



Pure Bond

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Cam Vasek tossed the holy stone from hand to hand. "So serious, Doctor Jeroen. Am I destroying all of your precious data?"

"Who are you?" I stalked towards him and felt the little muscle jump below my left eye. I knew exactly who he was...but he didn't need to know that. Yet.

"Me?" Cam balanced the gold-green stone on the palm of his hand. Its facets gleamed in the artificial white light cast by lamps hung from grips all around the low cavern. "You mean my fame hasn't spread to your particular dusty corner of academia?"

"I'm glad to say I know nothing of your obnoxious self."

His laughter echoed and the holy stone of the long dead Adrienai jumped, its facets sparking. Cam stared at it. "Y'know, this thinks it's funny too."

I blinked, the sudden spark of the stone making my pulse spike. I hunted through my bag, pulled out a data analyser and pointed the sleek, metal pad at the stone. "It's never reacted to anything before." I willed myself to move closer to him, so close the familiar spiced scent of his skin filled my thoughts. Gritting my teeth, I fixed the analyser in the air above the stone. The first part of my plan had just fallen into place. I had to remember that.

"How long have you been in this hole in the ground?"

Cam stared around the cavern. Did he see the perfect replica of the cut stone squatting on his outstretched palm? I focused on the stone, not on him. Focused on how the still air rubbed uncomfortably damp and warm against my skin and a thin slant of natural light hit the smooth floor from the vent high above us, making me squint. Anything was preferable to dwelling on him. Cam had dropped down through that man-made hole only minutes before. Just as I knew he would. He looked back at me. "A week? Two?"

I tapped at the fluid screen of my analyser. "Twenty days."

"You're kidding me." His gaze flicked around the shadows and fixed on

the narrow bunk shoved up against the wall with my jumble of stuff piled around it. "Twenty days without climbing out to...?"

My gaze flicked up and I frowned. "Your mind drops straight to the gutter."

"So I've been told."

Data streamed over the liquid surface of the analyser and pulled my attention back to it. "And you seem proud of the fact."

"You really don't know who I am, do you?" I looked up and he lifted his jaw, turning his profile to catch the light. "Cam Vasek?" I kept my face a mask of complete disinterest and faint dislike. "Oh come *on*. Cam Vasek? Leader of the Order of Cultural Exploration. I'm famous throughout the known-worlds." He smirked. "And banned on more than half of them."

"My dusty corner of academia has never heard of you." I pressed more keys on my pad and held down a hard smile. "So you can't be *that* famous."

"I think living in a cave under a mountain has affected your brain."

"Ah, insults now." I tilted my head. "You know, this is really *very* interesting." I grabbed the stone and moved away, holding it up to the light. It slanted a warm beam of soft, green-gold light down to the sandy floor. "So what was your interest in it, Mr Vasek?"

Anger ebbed from him and I bit back a smile. Served the arrogant son-of-a-bitch right. *You really don't know who I am...* His words burned through my brain. Oh, I knew *exactly* who he was. Who didn't? Cam Vasek and his band of cronies, supposedly spreading the message of sexual joy...when all that he wanted to do was fleece the unsuspecting of their wealth. I knew of his interest in the stone and I'd dedicated months of my life to finding it. I had...and now, here he was...

He laughed. "Everyone who touches it becomes rejuvenated, invigorated. It restores health and beauty. Who wouldn't want that?"

"Has it worked on me?"

His grin turned sharp and his eyes glittered. "All right, *almost* everyone."

So much for your infamous charm, Cam. I focused on the analyser. The findings were scaling off the limits of the machine. My heart beat

faster. Oh, I had every intention of giving his precious stone to him...just not in the way he planned.

Myths had surrounded the ancient stone, promising a wealth of things. Later peoples had tied it to an ancient spring ceremony, where it had formed the centrepiece of the ritual, said to focus the revitalising energies of the strengthening sun. The stone's creators, the Adrienai, were said to have used it as a marriage stone, binding one soul to another in complete faithfulness. But what my readings actually confirmed was that the Adrienai stone was a very sophisticated neural and DNA synthesiser.

Satisfaction tightened my gut. It would tie him to me and I'd enjoy the result...because I had no interest in him. None. Not anymore. And not even a soul-binding would change that. I'd take my revenge for how Cam Vasek had found a rock, a lump of carved quartz more fascinating—

I blinked as the stone lifted from my palm, spinning slow on its axis. It spun higher, its facets flashing golden light into the shadowed corners of the cavern.

"What the—" Cam's voice cut through my dazed thoughts. "Is it meant to do that?"

The ancient texts had always been vague—and crumbling—so the *exact* way the priests had used the stone to join the couple had eluded me. From the data, it promised to be a form of genetic bonding.

The stone settled into the roof of the cavern, spinning in a hole carved into the sandy rock. Being genetically bonded to Cam hadn't been my first choice of revenge, but all other ways had eluded me. His followers were fanatical, his wealth and power extreme as his ministry raked in billions from the gullible fools who fell under his spell. Getting close to him in any other way had proven impossible.

"I think it is supposed to do that," I said.

I glanced at him and in the now golden cast light of the stone I could see where the spell would start to weave, where it had initially caught me. He was tall, lithe with the carved perfection of a classical statue, only accentuated by the staid black robes of his order. His golden hair shone the same gleaming shade as the spinning stone. Wicked blue-grey eyes fixed on me.

"You're staring...Doctor Jeroen."

I snapped my gaze away. Damn, my heat exchanger must have died, because it was suddenly too hot. I pulled at the collar of my tunic, fingers running slick against damp, flushed skin and I turned my attention back to the stone high in the curve of the rock ceiling.

It slowed, slowed and then stopped...but it didn't fall.

I let out a heavy breath. Was that it? Was I bound to him? Hell, I didn't feel any different. That was easy enough. Now, I'd tell him about how I'd altered who I really was—

I rubbed at my throat. Each breath I pulled in didn't carry enough oxygen. My burning lungs fought for air as a vortex swirled out from the stone. It scoured the curved ceiling, spitting dust and grit down over my face. And it was growing. Shit. This was *not* good.

"We should get out—"

"Yes." Cam grabbed my arm, tugging me beneath the vent. "Wait till the air settles—"

The light shafting down from the vent vanished. A clatter cut through the rumble of the swirling air and my ladder lay in a crumpled heap on the sandy floor. I stared up. The vent slab I'd uncovered had dropped back into place, the seams blending into the cavern roof as if they'd never been. "This is bad. Very bad."

"It's an illusion." Cam's voice stayed calm, controlled and I didn't want to admire him for it. "It's what, two and a half metres? I'll lift you—"

"You'll do no such thing!"

"Me, or being rasped to pieces by grit and sand? What's your choice?"

I glared at him but nodded. He bend and strong arms encircled my thighs, just under my buttocks. Goosebumps prickled my skin at the press of his face into the crease of my leg and the curve of my pelvis. His arms tightened and he grunted as he lifted me. I had to grab at his shoulders to maintain my balance, finding hard muscle beneath the thin material of his robe.

I swallowed and desperately tried to ignore the sudden heat swelling low in my belly. What was wrong with me? I'd conditioned myself against everything that Cam Vasek was. But with his face, his *mouth*, so temptingly close to the source of my sudden ache? All of my mind techniques, my hours of mediating simply melted away.

"Serena?" His head shifted and his chin pressed just below my mons in a way that had my blood insanely hot. Cam's gaze lifted beyond me. "The roof?"

An embarrassed flush burned in my cheeks and I lifted my arms. Yes, I was supposed to be getting us out of the cavern, not thinking about how his lips could— I bit back a groan. Cam's grip tightened, his fingers biting into my thighs. The pulsing ache made it almost as hard to breathe as the thinning air. How had my plans gone so wrong so quickly? I would *not* fall for his surface charm. Not again.

Gritting my teeth against the increasing swell of arousal, I pressed my palm against the roof...and met only solid rock. I cursed and ran fingernails around the edge of where I *knew* the vent had been only moments before. Nothing. "It's as if it never existed."

"Great."

His arms loosened and I slid down over his body. Time slowed and it became hard to pull in a full breath. It had nothing to do with grit-thickened air. His face pressed against my stomach, lifting the damp tunic to expose my skin. The inexorable slide continued as his warm lips slipped over the valley between my breasts, up over the thin, rumpled material, up to my throat, my jaw...stopping just short of my mouth.

I groaned, I couldn't help myself. I bit my lip, wanting to deny the ache, for him to cover my lips with his, tease his tongue—

"You look flushed, doctor." The low vibration of his voice through my flesh...damn he had me wet. "Anything I can help you with?"

Hypoxia had me acting insane. I swallowed and willed back my self-control. "Lack of air," I said, wriggling in his grasp. I gasped, the ache heightening in my body as I found the solid length of his erection. Rubbing myself against him? *Very* bad idea.

He dropped me to the floor and I staggered. Cam gripped my arm, his fingers hard and firm. My imagination shot to places it shouldn't.

"Missing me already?"

"Funny—" I stopped. My brain had melted to mush. How had I missed the fact that the air around the stone had stilled? Instead, in the light from the lamps, the air shimmered in the shape of the Adrienai stone, stretching from the floor to the cavern roof.

I pulled free of him and walked around the change in the air. Pulling out the analyser, I scanned the anomaly. The results made me snort. The Adrienai had been a truly exceptional race. "It's a dimensional rift."

"A rift? To where?" Cam stared around the cavern, his gaze delaying on where the vent had been. "We have to go through it. It's either that or suffocate." His mouth quirked into a smile. "Was this your plan, doctor? Trap us here so that you could have me all to yourself?"

I hoped my expression had filled with the right amount of disgust. One I didn't feel, because that hint of a depraved smile had my blood hot. "Please Mr Vasek, don't flatter yourself."

"The way you just rubbed yourself all over me?" His wicked eyes gleamed and his mouth curled in such a way that I ached to sink my teeth into his lower lip simply to taste him again. "Have you thought of taking orders, Doctor Jeroen?"

"Your order?" I glanced over his dark robe and tried not to think of his body beneath the thin material. "I don't think so."

His gaze narrowed. "And here you are saying you've never heard of me..."

I winced and tapped the analyser, wanting to hide my slip in pretending to monitor the rift. The sudden surge of unexplained lust had my brain in turmoil. "You're right. We have no choice but to go through it."

And I stepped forward.

"Serena—"

Cam's hand clutched at my arm. I felt the pull of him, but the strength in the rift dragged me forward. It swept over my senses in a glittering golden rush, whipping my feet out from under me, spinning me over and around in a disorientating maelstrom. But Cam's hand still gripped my arm and somehow his touch grounded me.

Then with a scream, I landed face down on a soft mattress. Three seconds later, Cam, with a grunt, landed beside me.

He groaned and spat out a mouthful of material. "Are you insane, just walking into a rift—"

"You or the rift. I made a choice." I rolled away from him and dragged my tangled hair from my eyes. We'd landed on a large bed, set

in the centre of a circular room...no not circular. It had the same proportions as the cavern, the same shape as the holy stone.

"I'm wounded."

"You're Cam Vasek. A supernova wouldn't dent your ego."

"Oh now you're getting nasty." Cam sat up. His expression turned thoughtful. "Is it me or is this room..."

"...exactly the same as the cavern. Yes."

"Fresher air through." He strode across the short space surrounding the bed. "And windows."

I stood beside him, careful that I didn't brush up against his shoulder and stared out onto a light blue sky striped with white stratus clouds. And there was nothing else, simply the open sky. I pressed my face to the cool glass, trying to see more of our building...but there was only sandstone disappearing into wisps of cloud.

"Finished?" Amusement edged his voice. "The height we are, you might stick."

I pulled back. "Hilarious." Staring around the room, it stood empty save for the huge canopied bed. I scrubbed at the back of my neck. Lifting the analyser, I tapped out for more information. "There's no sign of the rift on this side."

"Welcome."

I froze at the soft voice echoing around the room. "What...?"

"You have been found in need of bonding. To leave the temple you must cement that bond."

"What does that mean...exactly?" Cam stalked around the room, staring up at the curved white ceiling. "Bonding?"

"The Holy Stone of the Adrienai exists for only one purpose, to bring warring parties together."

"We're not warring parties—"

"Cement the bond?" I broke in. I had the uncomfortable suspicion where the artificial intelligence planned to take the discussion. "You had other purposes when the Adrienai used the stone, not just..." I waved my hand, anxious about what the stone was about to reveal. My revenge had never involved sex. In fact, I'd planned the exact opposite. I wanted to deny Cam Vasek's libido, not increase it...even as the thought of stripping

him and pushing him back onto the bed fired through my thoughts.

Cam laughed and sank onto the bed. "We have to have sex to get out of here?" He cracked his knuckles and smirked at me. "I can do that."

The urge to punch him swept through me, my hands balling into fists. Yes, I wanted him, but I didn't have to like the idea. "You might not find it, or me that easy."

"The Adrienai resolved conflict through finding a moment of joy." The voice stopped and said nothing else.

"Hello?" I padded around the bed, habit making me stare up at the ceiling. I slapped the pad against my palm but no fresh data scrolled across its liquid soft screen. "Is that all we're getting?"

"What was your plan, Serena?"

No innuendo stained his voice and my gut cramped. I didn't look up as I said, "Does it matter?"

"I didn't plan to spend eternity in a lozenge-shaped room with you." He let out a slow sigh and sat forward. "So we get naked and get out of here."

"You make it sound so appealing."

Cam reached out and took my hand. The flare of heat through my body burned instant and shocking. How did I react to him so violently? "It will be. You *know* who I am."

I rolled my eyes. "And that's supposed to make it easier?"

His thumb ran in slow, delicious circles against my palm, spiking heat to my core. I swallowed, wanting to deny how wet I was even at so simple a touch.

"You're reacting to me...even as you fight it."

With a slight tug, he pulled me towards him until I stood between his legs. I tried not to think about the pressure of his thighs against mine...and failed. I could no longer blame the lack of air. It had to be the stone that had my skin hot and my breath short. Because I was not remembering our past together, not one bit of it. He'd wanted a stupid stone. Not me.

Cam's gaze fixed on my tunic clinging to my breasts and to my complete embarrassment my nipples peaked, poking through the damp fabric. "Would it be torture if I did this?"

His free hand slid beneath my tunic to press against my stomach. The sudden hot touch of his palm against my skin had me sucking in a quick breath. Fingers inched upwards to the underside of my breast. His thumb traced a teasing line under the curve and I bit back a moan. "Yes, it would."

Cam's soft chuckle had my eyes closing and then his fingers slid upwards. "You've never questioned how I know your name. How I knew where to find you."

Why was he talking? We didn't need to say anything. Something stirred in the back of my mind. The stone. It was doing this, turning my thoughts to mush...but I didn't care. I wanted my moment of joy with him. My chest tightened. It had been too long. "Does it really matter?"

He circled my breast, the ache of my needing him to move closer, to stroke his calloused thumb tip over my nipple. Or his mouth. Cam's mouth wet and hot, sucking, his tongue flicking— Breathing suddenly became overrated.

"Everything matters, Serena." His hand dropped mine and slow fingers undid the buttons on my tunic, pushing it back from my shoulders. His hands on my flesh almost had me swaying...and I groaned when his longed-for mouth teased my breast. "I didn't come looking for the stone." His tongue swirled over the peaked nipple, his large hand low on my spine holding me steady. "I came looking for you."

His words, his touch fired under my skin and I grabbed at his shoulders, my other hand fisting in his hair. "Me?" *Me*. For a moment, the thought that he knew who I was, who I *really* was arched my body, pressing his mouth hard against my breast. The rush of liquid heat through my veins negated all other thought. His soft, satisfied moan rippled through me. Yes, he had me, he'd found me and I wanted that hot, clever mouth on every inch of my body.

"No questions? No argument or indignation?" Something lurked under his voice and it tightened my fingers in his hair. He looked up and his gaze speared me. The need, the desire there caught my breath. "You planned this. Planned to lure me here and bind me. Why?"

His hand eased down from stroking, teasing my other breast to the top button of my trousers. He slid the first button through and then second,

third and fourth. The thin material loosened on my hips and with the urging of his hot fingers he dropped it down my thighs. He pressed insane little kisses to the underside of my breast and I couldn't help the slow groan that escaped me. "Why, Serena?"

"You deserved it." The words came out on a breathless gasp, no thought of my long months of scheming staining the need I had for his man. "You deserved all of it."

His thumbs hooked into my underwear, teasing his fingers against my skin. "I deserve all of it?" He smiled against my skin and the feel of it, wicked, so filled with the promise of pleasure bloomed heat through my flesh. "Do you know what you're offering?"

"Cam..."

His fingers shifted against my spine and the smile faded. "Do you?"

I pulled his head back and glared at him. "Why are you still talking?"

His grin was hard, wicked and my heart kicked. "As you want to fuck me I have to talk. Our roles are reversed...Serena."

I tried to concentrate. He'd paused before he said my new name. That meant...but my thoughts broke as Cam's fingertips trailed back up my inner thigh, tormenting me with little sparks of need that ignited in his wake. He brushed the crease of my thigh, stroking upwards and away from where I ached for his touch.

"You're binding yourself to me. Can't you feel it?"

His warm breath brushed my skin and in that moment the surge of a connection burned through my flesh. Deeper than before when I'd simply been another body in his bed. I tightened my fingers in his hair and tried to fight the warmth, the need I had to believe there had ever been anything more than just sex between us.

"You can." His lips chased a path across my stomach. "And you wanted this, wanted us bound on a genetic level. Why?"

"Revenge."

He stilled. "Revenge?"

Words I didn't want burst free. Damn stone had me unable to hold anything back from him. "You ruin lives. Someone had to stop you."

His laughter ran hot against my skin. "Stop me from doing this?" Close kisses teased over my ribs to my waist and he nipped at the curve

of my hip. I squealed, the sensation hot, quick, the little bite something he had always delighted in doing in the brief weeks I'd held his interest. "After I've hunted you down, I don't think so."

And then his fingers dipped lower, brushing over my mons in tantalising circles. The first flickers of orgasm heated my flesh and I clung to them, to him greedy for more.

His thumb slid lower, lower until he pushed against the wetness of my flesh and found my clitoris. I couldn't help the low moan that escaped me. "I never wanted you."

"Lying, Serena. What would the Adrienai say?" A finger followed his thumb, slipping sliding in a slow rhythm that had me aching. "No, this elaborate scheme was because you wanted me again. Admit it."

The guilty need for him burned as it always had, but now I couldn't deny it. The stone had ripped away all the layers with which I'd hidden the past and hell, I couldn't deny the pulse of need heavy in my belly. I never could. Had he really hunted *me* out, not simply his precious stone? And was he right? Had I chased down his stone, thinking that he would find it...and me? Words pushed from me, compelled by something *other*. "And what do you want?"

Cam's fingers circled and played pushing deeper, harder and the heat coiled tighter, so tight I had to pant against it. Orgasm teetered, so close it burned and with it came something else. He wanted to ignore my question; I could almost taste his resistance. "Cam..."

"You."

He groaned the word against my stomach and bright flares danced behind my eyes. Almost, almost there, the promised moment of joy, of bliss so close, but still... "Tell me."

"I want you. I have always wanted you." The final word was little more than a whisper. "Siran."

A riot of heat smashed up through my body and I cried out, a half-strangled cry that could have been his name tearing from me. I clung to him, hot, shaking, the tight press of his arms holding up my boneless body. I pressed a kiss into his hair and his familiar scent sank deep into my lungs. "Siran," I murmured, repeating my old name. "I'm Siran."

Cam expelled a slow sigh. "You left." His breath brushed warm

against my damp skin and I shivered. "You ran."

I closed my eyes, but I couldn't ignore the pain cutting through his quiet voice. I never thought I'd be explaining myself to him, at least not without gloating and anger. My stomach twisted in a tight knot. "You were bored. A *stone* held more attraction."

He pulled back and I willed myself to hold his gaze. Regret dulled them and the knot in my stomach ached. "I have wealth and influence...but you're a mythologist. I wanted something special." He snorted. "But I got it wrong and you ran, changed your face." His gaze darted over my features and for a moment, it almost felt as if he saw my face as it was before I'd spent what money I had to have myself genetically altered. His fingertips traced over my cheek, easing over my jaw. A smile ghosted over his lips and his gaze softened. "I never thought I'd see your face again. The stone restored you, Siran."

My heart twisted, the pain of his admission unexpected, unwanted. But the Adrienai had us examining, facing what had driven us apart. Damn it, it shouldn't hurt. Cam and I had connected for a few weeks, falling into too much too fast...and we crashed just as quickly. I closed my eyes, a slow breath easing the pain in my chest as I murmured, "I'm sorry."

Cam pushed himself up from the bed and wrapped me in tight, strong arms, his lips pressed to my tangled hair. My hands fisted in the thin material of his robe and I clung to him, breathing in his familiar scent, the heat of his body warming my nakedness. "I found you again." He whispered the words against the shell of my ear, the almost brush of his lips shivering down through my flesh. "That's all I wanted."

My eyes burned and thankfully, his robe caught the spill of tears. "You're ruining your reputation. Cam Vasek tied to one woman."

He laughed, the sound warm, wanted and I pressed myself harder against him and earned a tantalising kiss below my ear. "Shocking, isn't it?"

A smile broke through the surge of emotion, lightening it and I released a heavy sigh. "What now?" I lifted my head. There was no sign of the glittering rift anywhere in the room. "There's still no way out." I felt Cam smirking at me and my gaze narrowed on him. "What?"

"A moment of joy." He sounded reasonable, but his blue eyes shone brighter than the rift.

My mouth twitched. "Yes, I had one, thank you."

Cam tilted his head. "Then isn't it my turn?"

I bit back the smile that wanted to break across my lips. "Your turn?"

"Would you deny me?" His wicked grin had my heart beating fast. "A man of the cloth..."

I growled at him and pushed him. Hard. He hit the bed and fell onto the deep mattress. "You're no priest, Cam."

He shifted himself up onto his elbows. "I, and my followers, always preferred pontifex maximus."

"You would." My gaze skirted over his torso, the material pulled tight across his chest. I licked my lips and Cam's eyes darkened. It had been too long since I'd seen him naked, tasted his skin, kissed him, sank my teeth into him.

"You look hungry, Siran."

"And you look nervous." I cracked my knuckles, deliberately imitating his earlier action. He held my gaze and the warmth I found there, the need lifted the pain I didn't even know I carried. Finding the stone, using it had worked, had bound us together. That knowledge had me moving closer and I walked my fingers up his hard thigh. The muscle twitched under my light touch. My grin was sharp and Cam's lips parted. I could almost taste his anticipation. "Well? Shall we begin?"

Biography

I've been writing for a long time. Ages. Really. I started writing back in the mists of time, possibly long before the computer was a gleam in Babbage's eye... Okay, maybe not that long.

I love history and myths and take great pleasure in mixing the essence of past events into fantasy... along with the essential a dash of magic and sex...

I live half way between Penny Lane and Strawberry Fields...

So, does Kim Rees?

Really?

Isn't that odd.

To learn more about Kim, please visit her website www.kim-knox.co.uk, or her blog, www.kimknox.blogspot.com.