleasuring him would make him feel better. But Chellak hadn't seemed to want that either.

After Chellak had yelled at him to leave the bathroom, he had seen the bed and thought that he might respond to that, especially after what they had done the night before. Chellak had seemed to really enjoy it. So Demyan had dropped the sheet on the floor and lay down on the bed, waiting.

He had kept his eyes closed when Chellak walked into the room, not wanting him to see how nervous he felt. Only to hear him run from the room, slamming the door behind him. Demyan knew he could not have missed seeing him laying on the bed waiting for him.

He didn't know what to do now. Did this mean that Chellak didn't want him in that way again? That would explain why he hadn't been in bed with him this morning. But his master was rewarding him, teaching him to read and write. Didn't that mean something?

He didn't move when he heard the bedroom door open and someone sit on the bed beside him. He knew it wasn't Chellak. He didn't know how he knew, but he did. Chellak was still out in the other room.

“Demyan, are you okay?” Yerik asked as he looked down at the small body huddling under the covers. Chellak had come shooting out of the bedroom, a panicked look on his face as he sank down to sit against the wall, his head buried in his hands.

Ciprian was still trying to get him to talk about what had happened. He had nodded for Yerik to come in here and make sure that Demyan was okay. Something profound had obviously happened.

Seeing Demyan naked and huddled under the covers, he wondered if Chellak had tried something that Demyan couldn’t handle. He knew it could be hard to not claim a mate, but if Chellak moved too fast he could severely damage his relationship with Demyan.

“Demyan? Aren’t you going to come out and talk to me?”

Demyan flipped the covers back long enough to stare at Yerik as if to say, “*Really? You didn’t just say that!*” Before crawling back under the covers.

“Okay,” Yerik chuckled, “bad choice of words on my part. But I just want to help. So, come out, Demyan. Chellak’s in the living room with his head buried in his hands. Something has upset him really bad. Ciprian sent me in here because he’s worried. What happened?”

Demyan slowly pulled the covers back to look up at Yerik. He stared at him for several moments before pointing to his ring and putting his head in his hands.

“Yes, I told you the truth. I don’t know what happened between the two of you but it’s really tearing him up inside. I’ve never seen him like this.”

Demyan immediately sat up and swung his legs over the side of the bed. He reached over and yanked on the shirt Yerik wore, then pointed to himself.

“Oh, sure, you want to borrow my shirt?” When Demyan nodded Yerik started unbuttoning his shirt. Pulling it off, he handed it to Demyan who quickly put it on. It covered Demyan almost to his knees.

Demyan stood up and walked to the door. He took several deep breaths before opening the door and walking out. He found Ciprian on one of the low couches, but Chellak was nowhere to be seen.

Demyan walked over to Ciprian and pointed to his ring. "*Where is Chellak?*" He asked. Ciprian just shook his head. He looked frustrated and sad.

"I'm sorry, Demyan, but he left." At Demyan's anguished look, he stood up and took him into his arms. Hugging him close to his body, he patted him on the back. "I don't know what happened between you, but just give him some time. He'll be back."

Demyan sat down heavily on the couch. He tried to think of what he could have done wrong, why Chellak would leave. There were several things he could think of, all of them his fault.

First, he had been in Yerik's room, on his bed, and undressed. Second, he had been eating without permission. Chellak seemed to take special delight in feeding him. He had ignored that fact when Yerik had invited him to eat.

Third, he had obviously not pleased Chellak last night. If he had, Chellak would not have told him no when he tried to pleasure him in the bathroom and then in the bedroom. Viorel had always said that he wasn't any good at pleasing his master. Maybe he had been right.

Demyan wondered if he had any chance of making it up to Chellak. He didn't want to have a master, but he was realistic enough to know that since he had one, Chellak might not be a bad one. He was certainly better than Viorel. No matter what he did, Chellak had yet to hurt physically...yet.

"Demyan, are you okay?" Yerik asked as he walked into the room and went to sit by Ciprian's side.

Demyan shrugged his shoulders. Okay, what was okay? His master seemed angry with him for something he had done, and he had no idea what. He was so angry, he couldn't even be in the same room with him.

“Why don’t you go get dressed and we can get started on teaching you to read and write? I know Chellak wanted you to learn,” Yerik tried.

Demyan looked up eagerly. Yes! Chellak wanted him to learn to read and write. He could do that. Maybe that would make his master happy. Maybe if he learned to communicate with him, he would come back.

Nodding quickly, he jumped to his feet and ran to the bedroom to get dressed. He looked around the room for his clothes, and spotted his chest sitting on the floor by the fireplace. Dropping to his knees before the small wooden chest, he opened it and began rummaging for clean clothes.

He quickly got dressed and went back out to the living room to where Yerik waited for him. He eagerly sat down and began his lessons.

Yerik was surprised at how enthusiastically Demyan attacked his lessons. He seemed driven to quickly learn as much as he could. Within a matter of moments, it became apparent to Yerik that Demyan was very intelligent. He only had to explain things to him once and he got it.

Before he knew it, darkness had fallen and Ciprian walked back into the room. “Hello love, how did your day go?” He asked as he pulled Yerik into his arms and gave him a kiss. “Did the lessons go okay?”

“Oh yes, Demyan has a spectacular mind. He’s learning it almost as fast I can teach it to him. At this rate, he should be writing by the end of the week.”

“That’s great. Chellak will be very pleased.”

At the mention of Chellak’s name, Demyan’s head came up. He looked eagerly towards the door then back at Ciprian. He pointed to his ring and then shrugged his shoulders, asking about Chellak.

“Oh...well...he had some stuff to take care of. You know commander stuff. But I know he will be very happy that you’re learning to read and write.”

Ciprian felt the need to hit his brother again as all of the day’s enjoyment drained from Demyan’s face and he looked back down at the book before him, then closed and stacked it neatly on top of several others.

He nodded to Yerik and Ciprian and walked back into his room, softly closing the door behind him.

Yerik cuddled deeper into Ciprian’s arms as they watched him go. He felt the sadness rolling off of Demyan and the anger in his mate. “Do you think they will ever find each other, Ciprian?”

“I don’t know, my love. It’s not easy for Chellak. He never thought he would meet his mate let alone that he would be a slave. I’m not sure he knows how to deal with Demyan. He seemed agitated all day, growling at anyone that got too close. If something doesn’t happen soon, I don’t know if either of them will survive it.”

“Demyan wasn’t much better. Every time someone walked down the hallway, he would watch the door, waiting for Chellak to come in. When they went by, his face would fall but he would just shrug his shoulders and get back down to work.”

“Well, something has to give. I’m just not sure which one of them will do it first.”

Both of them turned when the door opened and Chellak walked in. He looked tired and haggard.

“Oh, hey,” he said when he saw them standing in the living room.

“Chellak, did everything go okay today with the Federation delegate?”

“Federation delegate?” Yerik asked curiously.

“Yes, the Federation of Planets sent a delegate here to oversee the implementation of the federation rules. They just want to make sure I am following the rules, nothing too big. But unfortunately, it looks

like I am going to have to make a trip back to their headquarters. They want me to personally escort those prisoners.”

“Why you? Wouldn’t it be just as easy for me or Bogden to go?”

“Probably. But they see it as me *doing my duty by the federation*. So, I get to go. I shouldn’t be gone to long, a couple of weeks or so.”

“When do you leave?”

“Not for a few days yet. Their delegate wants to oversee a few more things before we leave. Why?”

“What are you going to do with Demyan? Take him with you?” Yerik asked as he gestured towards the bedroom door.

“No, he’ll stay here. I can’t take him on a trip like this. But I ask that you keep an eye on him. I don’t want anyone to hurt him. Where is he anyway?”

“He’s in the bedroom. He had a good day. He’s a very fast learner. I think he’ll be reading and writing by the time you get back.”

Chellak smiled proudly, “I knew he could do it. It will be great to be able to communicate with him. Keep me informed on how he’s doing. If he needs anything, make sure he gets it.”

He went into the bedroom to find Demyan leaning against the wall next to the open window, watching the twin suns set.

“Hey, beautiful, Yerik tells me you had a good day. How do you like what you’ve learned so far?”

Demyan looked over when Chellak walked in. He was smiling and chatting like their earlier episode had never happened. Demyan shrugged his shoulders and gave him a small smile. If he wanted to pretend that this morning never happened, he could play along with that.

“I am very pleased that you are attempting to learn this, Demyan. You never know when you might need to communicate with someone. Keep it up.”

Demyan nodded, following Chellak into the bathroom. When Chellak begun unbuttoning his vest, Demyan reached over and turned

on the water to fill the tub. He sprinkled a little bath salt in the tub and turned back to Chellak.

He watched Chellak drop his clothes on the floor and climb into the tub. He knelt beside the tub and grabbed for a washcloth to begin cleaning Chellak, only to have Chellak stop him.

"No, Demyan," Chellak said as he took the washcloth from him. "Go into the other room." He pointed towards the door.

Demyan dropped his head and squeezed his eyes shut as he climbed to his feet. He stood there for several moments, wavering, until Chellak repeated his command to leave. Apparently, not everything from this morning had been forgotten.

He walked into the bedroom and sat on the bed, not knowing what he should to do. Chellak hadn't given him any orders, asked for anything, nothing. He had no duties so he just sat there, waiting for Chellak to finish his bath.

After awhile the bathroom door swung open and Chellak walked out, a towel wrapped around his waist. He walked to a trunk that a warrior had brought in earlier and opened it to search around for some clothes.

"Demyan, would you go ask Semyon to send for some food? I haven't eaten dinner yet."

Demyan eagerly nodded and ran to do as he asked, coming back to the bedroom several minutes later after a tray of food had been delivered. He found Chellak sitting on the bed, his back against the wall, studying a holo disk.

He set the tray on the bed beside Chellak, climbed onto the bed by his feet, and waited. Chellak finally looked up and smiled, "Thank you, beautiful." He reached down and grabbed a piece of meat and began eating, his eyes on the holo disk.

Chellak had taken several bites when he realized that Demyan wasn't eating. "Aren't you going to eat?" Demyan's face seemed to get a little somber, but he nodded and picked up a piece of meat and began eating.

“Demyan, let me ask you something,” Chellak said suddenly. “If you were making a trade deal with the Kregan’s for sarybium, would you suddenly increase the production at three mines to dig for the same mineral?”

Demyan thought about it for several moments before shaking his head no.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought. It seems that Vedek just signed a trade deal with the Kregan’s for a continuous supply of sarybium. But, at the same time he increased the production levels at three sarybium mines here on Katzmann. Why would he do that?”

Again, Demyan thought for several moments. Then he suddenly slapped the bed several times to get Chellak’s attention. When Chellak looked up Demyan reached over and grabbed at the pistol lying on the small table next to the bed. He pulled the power cartridge out and pointed to the bottom of it where the energy cell was located.

Chellak grabbed the cartridge and looked at it, confused. Demyan pointed to the bottom again. He motioned digging with his hands then pointed to the cartridge again. Watching the look of wonder come over Chellak’s face as he got the idea.

“Damn!” Chellak swore as he got up from the bed and went to the door. He opened the door and called to his brother. “Ciprian, if you had a huge amount of sarybium, what would you use it for?”

“Well, sarybium is used in the making of energy cells for particle weapons. With a huge amount, I could outfit an army. Why? How much sarybium are we talking about?”

“That’s exactly what I thought. Which makes me wonder why Vedek was amassing such a huge amount of sarybium. Seems he had some big plans in the works.”

“Oh? Any idea what?” Ciprian asked astonished.

“Not yet. Vedek ordered a huge amount of sarybium from the Kregan’s in some sort of trade deal, plus upped the production in three mines here on Katzmann. Demyan here figured out what the sarybium was for.”

“Way to go, Demyan,” Ciprian chuckled as he patted him on the back.

Demyan watched the interplay between Ciprian and Chellak as they talked about what Vedek could have been doing. He wondered that himself. Viorel Vedek was an idiot who used his size to get what he wanted. His father, however, was evil and cunning. He had to have been planning something.

Having an idea Demyan grabbed a piece of paper and began drawing a picture. When he finished, he handed it to Chellak.

“What, Demyan? What are you trying to say?” Chellak asked in confusion as he glanced at the paper, not understanding all the circles and lines on it.

Demyan pushed Chellak and Ciprian to stand a few feet apart. He handed the power cartridge to Ciprian then stood back. Making a show of beginning something, he took the cartridge from Ciprian and then made a show of handing him something in return then shrugged his shoulders.

Ciprian and Chellak just looked at him. Demyan just rolled his eyes. He handed the power cartridge back to Ciprian. He grabbed the holo disk from Chellak and pointed to it. Then took the cartridge back from Ciprian and made the motion to put something in his hand in return. He pointed to Ciprian’s hand then shrugged his shoulders.

“I think I get it. He wants to know what Vedek used as trade for the sarybium? Sarybium is very expensive and regulated by the Federation. What could he use to trade for it? Right?”

Demyan eagerly nodded. He quickly gave back the power cartridge and took it back, then handed it to Chellak and took it back. He did this several times, shrugging his shoulders. When they both looked at him baffled, he stomped his foot on the floor in aggravation.

“He wants to know if there were any other trade deals made,” Yerik said from the doorway, having heard most of the conversation.

Demyan clapped his hands together in excitement as he turned to see Yerik standing in the doorway.

“That’s a very good question. Chellak?” Ciprian asked as he held out his arms for his mate.

Chellak looked at Demyan in amazement. He really had no idea he was so smart. His mind was amazing. He briefly wondered how much help he could be if he could communicate easier.

Looking back at the others, he started thinking. “There have to be more. If I were planning something big, I wouldn’t stop at one trade deal. Would you?” Chellak asked.

“Nope, I would go for broke.” He wrapped Yerik in his arms. “You know what this means, Chellak. You have to go over every trade deal Vedek ever made, trace every incoming and outgoing transit ship, all the records of anything moving off world for at least the last couple of years. You need to find out what Vedek was up to. Who knows how deep this goes?”

Chellak nodded, already feeling the headache coming on from the work he had ahead of him. He sat down on the side of the bed with a heavy sigh, running a tired hand through his hair. What was Vedek up to?

Demyan saw the wearied look on Chellak’s face and was filled with remorse. He had just been trying to help when he pointed out that there had to be other trade agreements. Not create more work for Chellak. He knelt on the floor before Chellak, trying to show how sorry he felt.

Chellak smiled as he reached down to caress the side of his face, “It’s okay, beautiful. You have a very sharp mind. Any help you can give me is greatly appreciated. I need people around me who tell me what they think.”

Demyan held Chellak’s hand against the side of his face briefly as he lowered his eyes to the floor. He nodded as he stood up quickly and walked to the balcony where he sat down with his back against the wall, knees drawn up to his chest, and buried his head in his knees.

Chellak watched him go then gave Ciprian and Yerik a worried frown before standing up to follow him out to the balcony. He squatted down next to Demyan, worried by the silent shaking of his shoulders.

“Demyan? Is something wrong?” Chellak could feel the misery in Demyan and knew he was crying. It distressed him to think that his little man was hurting.

Demyan shook his head.

“Demyan, look at me,” he whispered, “please?”

Demyan raised his head to look up at Chellak. He wanted so much to be able to tell him how he felt, what he thought, to just be able to say his name, to yell at him for being so frustrating.

Chellak seemed to run hot and cold. One minute he couldn't stand to be in the same room with Demyan, the next he was softly caressing him. Demyan didn't know where he stood. He didn't know how he was supposed to behave or do. Chellak didn't seem to want anything from him.

“What's wrong, beautiful?”

Demyan desperately wished that Chellak would stop calling him beautiful. He didn't mean it. It was just a form of addressing him, like naming his favorite pet. He was beginning to hate that name.

Demyan shook his head again. Chellak would never understand and he couldn't explain it to him. If he could have laughed, he would have. He reached up and gently laid his hand on Chellak's cheek. He gazed up at him for several seconds, trying to read his expression. Finally, he leaned up and placed a small kiss on Chellak's lips.

“No, Demy—” Chellak stopped speaking when Demyan placed his fingers against Chellak's lips to stop him.

Demyan didn't know if he could hear Chellak say *no* to him right now. There were tears in his eyes as he caressed his face one more time before standing up and walking back into the bedroom.

Chellak did nothing to stop Demyan as he watched him walk away. He felt the heartache in him but didn't know what had caused it

let alone how to stop it. He tried his best not to treat Demyan like a slave, so he didn't think that was it.

He thought over what he had said, but couldn't think of anything that would upset Demyan. Was it mentioning Vedek? Chellak knew that Demyan was very afraid of both Vedek's. Maybe talking about them brought back bad memories.

Chellak stood up and watched out into the courtyard below as he tried to think what he could do to make Demyan feel better. Nothing immediately came to him. Then he thought of the dagger he carried in his chest. Maybe having something to help keep himself safe would make Demyan feel better.

Walking back into the bedroom, he saw that Ciprian and Yerik had left and Demyan lie curled up in bed under the covers. Chellak knew he wasn't asleep. He didn't seem to want to talk. He decided to let him be.

Pulling his clothes off, he climbed into bed beside Demyan. He nearly groaned when his leg touched Demyan's and he realized that he was naked. His cock became hard so fast it almost hurt.

He wanted to pull Demyan to him and caress every inch of his skin...with his tongue, his hands, every part of his body. Just thinking about touching Demyan's naked body made his aching cock jump. Chellak knew it would be a long...hard...night.

Demyan woke in the middle of the night to a hand wrapped around his cock. He ached, throbbing, nearly hard. Another hand caressed him between his butt cheeks, softly pressing into his eager hole. It felt blissful. He had never felt like this and he wanted more, so much more.

Opening his eyes he saw that Chellak lay between his legs, his hands pleasuring him. Chellak's lips licked his nipples, alternating between them, bringing them to hard little pebbles.

He reached down and wrapped his hands in Chellak's hair and pulled him up for a kiss, eagerly exploring the depths of his mouth. He tasted so sweet, so succulent.

Suddenly Chellak pulled away. Demyan thought that he would tell him no again and braced himself for the rejection. But Chellak didn't speak. Instead he flipped Demyan over onto his stomach and pulled him back onto his knees.

Kneeling quickly behind him Chellak grabbed his hips and thrust himself inside of Demyan all at once. If Demyan hadn't been so aroused, he knew it would have hurt.

Chellak began ramming inside of Demyan at a frantic pace, his large pulsing cock rubbing Demyan's prostate with every thrust. After awhile, Demyan didn't know where he ended and Chellak began.

Just when he thought he couldn't take the pounding anymore, Chellak grabbed him by the shoulders and pulled him up against his body and bit into his shoulders.

Demyan felt an intense pleasure shoot through his body. He could feel a build up of pressure in his body, his cock throbbing as it swayed between his legs, but he didn't fully understand what was happening.

He knew he was heading towards something glorious, something Chellak seemed to be reaching for as well. For the first time in his life, he wanted it, wanted to feel what Chellak felt.

Demyan turned his body and leaned over against Chellak's chest, biting him back, feeling the sweet taste of his blood trickle down his throat.

Chellak's mouth released Demyan's neck and he pushed him down into the mattress as he gave him several more quick jabs with his cock, holding him in place with a hand on his neck, another on his hip.

Then he roared, yelling out his release loud enough to shake the windows. His hands curled into Demyan skin leaving small scratches in his sides as he erupted, filling Demyan with pulse after pulse of semen.

Demyan was barely conscious as Chellak collapsed on top of him. His head was buried in Demyan's neck, the knot in Chellak's cock keeping them connected as they both fell into a satisfied sleep.

Chapter Five

Demyan woke slowly. He started to stretch but found he had more than one sore muscle. He smiled deeply as he remembered how he had gotten each and every one of them. No matter what anyone said, they could no longer convince Demyan that Chellak didn't want him.

He knew he did. Last night he had taken him, and even brought him close to orgasm. Demyan rolled over onto his back and reached down to stroke his cock. It felt so good. He had never had an orgasm before but with a little more persuasion from Chellak, he was sure it wasn't far off.

Demyan didn't plan on missing it any more. Chellak could have him whenever he wanted him. Demyan turned to look at Chellak, but the bed beside him was empty. Demyan sat up on his elbows and looked around the room.

He smiled and shook his head. He would have to break Chellak of the habit of leaving before he woke up. They never seemed to get the chance to spend any time together after they had sex. Chellak always seemed to go missing before he woke up.

Climbing from the bed, he spotted a small dagger in a sheath sitting on top of his folded clothes. Picking it up he turned and pulled the dagger out of the sheath and over in his hands. Made of silver with small carvings in the handle, the dagger was beautiful.

It had to be a gift from Chellak. Demyan felt tears come to his eyes at his loving gesture. He had never been given a gift before. And to get one after last night...Chellak must be rewarding him, thanking him.

Demyan held the dagger to his chest and danced around the room. He couldn't ever remember being this happy. Chellak wanted him. The happiness filling his heart overwhelmed Demyan, making him slightly lightheaded.

He quickly grabbed his clothes and got dressed. Strapping the dagger sheath to his thigh, then placing the dagger carefully in it, he headed towards the living area. He wanted to find Chellak and thank him, express his growing love to him.

Walking into the living room, he looked around but found the room empty. He went to the front door to see Semyon standing guard. He pointed to his ring, asking to be taken to Chellak.

"I'm sorry, Demyan, the commander is unavailable right now. Is there something I can do for you?" Semyon replied.

Feeling less joyful than he had moments before, he shook his head. He closed the door softly and walked into the room to sit at the desk and begin going over his lessons. He tried to understand that Chellak, being the high ruler, was but Demyan still wanted to see him. But, he had tonight.

The smile was back on Demyan's face when Yerik came out to join him. He nodded at him with a wide smile.

Yerik smiled back, noticing the bright look on Demyan's face. *Hmmm, things must be working themselves out between Demyan and Chellak.* "Good morning, Demyan. You seem to be in a good mood today."

Demyan eagerly nodded his head. He pointed to his ring then smiled.

"Oh, I see, Chellak put that smile on your face, did he? And where is your man?"

Demyan began shrugging his shoulders when Ciprian walked into the room, a stack of holo disks in his hand.

"Oh, hi, are you two getting those lessons underway?"

"Yes, Demyan was just telling me why he had such a big smile on his face," Yerik replied before giving Ciprian a quick kiss and hug.

Demyan stood up and pointed to the sheath on his hip, pulling out the dagger. He pointed to the dagger then to his ring, telling them that Chellak had given him the dagger. He was eager to show off his great prize.

“Oh, very nice. Chellak gave this to you?” Yerik asked with a wink. Laughing when he saw Demyan blush. Ciprian looked over his shoulder to the dagger.

“Oh good, Chellak mentioned wanting to give you something to defend yourself with. I was worried he would forget before he left.”

“Left? Where’d he go?” Yerik asked, trying not to feel his heart sink at the crestfallen look on Demyan’s face.

Ciprian looked up from the holo disks in his hands. “He had to go to Federation HQ. He’ll be back in a couple of weeks.”

“He left? Just like that? Did he leave any kind of message or anything?” Yerik knew from the lost look on Demyan’s face that he was wondering the very same thing.

“I don’t think so. But now that you mentioned it, he did seem a little distracted. Maybe he just forgot. He was kind of busy. I’ll ask him tonight when he calls. Why? Is something wrong?”

Demyan set his book down and walked quietly to his room. Taking off the sheath, he looked down at it for a moment before opening his chest and lying the dagger and sheath in the chest and closing the lid.

It hadn’t been a gift. He should have known. No one had ever given him a gift before, and he shouldn’t expect one now. He was a slave and he just couldn’t seem to make himself remember that.

All of the joy of being loved by Chellak drained out of him. He didn’t mean any more to Chellak than a piece of property and a means of getting back at Vedek. He probably didn’t even realize it had been Demyan last night, assuming he remembered it at all.

Why couldn’t he remember his place in the world? He was a slave, and he would never be anything better than a slave. Chellak just did what every a master did with their slave, use his property.

Demyan suddenly felt nauseous. Running to the bathroom, he emptied the contents of his stomach. He rinsed out his mouth and looked up at himself in the mirror. He had nothing to offer someone like Chellak except his looks. That's all he was, a pretty shell. He couldn't do anything.

Maybe if he learned to cook, or fight, or something. Maybe then Chellak might see him as something other than a slave. Maybe...maybe...maybe, so many maybes. Who was he kidding? Chellak was a warrior, the high ruler. He could have anyone he wanted. Why would he be interested someone like him?

He knew Chellak wanted him, but he didn't seem to want to want him. It was almost as if he felt ashamed of wanting to him. As if he hated himself every time he came to Demyan. And where did that leave him?

Demyan heard the bedroom door open and Yerik call out his name. He splashed some water on his face and then went out into the bedroom to face Yerik. He gave him what he hoped looked like a good smile but knew he fell short of his goal when Yerik walked over and gave him a hug.

"It'll be alright, Demyan. He's a busy man. I'm sure he just forgot to leave a message in the chaos of things. Maybe you can talk to him tonight when he calls. I'll ask Ciprian if you want me to?"

Demyan shook his head. No, if Chellak wanted to talk to him he would ask for him. He was done trying to get his attention. It hurt too much every time Chellak rejected his advances. When Chellak wanted him, he would let him know.

In the meantime, he had some lessons to get to. He gestured to Yerik that they needed to get to their lessons. His heart wasn't really into his lessons, but if that was what Chellak wanted, that's what he would do. He would rather curl up in bed and block out the world around them.

By the time evening came, Demyan could read small words and could spell his name. He seemed pleased with his progress, but still sad.

Yerik was pleased with Demyan's progress. He just wished he could do something to cheer him up but nothing seemed to work. Demyan was too depressed over Chellak leaving.

When Ciprian walked in he nearly heaved a sigh of relief. "Hey, how was your day? Anything interesting happen?"

"Not really. I had to deal with the trade delegate from Kregan. The man's a complete idiot. He actually believed that Chellak would continue trading with him even after we found out what they were trading."

"What was Vedek trading him?"

"Solar straw, if you can believe that."

"Solar straw? But you can get that anywhere. Why would they trade sarylium for solar straw? That doesn't make sense," Yerek said curiously. "We don't even grow that much solar straw here, just enough to get by. Not nearly enough to trade."

"That's what I thought. There has to be some underhanded dealing going on. They may have been trading something more, but I can't prove it. There's no record that I can find. But it does make you wonder, doesn't it?"

Yerik glanced at Demyan from under his eyelashes. His head was bowed over the book he was studying but the tilt of his head and the quick flash of his eyes told him that he was listening to their conversation. Maybe he did have a way of putting a real smile back on his face. "Will Chellak have time to talk to Demyan when he calls tonight?"

Demyan's head came up quickly as he looked at Ciprian almost desperately. Until Ciprian shook his head, then it dropped back down.

"Sorry, I already spoke to Chellak tonight. I needed to talk to him about the Kregan delegate so I called him early. But I'll see what I can do tomorrow, okay?"

Demyan nodded as he stood up and walked into the bedroom as calmly as he could. As soon as the bedroom door closed he raced to the bathroom and threw up. His nerves were so tied up in knots he couldn't keep anything down.

He really wanted to talk to Chellak, to understand the situation. But he wanted Chellak to want to talk to him. Maybe tomorrow night he would ask to speak to him. He could always hope.

But the next night was the same, Chellak and Ciprian talked before Ciprian came back to their room. It continued that way the next night and the next.

Then came the excuse that Chellak was just too busy or he had to leave to go to a meeting and didn't have time to talk. Each time it was something different but the end results were the same. Chellak didn't want to talk to him.

By the time three weeks had gone by, Demyan had gotten the idea. Chellak didn't want to talk to him. Then came the news that Chellak would be extending his visit for an undetermined amount of time.

Demyan spent that day in his room alone, refusing to come out. Yerik tried several times to get him to come out but Demyan wouldn't even open the door. He knew Demyan was in there, he could hear him walking around. He finally went to Ciprian for help.

"Ciprian, you have to call Chellak and find out what's going on. I can't even get Demyan to come out of his room. He can't just leave Demyan hanging here. He has to talk to him."

"I'll do what I can, but Chellak really doesn't want to talk to him. He won't tell me what's wrong, but I think that something happened the night before he left. Has Demyan said anything?"

"No. Every time I bring it up, he runs into the bathroom and throws up. I'm really starting to get worried about him. He can't keep anything down. If something doesn't happen soon, he's going to be really sick."

"Alright, I'll give Chellak another call and see what I can do."

Yerik nodded his head as he walked over to the bedroom door. "I'm going to try and get Demyan to let me in again. Let me know what Chellak says. I could use some good news right about now."

"Yerik," Ciprian called as he turned away. Yerik looked over his shoulder at his mate. "You know I love you, right?"

"Yeah, I know, big guy. I love you too," he replied.

Ciprian left to call Chellak while Yerik knocked on the bedroom door. He jumped in surprised when Demyan actually opened the door this time.

"Demyan, are you okay?"

He nodded and gestured that he felt hungry. Yerik grinned and went to get food, wondering at the funny little smile on Demyan's face. The last time he saw Demyan he was in the middle of a meltdown, refusing to eat. Now he was smiling and asked for food. Something had changed but damned if he knew what.

* * * *

Ciprian sat down at his desk and took a couple of deep breaths before dialing up Chellak's vidlink.

"Hey, brother, what's up? Why are you calling so late? Is there a problem?" Chellak asked as he smiled into the video link.

"Ah...well...there might be. Is there any chance you can come home early?"

"What is it?" Chellak asked, serious suddenly. He could hear the trepidation in his brother's voice.

"Look, normally I wouldn't stick my nose into your private business but Yerik is really starting to get worried about Demyan. He's not eating. He barely leaves his room, and every time Yerik tries to talk to him about you, Demyan runs to the bathroom and throws up."

Chellak clasped his hands together and leaned his face against them. He was quiet for several moments before he looked back at Ciprian.

"I'll leave in the morning," he replied quietly and shut off the vidlink before Ciprian could say another word.

Ciprian stared at the closed vidlink for several moments before getting up to go find Yerik. This whole situation was getting weirder and weirder. The entire time Chellak had been gone, he had refused to speak to Demyan, getting agitated every time Ciprian brought his name up. Now he seemed willing to drop everything and come home?

That just didn't make sense. Hell, none of this made sense. Chellak should have claimed his mate by now. Ciprian wasn't even sure that Demyan even knew he was Chellak's mate. It would be just like his brother to forget to mention that little tidbit.

He always thought he knew what was best for everyone but he forgot to ask them what they wanted. He had been the same way when Ciprian had mated Yerik. Sticking his nose in and making decisions without consulting either of them. It had nearly cost him his mate.

Ciprian knocked on the bedroom door. When he heard Yerik's reply, he opened the door and walked in, surprised to see Yerik and Demyan sitting on the bed eating and smiling. He drew back, a little curious.

"Ah, hey," he said looking down at the half-eaten tray of food between them. "Is this a private party or can anyone join?"

Yerik scooted over to make room for his mate, who stretched out over the bottom of the bed, his head resting against Yerik's legs. He reached down and grabbed some grapes and began dropping them into his mouth. At Yerik's raised eyebrow, he quickly nodded, not saying anything.

"So, Demyan, what's put you in such a good mood all of a sudden?"

Demyan just shook his head and patted Yerik's hand. At Ciprian's curious look, he placed a finger over his mouth and shook his head again before pointing to his ring, his smile brighter than Ciprian had ever seen.

"Oh, a secret, huh?" His eyes nearly popped out of his head when Demyan began to giggle. Granted, there was no sound, but Ciprian knew he giggled none the less. The joy in his eyes was evident by the gleam in them. He wondered how long that look would stay in his eyes once Chellak came home.

Looking up he saw a yawn cross over Demyan's face. He got up from the bed. Pulling Yerik up beside him, he smiled down at Demyan. "We're going to head off to bed. You try to get some rest and we will see you in the morning."

Demyan nodded and waved them away. He disposed of the remaining food then undressed and climbed into bed. As he curled onto his side, he absently stroked his abdomen. He did have a secret, a very special one.

* * * *

Demyan sat at the desk trying to work his way through the book Yerik had given him to read, when the door opened and Chellak walked in. At first, Demyan just stared at him, not sure he saw what he thought he saw.

Hello, Demyan," Chellak said quietly.

Demyan's eyes lit up as he jumped to his feet and ran to Chellak, throwing his arms around him. He was really here. It wasn't a dream.

It took him a moment to realize that Chellak was not returning his hug. His arms hung down at his sides and he had a peculiar look on his face as he gazed down at Demyan.

Demyan dropped his arms from around Chellak and stepped back. He looked hesitantly up at Chellak, waiting for him to say *no* again.

He knew it was coming. It always did when Demyan tried to get close to Chellak.

Demyan turned and walked back to the desk. He grabbed a piece of paper and began writing. When he finished, he set the pen back on the desk, and handed the paper to Chellak. Chellak looked at Demyan in surprise then down at the paper he held in his hands.

"I'm glad you're home. I hope your trip went well. If I can get anything for you just call me." When Chellak looked up, Demyan had left, the bedroom door just shutting quietly behind him. That went well.

He had just been so surprised at Demyan's welcome that he hadn't been able to move. He had been sure that Demyan hated him. He had been so ashamed of himself when he had woken up a couple of weeks ago to find himself pinning Demyan to the bed. It had been obvious he had forced himself onto the little man again. He had thought leaving would be the best for both of them.

He still did, but hearing Ciprian say that Demyan wasn't eating and got sick to his stomach every time someone said his name had worried him. When Demyan had greeted him with so much joy, he had been stunned. He didn't know how to react.

He actually wrote that he was glad Chellak had come home...He wrote! He could communicate with him. If Chellak hadn't been such an alpha male, he would have jumped for joy like a little boy. He could communicate with Demyan.

He shoved the note into his pocket and grabbed pen and paper. He walked into the bedroom, his eyes seeking out Demyan in the dim light coming from the window. He stood by the open window staring out, his hands resting on his abdomen.

"Demyan?" he asked softly.

Demyan turned his head and looked over at Chellak, the apprehension clear in his eyes. Chellak winced at the wounded look. He knew he was responsible for that look. "Ciprian called. He said you weren't eating, that you were getting sick. I was worried."

Demyan shook his head. Chellak handed him the pad of paper and the pen, gesturing to him to write his answer. Demyan took the paper and quickly wrote something before handing the pad back to Chellak.

"I'm fine. Nothing for you to worry about."

"Then why aren't you eating? I can see that you've lost weight. Are you sick? Do you need to see a doctor? Yerik said that you've been throwing up," he said handing the paper back to Demyan.

"I told you, I'm fine. It's nothing that won't be cleared up soon enough. No need for you to worry. You can go back to your business with a clear conscience."

"Demyan—" Chellak began only to have Demyan pull the paper out of his hand and write something else before handing it back to him.

"I am eating. Ask Yerik if you don't believe me. And I am no longer getting sick. There is nothing for you to worry about. I am fine."

"Damn it, Demyan, would you cut the crap? I want to know what's going on with you. Why are you sick? Is it because of what I did to you before I left? I can never tell you how sorry I am for that. All I can promise is that it will never happen again. Why do you think I left? I knew if I stayed, I would hurt you again. I don't want to do that."

"You didn't hurt me."

"Look, Demyan, I know you are just trying to make me feel better but I know what I did. I don't have any excuses for my behavior. But I do promise that it will never happen again. I think the best way for me to keep my promise is by staying as far away from you as possible. I don't seem to be able to...control myself around you."

"Chellak, you didn't do anything wrong. I belong to you, remember?" Demyan quickly wrote before handing the paper back to Chellak to read.

"No, Demyan, you don't. You will never belong to me. I know we have to keep up the pretense until I can find a way to set you free, but

you do not belong to me. You never did. Once I can find a way to free you, you can do whatever you want. Until then, you need to stay away from me.”

Demyan grabbed the paper and began hastily writing again only to have Chellak rip the paper from his hands. “No, Demyan. There is nothing you can say to change my mind. I will not own a slave. Do you understand?”

Demyan suddenly realized that Chellak still saw him as a slave. He probably always would. There didn’t seem to be any point in arguing with him. His mind seemed to be made up. He would never see him as anything other than a slave. Unless Demyan proved to him that he could be more.

Demyan nodded his head that he understood Chellak’s words. But he knew he didn’t accept them. He was more than a slave, and he would prove it. They had something special together and he wasn’t going to give it up.

He watched Chellak leave the room, a smile playing across his lips as he began to plan out his assault on Chellak’s heart. As he aimlessly rubbed his abdomen, he tried to keep his spirits up. He had a lot on the line and failure was not an option.

He had a lot of plans to make and he knew just the person to help him. He wanted to laugh as he went to find Yerik. He would be just the person to help him win Chellak’s heart.

He knocked on Yerik’s bedroom door, smiling when he opened it and motioning him over to the desk. Grabbing some paper, he wrote down what he wanted to do before handing the paper to Yerik.

Yerik grabbed the paper and began reading, a big smile beginning to cross his lips as he read. “Oh, definitely. I would love to help. Just tell me what you need me to do.”

“Do you know how to cook?” Demyan wrote.

“No, but I may know someone who does. Why? What does cooking have to do with winning Chellak’s affections?” he asked curiously.

“One, food can be an aphrodisiac. Second, Chellak seems to have a thing for feeding me. What better way to get close to him? And once we are that close...”

Yerik started laughing. “You are a devious little thing, aren’t you? I’m not sure Chellak is ready for someone like you. But I sure am going to enjoy watching him fall.”

Demyan smiled widely, enjoying the laughter in the other man’s voice. Nope, Chellak was definitely not ready for him. But he would be, whether he liked it or not. Demyan was determined to win Chellak’s heart, and have Chellak see him as something other than a slave.

“So, who can teach me to cook? I have some plans for my warrior.”

Chapter Six

Demyan walked to the bedroom door to find Chellak when he heard voices coming through the barely cracked door. He leaned in closer trying to hear what was being said.

"I don't know what to do, Ciprian. He won't leave me alone. Every time I turn around, he's there. In the war room, the great hall, hell, yesterday he followed me to the practice field. It's like he's stalking me. Why won't he just leave me alone?"

"Demyan just cares about you. He wants to be where you are."

"Well, it's driving me crazy. I just want him to stop. He's constantly touching me. It's like he *has* touch me all the time. I've told him no but it's like he can't hear me. Doesn't he understand how that makes me feel? And the food, my gods, every time I turn around he's trying to shove food down my throat. I'm surprised I don't weigh three hundred pounds by now."

He sighed deeply. "Do you know, the other night I came back to my room and Demyan was waiting in my bed, naked, with three different trays of food? I had to leave. I'm afraid to come back to my own quarters in case he's waiting for me again, ready to ambush me. Last night I slept in the great hall. I don't know how much more of this I can take before I crack."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm thinking of sending for his family. I can't keep doing this. I just want Demyan to leave me alone, Ciprian. Is that too much to ask?"

Demyan's hand pushed against his chest where his heart should be. He wondered why he could still feel it beating when he knew he

had stopped living. Everything he had done to try and win Chellak's heart had backfired.

He thought he had been making progress. That maybe Chellak had started to care for him. Now he knew the truth. Chellak hated him. He didn't even want him around anymore.

Demyan's knees gave out and he sank to the floor. Everything he had done...learning to read and write, learning to cook food for Chellak, offering himself to Chellak... None of it mattered. Chellak didn't want it, didn't want him.

Every time Chellak had told him to go away, yelled at him to leave, Demyan thought he was just busy or upset over something. He hadn't realized that Chellak really didn't want to be around him.

And now Chellak didn't even feel comfortable in his own home. Demyan had done that. He had chased Chellak out of his own home with his obsession to have Chellak's love. Love that would never be his. Love that Chellak didn't want to give him.

Demyan didn't know how much time went by before he noticed the cold from the floor seeping into his bones. It only made sense. He couldn't feel anything but cold. He absently wondered if he would ever be warm again.

Sitting up he spotted his chest sitting by the fireplace. Grabbing it, he pulled it to the middle of the room and opened it. Pulling out the dagger Chellak had given him, he reached behind him and began cutting his hair off at the nape of his neck. So numb, he didn't even notice when the dagger cut into his hands.

Pulling the long braid around in front of him, he tied the end off with a bit of string, then placed both it and the dagger back into the chest. He didn't even notice the blood that dropped from his cut hands onto the braided hair.

He pulled out one of the small black bags and emptied the contents into his hand. A ring from his mother, a bit of Chellak's hair that he braided into a bracelet, and a small piece of paper with the first sentence he had written on it.

Unfolding the paper he read the simple words... *Chellak, I love you, Demyan*. He had been so proud of himself when he had written those words. He had just been waiting for the right moment to give the paper to Chellak.

He didn't make a sound but his breath heaved in his chest as tears flowed from his eyes. He crushed the paper in his hand, before dropping it back into the chest. He put everything back into the small black bag, dropped it back into the chest, and closed the lid.

He had to leave. It didn't matter where he went as long as he went. Chellak didn't want him here anymore. If he really loved Chellak then the least he could do is give him what he wanted.

He would leave, get out of Chellak's life, and stop...stop stalking him. He stood to his feet and turned to leave only to stop suddenly when he saw Sorina standing before him. He just stared at her, wondering what she wanted.

"Don't be afraid, Demyan. I know this is all very confusing but it will get better. I was the soothsayer to the royal household for many years before Vedek arrived. I know these things. Now, come, I have a place where you can go," she whispered as she held out her hand.

He stared at her for several moments before taking her hand and following her out of the bedroom through a small portal behind the fireplace.

"I have lived in this palace for nearly fifty years, my boy. I know everything there is to know about it. Now come, we have a long way to go before we can rest."

Demyan nodded his head in understanding as he blindly followed Sorina out of the hidden passage and then out of the palace. Any place was better than here, not that it really mattered where he went now.

* * * *

Yerik closed the bedroom door behind him and looked around the room. "Is Demyan going to join us for dinner tonight?"

Chellak gave Ciprian a long look before he pointed to the bedroom door behind him. “Go ask him. He’s taking a nap or something.”

Yerik rolled his eyes as walked across the room and entered Chellak’s bedroom. He looked around the room when he didn’t immediately spot Demyan on the bed. Going to the bathroom, he found it also empty, as was the balcony.

Walking across the room, he nearly tripped over the small chest sitting in the middle of the room. It worried him that it sat in the middle of the room. Falling to his knees, he opened the lid.

“Ciprian!” he yelled when he saw the contents. The bedroom door flew open as Ciprian and Chellak ran into the room, pistols drawn. They instantly started looking for a threat.

Yerik gave Chellak a stricken look as he lifted out Demyan’s blood splattered braid. “What have you done?” he whispered.

Chellak sank to his knees beside Yerik, his hands trembling as he took the braid from him. He looked at Yerik, the horror all over his face at the bright red blood on soft white blond hair.

“What—what is this? Is that Demyan’s hair?” he cried out. “Where is he?”

Ciprian quickly ran to the bathroom and then the balcony. “He’s gone, Chellak.”

Chellak carefully pulled out the bloody dagger he had given Demyan and turned it over in his hand. “Gone? But how—why?” he cried.

“Chellak,” Yerik began slowly giving Ciprian a quick glance, “The only reason Demyan would cut off his hair is if he were mourning the loss of his mate. That’s the way of his people.”

“I don’t understand. Why would he do this? He didn’t even know he was my mate. I never told him.”

“You don’t think he heard us talking do you?” Ciprian asked.

“No, no, he couldn’t have,” he whispered, appalled by the very thought of Demyan overhearing his earlier conversation. “Could he?”

“Chellak, what could he have overheard you talking about? What could have made him think he had lost his mate?”

“I don’t know. Ciprian and I were talking about Demyan...How he kept following me around and touching me constantly. It’s so hard not being able to have him, especially when he’s always touching me, offering himself to me. I wanted it to stop. I just wanted him to leave me alone.”

“Is that all? Is that everything you talked about?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“You did mention that you were thinking of sending for his family.”

“Well, yeah, but I only wanted him to have someone around to help him. I thought he’d want to see his family.”

“Did you say that? Or did you just say you were sending for his family?”

“I don’t know. Why all the questions? What does this have to do with Demyan cut—cutting his hair and leaving?”

“Well, you wanted him to leave you alone. It looks like you got exactly what you wanted, Chellak. I hope you enjoy it,” Yerik said sternly as he stood to his feet and walked out of the room.

Chellak stared at the braid in his hand, barely hearing the door close behind Yerik. Why? It didn’t make any sense. He had stayed away from Demyan. He hadn’t forced him again. He kept his promise to him. Why would Demyan leave now?

“Chellak... brother—”Ciprian began, only to stop, inhaling deeply at the look of anguish on Chellak’s face when he looked up at him.

“He’s out there, all alone, with no one to take care of him, keep him safe. He’s got to be so scared. We have to find him, Ciprian.”

“We will, Chellak. He can’t have gone far. What I want to know is how he got out of this room without us seeing him. He didn’t go through the living room and he couldn’t have jumped off the balcony. It’s four floors up. So, how did he get out of here?”

“He had to have help.”

“Chellak, what if he didn’t leave of his own free will? What if someone took him?”

Chellak began rapidly shaking his head. “No, someone couldn’t have taken him. Demyan wouldn’t go with anyone.”

“Then he had to have left on his own.”

“No, he wouldn’t leave. He has no reason to. Oh gods, do you think he could have left to get away from me? The things I did to him. I knew they were wrong. I knew he didn’t want them. I did it anyway. I took what I wanted and didn’t care what he wanted. No wonder he left. He must hate me so much.”

“Chellak, Demyan doesn’t hate you. If anything, he loves you,” Yerik said from the doorway. He pointed to the braid Chellak clutched in his hand. “You’re holding the proof in your hands. He cut off his hair because he’s mourning the loss of you, his mate. It means he’s finally given up.”

“What do you mean he’s given up?” Ciprian asked curiously.

“He’s tried everything he could think of to get Chellak to see him as someone other than a slave.” He glanced at Chellak, “All those trays of food he kept getting for you, he made them. He learned how to cook so he could create for you, to give to you. He learned to read and write so he could communicate with you. He offered himself to share himself with you. He did everything he could think of to get your attention.”

“But I didn’t want any of that from him. I just wanted him to be happy,” Chellak replied.

“None of it mattered to you did it?” Yerik continued as if Chellak hadn’t spoken a word. “No matter what he did he couldn’t make you happy. When he heard you talking about sending for his family, it must have been like a slap in the face. He finally understood that he really didn’t matter to you, that you would never want him. You just wanted him to leave you alone. So he gave you the only thing he had left to give.”

"No, that's not true," he cried out as he looked down at the braid in his hand. He slid down to sit on the floor, his knees drawn up to his chest.

"Isn't it? Did you ever ask him what he wanted or did you just decide for him, like you did when Ciprian and I were having problems? You never asked us if we wanted to be separated, you just ordered Ciprian away."

"I was just trying to—to—"

"I know what you were trying to do, Chellak, and I have forgiven you for it. You had our best interests at heart. But Demyan doesn't know you like we do. He doesn't know you are just doing what you think is best. It's in your nature to make decisions without discussing it with others. But did you ever, just once, think to ask Demyan what he wanted? Did you even tell him that he was your mate?"

Chellak just shook his head, his throat too choked up to speak. Yerik was right. He had never once asked Demyan what he wanted. He had just trudged ahead making decisions left and right, not asking for Demyan's opinion.

"Oh gods, what have I done?" he whispered clutching the braid of hair in his hands and holding it against his chest.

Yerik grabbed Ciprian's hand and pulled him from the room, quietly shutting the door behind him. Ciprian looked at him curiously. "He needs some time to decide what he wants."

Ciprian nodded, wondering if Chellak even knew what he wanted. "Come on, let's start a search and see if we can find out how Demyan got out of here without anyone seeing him leave."

In the bedroom, Chellak held the braid to his chest with one hand while the other one pulled the chest over to his side. He picked up the crumbled piece of paper and smoothed it out.

His eyes began to water again as he read the words *Chellak, I love you, Demyan*. Yerik was right. Demyan did love him. Why had he never seen it? How could he have been so blind?

He had held the entire world in his hands, crumbled it up and threw it away much like the paper in his hand. Would he ever be able to get it back? Could he prove to Demyan how much he loved him and wanted him?

Grabbing the small black bag, he emptied it out on the floor beside him. He had never seen the contents before, not wanting to invade Demyan's personal space. But now, he wished that he had. It contained a small ring and a bracelet made of hair. On closer examination, Chellak realized that it was his hair.

He slipped the ring on his finger and placed the bracelet back in the chest. The paper with words of love on them he carefully folded and put in his inside pocket.

Pulling several strands of white blond hair from the braid he began weaving a small necklace which he tied around his neck. The rest of the braid he placed carefully back in the chest and then closed the lid.

He buried his head in his knees and let the tears flow. His heart ached, his soul screaming out for his mate. Even if he found Demyan, what right did he have to him after the way he had treated him?

"I'm sorry, Demyan. I love you so very much. I know I don't deserve you but please come back to me," he cried out. He wrapped his arms around his knees and cried out for the loss of his mate.

* * * *

Demyan spotted Chellak sitting on the floor, his head buried in his knees. He had felt the despair in Chellak and had been unable to leave. He had just planned on checking in on him, to see for himself that he was okay.

But as he stood in the doorway, not quite sure what he would do now that he was there, Chellak's head came up and swung towards him. Demyan's heart melted as he saw the tears on Chellak's cheeks.

That decided it for Demyan. He walked over to stand in front of him. Grabbing Chellak's hands, he held his arms out of the way as he sat down on the floor between Chellak's legs. Pulling on his strong arms he wrapped them around his body. He laid his head back on Chellak's chest and waited.

Chellak looked down at the beauty wrapped in his arms. He didn't know exactly why he was there but he wouldn't complain. Demyan had come to him of his own free will. He'd be an idiot to turn him away.

That didn't mean he would try anything stupid, like kissing him, no matter how much he wanted to. He would let Demyan set the pace and just be thankful he wasn't slapping his face right now.

Both sat there waiting for the other one to be the first to move. Neither wanted to offend the other, to make a mistake, or make the wrong move. So they sat there, Demyan listening to the steady beat of Chellak's heart under his head. Chellak feeling the warmth emanating from the body he held in his arms.

He noticed the sweet smell of contentment that flowed from Demyan. He didn't know why he hadn't noticed it before. Hell, he hadn't even thought to smell him earlier either. If he had, he might have been able to keep them from being in this mess.

Chellak's sense of smell as a katzman was very strong. Everyone put off a certain smell depending on his or her emotions. Being able to smell the emotions of their mate was something katzman prided themselves on. It helped keep harmony between mates.

He hadn't even thought to smell for Demyan's emotions. He had just reacted. Maybe he could have prevented all of this strife, maybe not. But having Demyan willingly in his arms made him not care too much how he got there. Just that he was there.

"Have you eaten, beautiful?" Chellak asked, finally breaking the silence.

Demyan nodded his head, remembering the meal he had eaten earlier with Sorina, but worried that Chellak would be upset for eating

without him. His concern was soon laid to rest when Chellak spoke again.

“Good, I’m glad. I want you to eat whenever you’re hungry. If there’s no food in here, ask the warrior I have standing guard outside. He can get you something. And I don’t want you to worry about the guard. He’s there for your protection only, little one. I don’t want anything to happen to you.”

Both were silent again for a little while until Chellak looked back down at Demyan. “Look, Demyan, can we get more comfortable? I think it would be best if we got a few things straightened out between us. Okay?”

Demyan readily nodded. That sounded like a good idea to him. Chellak stood up, cradled Demyan in his arms, and carried him to the bed. Sitting down he pushed himself up against the wall, refusing to relinquish the man in his arms.

“Okay, beautiful, I’m going to explain some things to you and when I’m done, if you don’t understand, you just tell me and I will elaborate. Okay?”

Demyan nodded that he understood.

“Good. Okay, first thing,” Chellak began, “You can eat, sleep, or take a bath whenever you want to. You don’t have to ask permission from anyone. You don’t have to ask my permission. If you want to do it, just do it. I would appreciate it if you saved the evening meals to share with me. But if you don’t want to, you don’t have to. Understood?”

Demyan nodded.

“Number two. If I ever tell you to stay put, I do not mean you have to stay in that exact spot until I return, unless we are in danger and I specifically tell you to stay put. In our quarters, even if I tell you to stay here, I mean for you not to leave our quarters. But you have the full run of our quarters. Understood?”

Again, Demyan nodded.

“Number three. I have grown very... attached... to you. But that does not give me the right to touch you or do things to you that you do not want. If you don't like something I am doing, tell me. Just get my attention and shake your head no and I will stop. Understood?”

It took a moment for Demyan to nod this time. He was too astonished to move for several moments. Chellak was actually giving him permission to say no to him?

“Another thing that kind of goes along with that...as a katzman, I am very—well, I like to be touched and caressed. It's a natural way for us to show affection. We are very tactile creatures. So I am giving you my permission to touch me anytime you want to, in any way. Like tonight when you came and sat with me. If you want to sit with me, then sit with me. If you want to hold my hand, hold my hand. If you want to cuddle, cuddle. You get the idea.”

Chellak wasn't sure that Demyan understood what he tried say. Then Demyan grabbed his hand and pulled it up to his chest tucking it under his chin. It wasn't everything he wanted, but it was a start.

“Okay,” he said taking a deep breath, “Fourth thing. The ring I gave you? I told you that it would keep you safe, that anyone you showed it to would know that you belong to me, remember? Well, I am going to inform all of my warriors and the palace staff that if you show them the ring and I am not with you, to take you to wherever I am. That way you can always find me. For example, if I'm gone and you showed the ring to the guard outside, he would know to bring you to me. Understand? I want you to always be able to find me.”

Demyan nodded, rethinking his earlier hatred of the ring that Chellak had given him. Maybe it wasn't such a bad thing after all.

“Okay, last thing, at least for now. If I ever tell you something and you don't understand, tell me. I imagine we will look pretty silly waving our hands around, but we'll muddle through,” he chuckled, “okay?”

Chellak was surprised when Demyan didn't nod his head but instead climbed up on his chest, straddling him. His lip was held

between his teeth as he gazed down at Chellak as if he was trying to decide something.

“What, beautiful?” he asked as he gazed up at Demyan. “Did you not understand something I said? Where’s your pad?”

Demyan’s fingers were trembling as he gently laid them on Chellak’s mouth then brought them to his own mouth. Then he slowly shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t understand, Demyan,” Chellak whispered.

Demyan couldn’t figure out how to talk to him. Maybe if he just showed him. Leaning down slowly, so that Chellak could stop him at any point, he gently laid his lips on his, giving him a small kiss.

Chellak’s hands came up and gripped Demyan’s arms. For a brief moment, he gloried in the feel of Demyan’s lips on his before pushing him away.

“No, Demyan,” he groaned. He wished he hadn’t said anything when he saw the crestfallen look in Demyan’s eyes before he lowered his lashes to hide them. When Demyan lowered his head and started to climb off of him, Chellak wrapped his arms around him and pulled him down to his chest, not letting him go.

“No, Demyan, stay, please?” he asked. He felt relieved when Demyan settled down after a few moments, his head resting on Chellak’s chest. “I know you don’t understand, Demyan. But you didn’t do anything wrong. I told you that I have become very attached to you. I’m not even sure that word adequately describes how I feel about you, how you make me feel. When you kiss me, I—well, things happen to me, to my body, Demyan, that don’t happen to yours.”

He had to swallow several times before he could continue. “That tells me that you don’t want me the same way I want you. Don’t get me wrong, Demyan, it’s okay that you don’t want me. I’m disappointed that you don’t, but I can’t make you want me, no matter how much I want it. And it’s wrong to force someone. That’s why I stopped you. I forced you to be with me, and it was wrong. I can never tell you how sorry I am I did that. I had thought you wanted it

too, and I only realized afterwards that you didn't feel any of the desire or passion I did. But when you kiss me like this, it's hard for me to remember that you don't want me. So, kissing is out. Understand?"

Demyan shook his head that he didn't. Why couldn't they kiss? Wasn't it a way to express how they felt about each other? Unless Chellak didn't want to feel that way about him.

"Oh, Demyan, when you kiss me I become aroused... see?" Chellak grabbed Demyan's hand placed it over his hard cock. "I want to do things to you. I want my cock inside of you, loving you. But you don't feel the same way," He pulled Demyan's hand over to feel his own cock lying softly against his body. "I will not force myself on you again!" he growled.

Feeling the difference in their cocks, realization suddenly came to Demyan and he pushed Chellak's arms away and jumped off the bed to grab one of the small bags that sat in his wooden chest.

"I'm sorry, Demyan," Chellak whispered thinking Demyan was trying to get away from him. He flung his arm over his eyes and tried to keep the tears from falling again. He flinched when Demyan's delicate hands began pulling on his arm.

"Just give me a minute, okay?" he asked desperately. But Demyan was insistent. He kept pulling on his arm until Chellak finally moved it to look up at him. "What?"

Demyan pulled on his arm until Chellak sat up. He motioned for Chellak to follow him. Confused but curious, Chellak stood up and followed Demyan out of the bedroom, then out of their quarters and down the hallway to the stairs.

Demyan had a firm grip on Chellak's hand as he dragged him down the stairs to the servant's quarters. He stopped in front of a simple wooden door and knocked. Chellak was surprised when the door opened and Sorina stood there.

Pushing past Sorina into the room, Demyan dragged Chellak in. He began gesturing frantically from Chellak to the small bag in his

hand then to himself. He opened the bag and poured the contents out into Chellak's hand.

Chellak didn't know what he expected but it wasn't a handful of small white pills. He looked at Demyan then Sorina in confusion. Demyan began gesturing again.

"What is he trying to say, Sorina?"

"I think he wants me to tell you about these little pills of his."

Seeing Demyan nodding frantically, Chellak looked at Sorina in confusion. "What are they?"

"Well, if he's wanting me to tell you, you must be something special. I make these little pills for Demyan myself. It's an old recipe handed down to me by my mother, and her mother before her, and so on."

Demyan grabbed the pills out of Chellak's hand and poured them back into the little bag. He made a great show of closing the bag tight and handing it back to Sorina.

"Hmmm, you must have really made an impression on my boy for him to give these back to me," she chuckled.

"Would you please tell me what in the hell they are?" Chellak bellowed. Demyan scooted over next to him and placed his finger over Chellak's mouth before shaking his head no. Chellak dropped his head to his chest and let out several deep breaths.

When he lifted his head to look back at Sorina he felt much calmer. "I apologize for my outburst. I let my frustration get away from me but I should not have yelled at you." Demyan's wide smile and a small pat on the cheek rewarded Chellak for his apology.

"Well, it seems he's made an impression on you as well. Now, these little pills...I made them for Demyan to help keep him safe from Viorel. They keep Demyan from becoming aroused. I couldn't keep Viorel from hurting him but I could keep him from that."

"So you take these pills so that you wouldn't—you couldn't—so that Viorel couldn't get you. Oh gods!"

At Chellak's stricken look she laughed, "Don't worry, it's not permanent. As soon as he stops taking them the effects will wear off. It shouldn't take more than a few of days."

At Demyan's wild motions she chuckled. "It would seem he hasn't had one since you got here. He should be back to normal already."

Chellak still looked stunned when Demyan stepped in front of him and leaned up to lightly kiss him on the lips. Pulling back, he looked Chellak straight in the eyes and nodded his head, a soft flush filling his face.

"Well, it looks like you two have some talking to do. I'm just going to check on things in the kitchen. I'll be back in a few minutes," Sorina said, laughing as she headed out the door, Chellak and Demyan oblivious to her leaving.

Chellak watched him for several silent moments, afraid he was seeing in Demyan's gestures what he wanted to see. He grabbed him softly by the arms and pulled him close to his body before lowering his head down close to Demyan's.

"Are you sure, Demyan, absolutely sure? Do you realize all that this entails? If I take you, I will not hold myself back from you. You'll get all of me, everything that I have. I will love you anytime and anywhere I see fit. Do you understand that?"

Chellak thought Demyan's smile shined gloriously. Almost as beautiful as he looked. Demyan nodded and leaned up to kiss Chellak.

"There's one more thing you need to know before you agree to this, beautiful. If I take you, I will mate you. That means I will never give you up. You will belong to me. But you'll be my mate, not my slave. I will be yours as much as you will be mine. Do you understand this?"

Demyan nodded with another glorious grin as he kissed Chellak again.

With a loud whoop Chellak picked Demyan up and threw him over his shoulder. He saluted a laughing Sorina as he passed her in the hallway, carrying his precious package back upstairs to their quarters.

Walking past a startled Ciprian and Yerik with a happy wave, he went into the bedroom and slammed the door shut before tossing Demyan on the bed.

Standing at the end of the bed he quickly stripped off his clothes. Demyan quickly joined him, pulling his clothes off and tossing them off the bed to the floor. Chellak had a wicked grin as he climbed onto the bed.

Starting at his feet, Chellak began kissing his way up Demyan's legs, then his thighs. He was surprised to see that Demyan's cock, hard and jutting from his groin, when he looked up. He moved up until he lay between Demyan's thighs. His hard cock pressed against Demyan's.

Demyan pushed on Chellak's chest until he understood to roll over onto his back. Demyan scooted down to the bottom of the bed and started just as Chellak had done, by kissing his way up his body.

When he reached his groin, a hard throbbing cock met him. Unlike Chellak, he didn't move on. He stayed there to play. Licking and sucking the hard rod until Chellak groaned and pulled him up his body. "I can't take anymore, baby. I want to be inside of you when I cum."

Demyan eagerly grabbed the oil out of the basket beside the bed and handed it to Chellak before rolling onto his back and pulling his legs up to his chest, presenting himself to Chellak.

"Damn! That's a beautiful sight," Chellak groaned as he poured some oil on his fingers. He knelt between Demyan's legs and reached down to caress the small puckered hole. Demyan bit his lip when Chellak inserted one finger.

Chellak looked up to see if he was hurting him but the look of complete ecstasy on his face told him to continue. He rimmed around the edges several times before adding a second finger. Scissoring his

fingers back and forth he stretched Demyan until he could add a third finger.

When Demyan seemed sufficiently ready for him, Chellak pulled his fingers out and wiped them on a washcloth before rolling over and pulling Demyan to straddle him. He caressed the side of his face as he looked up at him.

“You take it from here, beautiful. This has to be your decision, your choice. I don’t ever want to take your choices from you again.”

Demyan grinned, running his hands over Chellak’s strong chest, down his abdomen to his aching cock. He grasped the hard flesh in his hands stroked it several times, drawing a deep groan from Chellak.

Holding Chellak’s cock against his glistening hole, he pressed down until he was seated against Chellak’s groin. He rubbed Chellak’s chest several times when he began to purr. He didn’t know that Chellak could purr, but he shouldn’t be surprised. He was a katzman.

Lifting his hips up, he slammed back down onto Chellak, doing it again and again until Chellak’s purr became a loud growl. He caught Chellak’s eyes with his. Holding his gaze, he leaned down and sank his teeth into the soft skin over Chellak’s heart, sipping the blood that flowed from the bite.

Chellak went wild. He rolled them over until he pinned Demyan beneath him and sank his teeth into the skin between his neck and collarbone. At the same time, he began rapidly pounding with his hips, sucking with his mouth.

As Chellak thrust into him, Demyan felt him hit something deep inside that sent chills throughout his entire body. “*Again... again... do that again... right there,*” he thought.

Chellak chuckled against his neck as he angled his hips to hit Demyan’s sweet spot again.

“*Oh gods... yes... more... harder,* ” Demyan cried silently, his head arching back in ecstasy as he felt things he had never felt before.

Chellak's hands gripped his hips so hard that Demyan was afraid he might have bruises in the morning as he began moving faster, thrusting harder. He could have cared less.

Demyan felt something building inside of his suddenly hard aching cock. He suddenly felt scared. "*Chellak?*" he cried out wordlessly as he looked to him for answers.

Chellak licked the love bite closed and leaned up to gently kiss him on the lips. "It's okay, beautiful, just let it happen. I've got you," he whispered against Demyan's lips. Chellak growled deep in his chest as Demyan's eyes rolled back and his head arched.

Demyan's hand's clenched in the sheets beside his head as he raised his hips to meet Chellak's thrusts over and over again.

"*Chellak!*" he screamed silently, his mouth opening in amazement. Chellak growled deeply again as he felt Demyan's hot nectar spill between their bodies. The smell of his mate's arousal and astonishment, knowing he had brought pleasure to the little beauty was more than Chellak could take.

With one mighty thrust he reared back and roared out Demyan's name as he came deep inside him, the knot finding lodging against Demyan's prostrate, sending more streaks of pleasure through Demyan.

Chellak nestled his head in Demyan's hair as he tried to control his rapid breathing. Once he felt he could breath normally again, and strength returned to his arms, he leaned up to look at Demyan.

"You okay, beautiful?" he asked, concerned by the turbulent look in Demyan's eyes.

Demyan slowly shook his head no, his eyes still unfocused, dazed. "*What happened?*" he thought, wishing more than any thing that Chellak understood him.

"My guess is that you just had an orgasm. Pretty good, huh?" Chellak chuckled absently as he stroked Demyan's face.

Demyan's eyes slowly widened as he realized what Chellak had said. He had just answered his question... exactly.

"Chellak?" he thought again.

"Yeah, beautiful?" he asked, rolling over onto his back and pulling Demyan with him

"You're talking to me."

"Yeah, it's great, isn't it?" Chellak chuckled.

"How is this possible?"

"One of the little secrets of katzman race. Ciprian and Yerik can do the same thing. We don't advertise it much. In fact, it's one of the closest kept secrets about the katzmen. It only happens when two people are truly mated and accept each other, like we have."

"I don't understand?"

"It's real simple, beautiful. Before now, we had not accepted our mating. Now we have. I love you and I believe that you love me, right?"

Demyan nodded enthusiastically. *"Yes, I love you."*

"Well, see, there you have it. We love each other and have mated, bonded on a level that goes beyond physical. It goes down deep into the soul. I will always know where you are, be able to feel you, know what you are feeling. And you will always be able to feel me, to know that I love you."

Chellak laughed at Demyan's dubious look. "Reach out with your feelings. Close your eyes and reach for me. You'll feel it. No matter where you are you will always be able to feel my love for you."

Demyan gave Chellak a doubtful look but closed his eyes. He thought about Chellak and how he felt about the big katzman, of all the things that made him love Chellak...how he felt, how he smelled, how he protected him.

At first, he felt nothing, then slowly, he began to feel a warmth fill his body, his heart started beating faster. He smelled Chellak's deep rich scent, felt the beating of his heart under his ear, the feel of his strong masculine chest under his head.

Then suddenly, as if he had been hit with an energy beam, he felt light pour into his soul. It was everything and nothing. It had no

substance to it but Demyan felt it fill his entire body from his head to his toes.

His body arched as he felt the light of Chellak's love pass through him. Every cell in his body was electrified. Just as he felt a small tether snap into place between him and Chellak, his cock exploded. "*Chellak*," he cried out as he came, spilling his release over both of them.

He barely registered Chellak's body arching as he also spilled his seed, bellowing out Demyan's name in return. They lay there, breathing heavily, wrapped in each other's arms as they both assimilated what had just happened to them.

"You okay, beautiful?" Chellak finally whispered hoarsely.

"*I don't think so. What just happened?*"

"The mating link snapped into place. No one told me that it would happen quite like that. It was—it was—oh gods, Demyan, I've never felt anything like it. I have never cum from just, well, whatever that was."

"*Never?*" Demyan giggled.

"No, baby, I swear. I have never cum from anything but direct stimulation. What just happened—it's never happened to me before." He pulled Demyan up close to his side. "It must be you, my own."

Chapter Seven

Demyan stepped out of the bedroom and saw Chellak talking with Ciprian and Yerik. He knew he hadn't made a sound but Chellak turned to him anyway, flashing him a huge smile. He could get used to this mating thing.

He quickly crossed the room and walked into Chellak's open arms. He rejoiced in the feeling of Chellak's arms around him, almost as much as the kiss he laid on his lips.

"Hi, beautiful. Did you get enough sleep?" Chellak asked.

"Yes, although I was lonely when I woke up. You're going to have to learn not to leave our bed when I'm still asleep. I don't like waking up alone," Demyan replied.

Chellak chuckled, "I'll do my best, my love."

Ciprian looked at the two of them, a perplexed look on his face. Yerik just leaned back in Ciprian's arms, smiling indulgently at them. They looked good together. Almost as good as he hoped he looked with Ciprian.

"Now that we are all here, I have something I would like to share with you all. Especially my mate," Demyan looked at Chellak to pass on his words to Ciprian and Yerik, who nodded in return.

"You know how you told me that the mating bond was a secret of the katzman race? Well, the Elquonean's have a small secret of their own that is known to only a few. I am brüter. That means that I am—"
A loud knock at the door interrupted Demyan's words.

Ciprian gave Chellak an inquisitive look as he went to answer the door. A Federation delegate stood there, accompanied by two armed Federation Guards.

“Commander Chellak Rai?” The delegate inquired.

Ciprian stepped back and nodded towards Chellak. The delegate swung his gaze to Chellak as he stood up and walked towards the door.

“Commander Chellak Rai?” The delegate inquired again.

Chellak nodded, “Yes, I am Commander Rai. Is there something I can do for you, envoy....?”

“Envoy Tamyra, Commander. A complaint has been filed against you for violation of Federation Regulation number 342. No member of the Federation of Planets shall knowingly own a slave or any person determined to be a slave. By order of the Federation Council, you are hereby required to come to Federation Headquarters to answer to these charges.”

“Who filed this complaint?” Chellak asked, already feeling that he knew who the complainants might be. “Vortigern and Viorel Vedek?”

The delegate looked back down at his paper and then back up to Chellak, “Ah... yes... How did you know, commander?”

“Because the slave I supposedly own used to belong to them and they want him back. If I am put in jail, they can argue that he no longer has a master, therefore, according to the contract of ownership, they can reclaim him. I will not let that happen.”

Envoy Tamyra glanced back up at Chellak from the paper he had been reading. “Does that mean you will not come willingly, commander?”

“Oh, not at all. I will come but Vortigern and Viorel Vedek will also be answering for a few things as well.”

“Chellak?”

Chellak turned to see Demyan standing behind him and pulled him into his arms. “It’ll be okay, baby, everything will work out. I want you to stay with Ciprian and Yerik at all times. Vortigern and Viorel are sure to try something and I want you safe, my love.”

“I’m scared, Chellak. What if they decide to give me back?” Demyan cried.

“Not going to happen, beautiful, ever.” He lifted Demyan’s face up to his with his hand and leaned down to give him a small kiss. “Remember who you are. You are the mate of Commander Chellak Rai, High Ruler of Katzmann. You are not a slave. You can only be a slave if you let them treat you like a slave.”

“I love you, Chellak. Make sure that you come home to me.”

“I love you too, my own. I’ll be home before you know it.” Chellak kissed Demyan, trying to put all of his love and affection into his kiss. Looking into Demyan’s eyes, he caressed the side of his face briefly before pushing his crying mate into Ciprian’s waiting arms.

“Take care of him, brother. I’m counting on you.” He gave Demyan one last look before turning back to the delegate and nodded. “Okay, I’m ready now.”

Envoy Tamyra looked past him briefly, having seen the affectionate display between Commander Chellak and his *slave*. It had been very enlightening. His superiors might be very interested in what had just happened.

Vortigern Vedek and his brutal son were not well liked in the Federation. They hadn’t been liked before Chellak Rai had taken over Katzmann and they were liked even less now. Especially since they had come whining to the council about Commander Rai, one of the most decorated warriors in the Federation.

Not many of the council members had believed Vedek when he brought his complaint to them but it still had to be investigated. The little love scene he had witnessed between Chellak and Demyan could prove to be very useful.

Demyan watched the Federation Guards lead his mate away, terrified that he would never see him again. He suddenly ran to the bathroom and emptied his stomach. Yerik stood waiting for him when he came out, a glass of water in his hand.

“You’re not going to stop eating now, are you?”

Demyan shook his head. He grabbed a piece of paper and began writing. When he finished, he handed it to Yerik.

“No, I am not going to stop eating. I am just upset. I am also worried about Chellak. We have to do something to help him.”

“We will, don’t worry. I’m sure we can figure out something to help him.”

“I don’t know if I can—if I will be able to survive without Chellak,” Demyan murmured.

“You won’t have to, I promise, Demyan. Ciprian will figure something out,” Yerik said as he patted Demyan on the back, trying to comfort him.

“I think I already have,” said a voice from behind them.

Demyan and Yerik quickly turned towards Ciprian, who stood in the doorway, a holo disk in his hand. “Demyan, what can you tell me about your contract of ownership?”

Demyan shook his head, writing quickly on a piece of paper. *“I don’t know anything about it. I’ve never actually seen it. My father signed it and then Vedek took me away. I don’t even know what it says.”*

“So you know nothing about it?”

Demyan shook his head. *“Why?”*

“Well, according to the Brüter Covenant, you have to perform your duty as the brüter in order for the contract to be considered valid. However, after you perform your duty as the brüter you are considered a lawful dependent and not a slave. Do you understand what this means?”

Demyan nodded. Of course he understood what it meant. He was the brüter.

“Okay, so what does it mean?”

Demyan rolled his eyes. How was this going to help Chellak? They needed to concentrate on freeing his beloved, not droning over a contract of ownership.

“This is important, Demyan. Please, tell me what it means,” Ciprian pleaded.

Demyan sighed as he grabbed a piece of paper and began writing. When he was done, he handed the paper to Ciprian, who quickly read it. He looked up occasionally to stare at Demyan as if he had two heads.

“My gods! Demyan, this is it. This is how we can get Chellak out of trouble. Why didn’t you tell us before?”

“I was trying to tell you when that man knocked on the door and took my Chellak away. I wanted it to be a surprise,” he wrote.

Ciprian started laughing as Yerik grabbed the paper out of his hand and began reading the paper. “Oh, it’s going to be a surprise all right. Chellak’s going to fall out of his chair over this one,” Yerik chuckled a moment later.

“You don’t think he’ll be upset, do you?” Demyan wrote.

“No, little one, I think he’s going to be thrilled. Come on, we need to get to Federation Headquarters and rescue your wayward mate.”

“I still don’t understand, Ciprian, how does this help Chellak?” Yerik asked, confused.

“The fine print, my love, the fine print,” Ciprian replied, handing the holo disk to Yerik and pointing out one small section of the contract.

Yerik read the contract then gave Demyan a quick glance from his head to his toes before grinning. “Way to go, brüter!”

Demyan looked at Ciprian and Yerik, still baffled as to how this would help out Chellak. At his lost look, Yerik grabbed him by the arm and pulled him out the door, following Ciprian.

“Come on, Demyan, I’ll explain on the way. We have a federation hearing to get to.”

* * * *

Demyan was so nervous he wanted to throw up but he knew he couldn’t. He stood outside the High Council Chambers waiting to be

called in to testify for Chellak. They had arrived at the Federation HQ yesterday, but he had not been allowed to meet with Chellak.

Ciprian and Yerik had done their best to keep him cheered up but nothing but having Chellak home would make him feel so much better. He missed him terribly. Knowing Chellak was just on the other side of the door made him even more anxious.

Yerik had insisted that he get all dressed up to address the council. He wore white leather pants, a long sleeve white shirt, white leather boots, and a floor length hooded white cape.

Demyan had wondered at all the white he was wearing, but Yerik said that he needed to wear it to show his support of his mate. Demyan had agreed without question.

The only color on him was a brooch pinning his cape closed, the silver dagger in a black sheath at his waist, and the silver ring that Chellak had given him.

The brooch, made of silver, displayed Chellak's family crest. The ring had not been removed since Chellak had put it there and if Demyan had anything to say about it, it never would. The dagger was for his safety.

Demyan heard the council ask for any more representatives to speak in Chellak's favor before they passed judgment and knew he was about to be called in. He took several deep breaths, bracing himself for the task ahead.

Truthfully, he was terrified. He knew that Vortigern and Viorel Vedek would be in that room, along with his mate. As much as he wanted to see Chellak, he did not want to be in the same room with either of the Vedek's.

As Ciprian and Yerik walked towards him, Demyan tried to get his nerves under control. Both of them were dressed in their officer uniforms with white floor length capes much like his.

Ciprian and Yerik both swore they would not leave his side, no matter what. In fact, an escape plan was already in place in case the council tried to give Demyan back to the Vedek's.

Ciprian nodded. It was time. Demyan took a deep breath and straightened his spine, lifting his head high. He was proud to be Chellak's mate, his lover, and he would let everyone know it.

Flanked by Ciprian on one side and Yerik on the other, Demyan entered the council chambers. He stood just inside the door with Yerik as Ciprian walked down a long walkway in the middle of the room to stand before a curved council table with seven council members sitting behind it.

Chellak sat to the left of him, looking at Ciprian like he wanted to strangle him. Vortigern and Viorel Vedek sat to the right of him, staring curiously at the figure standing before the high council. No one paid any attention to the two covered figures at the back of the room.

"Captain Rai, you have some evidence to present to this council in defense of Commander Rai?" one of the council members asked.

"Yes, sir, I do," Ciprian replied as he nodded respectfully to each council member.

"Please, present your evidence."

As Ciprian handed a holo disk to each of the council members, Vortigern Vedek stood up complaining.

"This is outrageous. What is he handing you. I have a right to see whatever evidence he has."

"Vortigern Vedek, if you do not sit down you will be asked to leave this room," One of the council members said.

"Please, council, I would really appreciate it if he could stay. What I have to say directly concerns both Vortigern Vedek and his son. I want them to hear this."

The council members looked at Ciprian for several moments before speaking, "Very well, proceed."

"What you have before you is a copy of the Brüter Covenant that was given to Vortigern Vedek when he purchased the slave known as Demyan." He handed one to Vortigern who grabbed it out of his hand and began reading it.

Ciprian watched the smile come over Vortigern's face as he read it. He thought he had an edge. Ciprian knew differently. "Mr. Vedek, would you confirm that this is the correct document that my brother, Commander Rai, demanded from you the day you were escorted from the planet Katzmann?"

"Yes, this is the document," he smirked.

"Can you verify that this document of ownership, the holo disk, and the ring, were all taken from you the day you were escorted from Katzmann?" Ciprian held up all three for Vortigern to see.

He looked them over carefully before nodding his head. He practically gleamed with excitement. He really thought that he had Chellak right where he wanted him. Viorel just sat there, looking bored out of his tiny little mind.

"Thank you." He said as he walked towards Chellak, winking at him as he handed him one of the holo disks.

Ciprian couldn't wait for this to play out. He just hoped that Chellak could hold himself under control until it was all over. He was going to be pretty pissed off when he figured out that Ciprian had brought Demyan into the council chambers. He just hoped this played out the way they planned.

"Now, if you would carefully look over the contract that Vortigern Vedek has authenticated, I would like to read you the provisions of this contract.

Section one: Demyan is hereby contracted to act as brüter for the sire of this contract.

Section two, The brüter has a legal obligation to perform his duty as the brüter for the sire.

Section three: The brüter is pledged to this lawful claim contract. This contract will be null and void until said brüter performs his/her duty as a brüter; at which time he/she will be considered the lawful dependent of the sire.

Section five: A lawful dependent must have a token of status from said sire so that all may know that the brüter has met the desired requirements of said sire.

Now, gentlemen, have you any questions concerning the words of this contract?"

"Captain Rai, I'm not sure why you've brought this evidence to our attention. Are you trying to get your brother convicted?" one of the council members asked.

"No sir. In fact, I believe that this information will exonerate my brother. At this time I ask your indulgence." He nodded towards the back of the room. Demyan and Yerik walked forward until they stood in front of the council members, Demyan between Ciprian and Yerik.

Demyan reached up and lowered his hood, hearing the quick in drawn breath of Chellak and the outraged roar of Viorel Vedek.

"Council members, may I present Demyan, the brüter as stated in the Brüter Covenant."

"Captain Rai, what is the reason for bringing this... this slave... to this hearing?"

Demyan produced a piece of paper began writing on it. When he finished, he handed the paper to the council member who had spoken.

"If you have made slavery against your Federation regulations, why do you still refer to me as a slave? Do you have the right to sit in judgment over Commander Chellak if you still condone slavery yourself?" he asked.

The council member turned a little red but nodded his head respectfully to Demyan. "I apologize. How would you prefer us to address you?"

Demyan wrote again and handed the paper to him. *"My name is Demyan Rai, mate to Commander Chellak Rai, High Ruler of Katzmann. You may call me Demyan."*

The council member chuckled a little. "Very well, Demyan. Please proceed, Captain Rai."

“Thank you, councilor. According to the dictates of the Brüter Covenant given to Vortigern Vedek when he took Demyan from his home world, this contract is null and void until Demyan has performed his duty as a brüter, at which time he will be considered a *lawful dependent of the sire*. Do the council members agree that this is what the contract says?”

The seven council members looked over the contract and agreed.

“Does Vortigern Vedek agree that this is what the contract states?” Vortigern nodded his head, wondering where Ciprian was going with his line of questioning.

“It specifically states that Demyan will become the lawful dependent of the sire. The contract does not say slave. Correct? Then there is no problem. The contract says that Demyan will become Commander Chellak’s lawful dependent, not his slave. I would also like to point out that the contract is null and void until Demyan performs his duty as the brüter, at which time he becomes the lawful dependent of the sire.”

“And this means what, captain?”

“This means that there is no contract of any kind until Demyan performs his duty as the brüter. Once he has performed his duty, he becomes the lawful dependent of the sire. So until he performs his duty, he can not be considered a slave. After he performs his duty, he will be the *lawful dependent* of his sire. The last time I looked, lawful dependent did not mean slave.”

He smiled and clasped his hands together before him. “Now, council members, I respectfully ask that all charges against my brother for violation of Federation Regulation number 342 be dropped. He does not now nor has he ever owned a slave.”

“Now wait just one damn minute,” Vortigern Vedek yelled as he jumped to his feet. “I paid good money for him. He belongs to me.”

“Mr. Vedek, you will sit down right now or leave these chambers,” a council member yelled. “We will reconvene in ten

minutes and give you our decision.” The council members all filed out of the room.

Demyan glanced at Chellak beneath his eyelashes. “*Are you mad at me?*” Demyan thought to Chellak.

“*No, my love, of course I’m not mad at you. You probably saved my hide. I am concerned however. Vedek won’t let this sit. He’s going to try something. You need to be careful,*” Chellak smiled as he sent the thought back to him.

“*I love you.*”

“*I love you too, beautiful.*”

Demyan nervously stood with Ciprian and Yerik until the council members came back in and sat down.

“Commander Rai, please stand.”

Chellak stood up and faced the council members, his hands clasped behind him.

“It is the opinion of this court that Commander Chellak Rai did in no way violate Federation Regulation number 342 by owning a slave or anyone determined to be a slave. As such, you have been cleared of all charges and are free to go, Commander.”

Demyan started to run to Chellak only to be stopped by a yell from Vortigern Vedek.

“That’s all well and good. However, I paid good money for the little runt. I have a contract. I demand that he be placed back in my possession as my *lawful dependent*.”

Chellak walked to Demyan and wrapped him up in his arms. “Over my dead body,” he growled.

“Commander, according to the legalities of this contract, Demyan does belong to Vedek.”

Viorel Vedek stalked up to Chellak and grinned, “Hand the little runt over. He doesn’t belong to you.” He tried to grab Demyan but Chellak and Ciprian stepped in between them.

“Take your hands off of him,” Chellak yelled.

“Gentlemen, please, sit down. While we do not uphold slavery, we do enforce contracts. If Demyan had a contract with Vedek, he needs to fulfill that agreement.

Demyan wrote quickly on another piece of paper and handed it to the nearest council member, who read it and passed it on to the next one, and on down the line. *“I have performed my duty as the brüter, therefore, I am now the legal dependent of Chellak Rai as he is the sire in question as stated in the contract.”*

“What do you mean, Demyan? Wasn’t the contract with Vedek?”

“If you look at the contract it says that the agreement is null and void until I perform my duties as the brüter, at which time I become the lawful dependent of THE sire. It also states that I must have a token or symbol from that sire.” Demyan wrote before showing the council his ring.

“Okay, Demyan, give us a moment,” One council member asked before leaning over and whispering in the ear of the one next to him. He shook his head and gestured back to Demyan.

“Demyan, can you please tell this council what duties you have to perform and if you have indeed performed them, what proof do you have?” he asked.

Demyan dropped his head to his chest. He hadn’t wanted to tell Chellak in this way. Before he could answer Viorel reached around Chellak and grabbed him by the arm and started pulling him away from Chellak. “He doesn’t have any proof because he’s done nothing!” Viorel yelled.

Chellak went to defend Demyan but before he could reach him, Demyan pulled the dagger out of his sheath and stabbed Viorel in the arm, pulling away. He quickly ran behind Chellak and Ciprian, looking desperately at the council.

“Guards... guards... place Viorel Vedek under arrest. Now!” one of the council members yelled as the guards ran towards the fighting men. “I want this room cleared.”

It took several moments for order to be restored but once it had, Viorel Vedek was in cuffs and standing between two guards next to his father. Vortigern Vedek was steaming.

Demyan ran over to Chellak to see if he had been injured. After noticing a couple of cuts and a split lip he threw his arms around him, hugging him close. "*Chellak, you're okay?*"

"I'm fine, beautiful. Are you okay?"

Demyan nodded rapidly. Then with a huge smile, dragged Chellak to stand in front of the council members. "*Will you translate for me?*"

Chellak nodded grabbing Demyan's hand in his. He looked up at the council members. "Demyan would like me to translate. Councilor Jutik, as a Katzman, you can attest to the fact that I can hear and understand my mate."

Councilor Jutik nodded. "You are mated?"

Demyan pulled his shirt aside showing the mating mark on his neck. Chellak showed the one on his chest. The councilor nodded his head. "As a Katzman, I can attest to this."

"*I am a brüter. As stated in the contract, I have a duty to perform. When I perform my duty for Chellak, I then belong to Chellak. Correct?*"

The council members nodded. Demyan took a deep breath before he continued. "*I have performed my duty as a brüter for Chellak Rai,*" Chellak repeated for the council.

Demyan parted his cape and placed Chellak's hand on the slight round in his abdomen. "*Brüter means breeder. My duty is to provide a child for the sire of my child. I have performed this duty, thus, I am now the lawful dependent to Chellak Rai.*"

Chellak began repeating what Demyan said until the meaning of the words started to make sense to him. He looked down at Demyan, his face covered in shock. "What? You're going to have a baby? My baby?"

Before Demyan could reply, Commander Chellak Rai, High Ruler of Katzmann fell backwards into a dead faint.

Chapter Eight

Epilogue

Demyan stood at the window watching the twin morning suns rise over the courtyard in the distance. It looked peaceful. It was hard to believe that just a few short months ago this had been the scene of a bloody battle.

So much had happened since that day. Changes that Demyan could never have envisioned. The Federation Council had cleared Chellak of all charges. After getting a dazed Chellak back to his feet, they had also unanimously declared that Demyan was now the lawful dependent of Chellak Rai.

Demyan had never been so proud as he had been when his legal status changed from Demyan the slave to Demyan Rai, lawful mate to Chellak Rai. The Brüter Covenant was considered fulfilled and the paperwork had been sent back to his family. It stated that he had performed his duty as the brüter to his sire's satisfaction.

He had been surprised when his family had replied to the news with an invitation to come visit. Not wanting Demyan out of his sight, Chellak had invited them to come visit on Katzmann instead. He had even sent Trajan Varl, one of his most trusted warriors to escort them here.

Demyan still wasn't sure how he felt about seeing his family. He hadn't seen them in more years than he could remember but looked forward to their visit.

Chellak had convinced him that family connections were important and getting to know his family again would ultimately be

for the good. With the baby coming soon, Demyan figured he might be right.

It had taken Chellak a little while to come around to the idea that he was going to be a father, but now there were times that Demyan thought Chellak was more excited about the impending birth of their child than he was. Although, he drove Demyan crazy constantly worrying about whether he felt okay or had enough to eat.

Chellak walked into the bedroom, stopping to stare at the sight before him. Demyan stood in front of the window. The morning light of the twin suns of Katzmann came through the open window, surrounding him in a brilliant array of color.

Demyan's hands gently caressed his large distended stomach, covered only by a soft white shirt. Much to Chellak's delight, it was the only thing his mate had on. Lithe tanned legs peeked out of the thigh length garment.

"Morning, beautiful," Chellak whispered into the quiet room. His heart pounded loudly in his chest as Demyan turned towards him with a wide loving smile on his face. He would never get enough of the instant loving acceptance Demyan gave him each time he saw him.

"Morning, love. I should be mad at you," Demyan replied as he slowly walked towards Chellak. His hands lifted to the buttons of his shirt, starting to unbutton it. *"You left our bed again before I woke up."*

"Ah, but I had a good reason for leaving this morning."

"Is there ever a good reason to leave this?" Demyan asked, raising one eyebrow, daring Chellak to get himself out of this mess. He slowly parted the shirt, revealing the naked physique beneath.

Chellak swallowed audibly, his cock rising to instant attention at the sight of his mate's nude body. Demyan was easily the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. Knowing that he carried their child only added to his allure.

"At the moment, I can't think of a single one," he whispered as his mate dropped the shirt onto the floor and began walking towards him.

Demyan stood up on his toes and gave Chellak a long passion filled kiss, telling him without words how much he had missed him.

“Tell me why you left and I might forgive you,” Demyan said as he pulled himself from Chellak’s eager arms and walked towards the bed. He crawled onto the bed and rolled onto his back.

Chellak’s pulse pounded when Demyan spread his legs and reached down to begin slowly stroking his hardening cock. “I had some work to finish up. I wanted to get it done before you woke up so I could spend the rest of the day with you,” Chellak choked out as he quickly stripped his clothes off and dropped them on the floor.

“Hmmm, good answer.” Demyan held out his hand to Chellak, *“Now, come love me.”*

Chellak climbed onto the bed to lay beside Demyan, his hands eagerly attempting to touch as much of his naked body as he could.

Chellak leaned down to kiss his mate as he replied, “I will always love you, beautiful. You’re my mate.”

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stormy Glenn believes the only thing sexier than a man in cowboy boots is two, or three, men in cowboy boots. She also believes in love at first sight, soul mates, true love, and happy endings.

When she's not being a mother to her six teenagers or cleaning up after her two 70 pound lap puppies, you can usually find her cuddled in bed with a book in her hand or her laptop, creating the next sexy character for her stories.

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