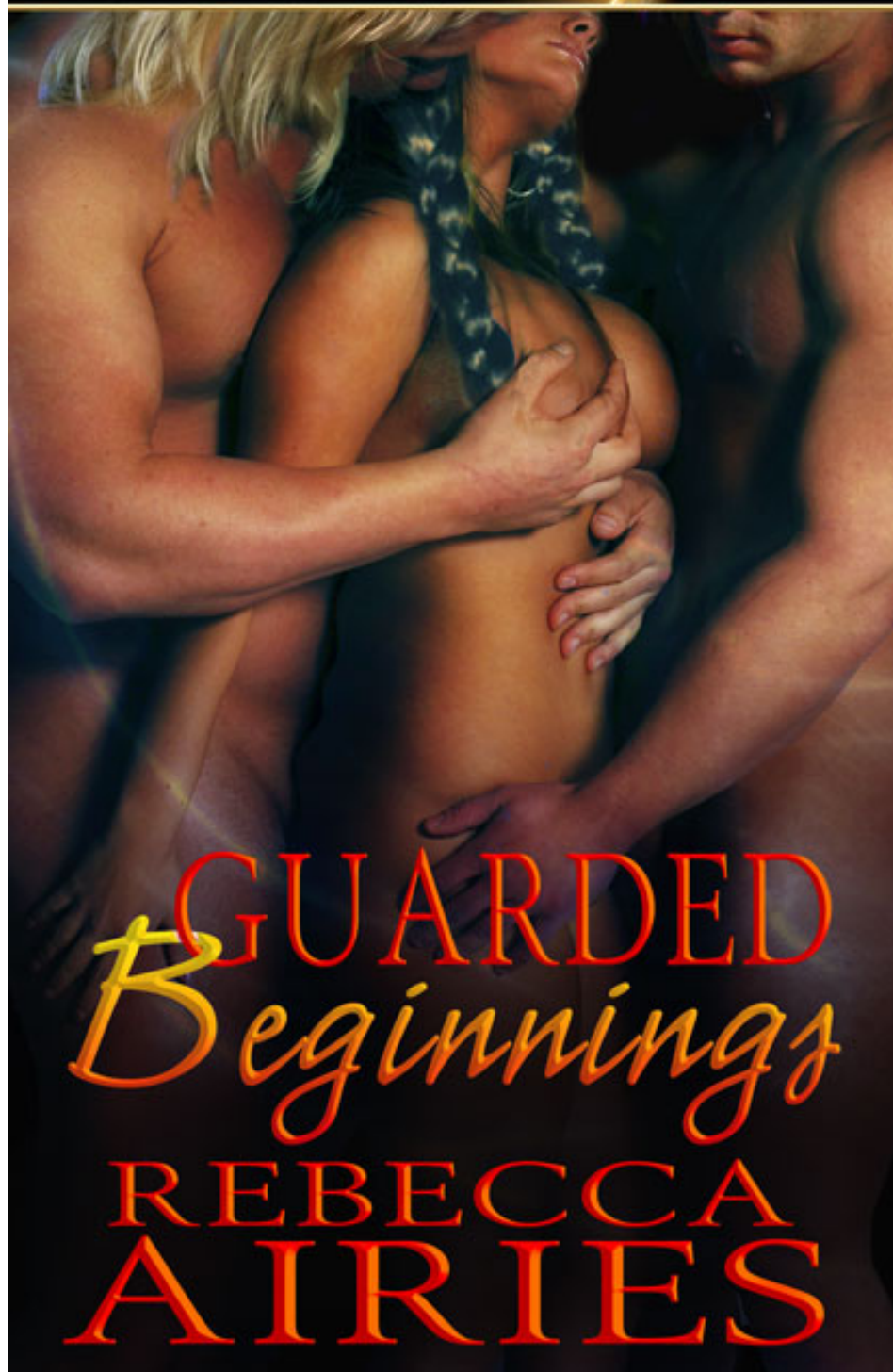


ELLORA'S CAVE **AEON**



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Guarded Beginnings

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Edited by Helen Woodall

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# ***GUARDED BEGINNINGS***

**Rebecca Airies**

*Dedication*

To Catherine and Krissy – thank you for keeping my imagination fresh and good luck as you both begin to chase your own dreams.

## Chapter One

Davik Ferr stared at the screen. The images on it were frozen, stopped on the moment when she'd strolled past. The brief glimpse of her during the meeting with the Tribunal had stunned him. He had no idea if they'd seen his surprise and didn't care. The details of the mission hadn't mattered from the moment he'd seen her. He didn't know if Nials Caral and his sister were actually in any danger but he knew he and Camin would be going to the mining planet of Mayoon. The representative had given them the video and now Davik couldn't stop looking at her. Nials wanted male guards and had been requesting them regularly.

Aeva... Even just seeing her in the background of the video, it was impossible for him to mistake her. She wore her glossy black hair in a long braid now. Her light brown skin gleamed under the harsh light. It looked darker than he remembered against the very pale gray wall behind her. The tight fabric of a light green shirt had delineated her high, firm breasts. Encased in black body-hugging pants, her legs looked toned and strong.

Only briefly did he see more than a profile in that video but it had been enough. He'd seen that sweet oval face in his dreams. Finally he'd get a chance to do things right. Now that he'd found his woman again, he wouldn't let her go. He just had to find out what name she went by now.

"The shuttle's being prepped to take us to Vedev. We're going in as muscle for the bar. From Vedev we'll go by company shuttle to Mayoon. She's not going to disappear. You heard the man. She's guarding them." Camin strode into the room they'd rented before their meeting with the Tribunal. He dropped onto the plush gray chair and looked over at the vid-screen.

"Any word on how long it will take help to get to us." Davik turned off the small computer. Looking at it was almost a form of torture. Seeing her satisfied some part of the longing inside him but he wanted to hold her, to feel her soft skin.

Four men would go with them, which should be plenty of guards even if they intended to do the job as the Tribunal wanted. Their plans differed greatly from the one the officials had outlined to them. This time they wouldn't be taking any chances by following rules other than their own. She was much too precious to them. They'd sent word back to the *Mocant* that they'd need extraction from the mining planet of Mayoon.

"We'll be there at least eight days, probably closer to sixteen." Camin shrugged. "We can use the time to get to know the person she is now."

Davik nodded. They'd need that time and maybe more. He'd wasted the time he'd been given with her before, kept her at a distance. He wouldn't be repeating his

mistake. He knew the pain that losing her could bring and he wasn't going through it again.

\* \* \* \* \*

Denise wiped down the scarred wooden top of the bar. She'd done it last night but the action kept her hands busy and off Nials' throat. The urge to do the man bodily harm grew each day. And because she hadn't been getting enough sleep, her restraint wasn't at its highest.

The huge room seemed strange without people filling it. In the short time she'd been here, she'd become used to seeing the sturdy, gray-topped tables surrounded by people. She'd even grown accustomed to the bad sound system in the bar and the limited selection of music the antiquated player offered. What she couldn't get used to was how these surroundings sometimes reminded her too much of the labs. The gray walls and even the durable white tiles on the floor seemed too clinical to her.

The lights flickered overhead, giving off a faint yellowish glow before flaring to their brightest level again. That was yet another thing that irritated her. When they'd taken this assignment, they'd been told the mining outpost was isolated and she had been thrilled. Protecting Nials and his sister would be easier if they weren't somewhere they could be easily found.

They hadn't been told that conditions here were this primitive. The power was still so sketchy here that the doors used manual locks, not automated ID locks. As if that wasn't enough, they'd been forced to leave all their weapons on Vedev before they'd boarded the shuttle to Mayoan, mainly because there had been two incidents before the ban when a group of miners had used laser rifles to take over an ore carrier and steal the valuable cargo. There had also been a few times when the isolation had driven one of the miners crazy. The only tool they'd been given in case of attack was an ample supply of a drug and contact with a Tribunal operative on the planet. Well, that and the knife that was almost standard dress here.

Doing around-the-clock body guarding on two people with three guards would be impossible long-term. Not to mention working the bar. Denise, Jasi and Layla rotated the work. Two tended the bar while the third got a little rest and remained in the living quarters with Nials and Sela. Thankfully, they shouldn't be under this much pressure long. The Tribunal had promised to send more operatives when they could. Keeping Nials alive was a priority for them. She knew the information he'd given them about Bio-mech was important, although she didn't know the details. The only reason the Tribunal had even sent them here with Nials was because the man had requested *Arcein* guards.

The information could have been anything really. Bio-mech along with Vari-co and Mari-tec had created the *Arceins*, at first to try to lengthen human lives. Later they'd decided to use them as weapons. Regardless of their plans, they'd broken intergalactic law from the first experiment. Although the governments on Maridon and Larisk where

the companies were based had denounced the experiments, they hadn't stopped. If Nials had learned of some new information, none of the companies would want the Tribunal to get it. Especially if it were of an ongoing project or a new one that could get them into more trouble. They couldn't know that Nials had already told the officials everything. After suffering in one of their labs for a good deal of her life, Denise wasn't going to let them win.

She had no idea why he'd requested *Arceins*. He hadn't trusted a single decision she'd made. It was his double-checking, the constant doubt that infuriated her the most.

The man more than lived up to the untrusting, antisocial reputation of the Second Gen men. He seemed happiest when he was alone and didn't deal well with any kind of contradiction. With one exception, she did have to admit that he was devoted to his sister Sela. While she admired that, she wished he'd put more energy into restraining his sister's impulses or at least help in making the woman aware of the dangers. He defended his sister's actions no matter what she did and hadn't seen the trouble she caused. That infuriated Denise and she didn't know how long it would be before someone actually got hurt because of Sela. As it was, the woman's antics only increased the stress on the women guarding them.

Hopefully more help would arrive with the shuttles due today. She knew she wasn't the only one who could use a break. If no reinforcements arrived, they'd have to make it through another week before more shuttles arrived. Denise looked toward the door. Jasi had gone down to the entry port, the only access to the mining camp for civilians, to see if someone had been sent. She should be returning soon.

Denise moved around the bar, wiping the tables and moving chairs. She kept the front door and the entrance to the private staff area in sight at all times. Her first duty was to ensure no one entered the bar and tried to get to Nials while she was on watch. But there was another reason she kept such a sharp vigil. Sela wouldn't listen and thought she could do as she wanted. She didn't see that she was in as much danger as her brother. The woman constantly tried to slip out of the bar.

The hum of strange *nano-cytes* hit her. She blinked, stunned. Nials and Sela were Second Gen and she'd grown used to the signal of their *nano-cytes*. That left only one group of *Arceins* who could produce the unknown signal. Nervousness flared. She was relieved to finally have some help but she didn't know what to expect from First Gen *Arceins*.

The entrance door to the bar swung open, admitting a sharp gust of warm air, a whirl of needlelike leaves and Jasi. Her friend looked shocked. Her eyes were wide and she kept glancing over her shoulder. Denise frowned as the door remained ajar after the black-haired, green-eyed woman had staggered through the entrance.

A tall, broad-shouldered man stepped into the opening. Now Denise's eyes widened as they landed on his face. Short, wavy blond hair just brushed the collar of his shirt. That haircut highlighted his pointed ears. She knew the sharp, hard lines of his face even though she'd never met him. Almost every night, she dreamed of him and another man.

His blue eyes narrowed as they focused on her. The angular planes of his face became more pronounced as his jaw clenched. He took a slow step forward.

Denise took a deep breath, shaking her head. She couldn't believe he was here. She'd known they'd probably been created but hadn't expected to see even one of them. Or wanted to see them. Most of her dreams involving them weren't happy.

The man stumbled forward a bit and then stepped to the side as another man entered the bar. The overhead light glittered off the red-blond hair of the man striding toward her. The harsh light made his long hair seem even redder. If anything, he was larger than the blond man trailing behind him, his muscles more defined. The tight black shirt he wore made that more than obvious.

Eyes a strange color somewhere between brown and gold watched her as if he thought she might run. If her feet didn't suddenly feel bolted to the floor she might have. Her eyes marked his high cheekbones and the slight shadow of beard on his cheeks. She stared at his lips. She'd never seen a man with lips that full.

A'Camion and Davorik—those had been the names of the men in her dreams. It couldn't be the names of the men in front of her. Her dreams had mostly revolved around a primitive world. For a long time, she'd thought they were just that—dreams. Only in the last year had she dreamed of A'Camion, the blond, and Davorik, the redhead, in the prison with her. Well, a different version of her, softer, a victim. It had taken a little time but she'd realized that those dreams were far from creations of her imagination. They were scenes from the life of the woman from whose DNA she'd been created.

Her gaze flicked past him to the four men who'd come into the bar after him. Nervousness settled low in her stomach. She didn't want to have anything to do with them but Jasi wouldn't have brought them here unless they'd been sent as reinforcements.

Jasi stepped forward and forced a smile. Her shoulder-length hair swung gently as she glanced toward the men. "These are the men the Tribunal sent to help us. Did you know Nials contacted them again?"

"No but it wouldn't surprise me. He's not exactly thrilled with having us guard him." Denise shrugged.

Right now she couldn't care less about Nials' obnoxious behavior. She could barely focus on anything other than the two men who now stood shoulder-to-shoulder in front of her. Emotions rushed through her, an illogical mass of feelings that she couldn't control or sort through. Attraction pulsed, immediate and undeniable. Just as strong, anger rose and flared.

It didn't matter that she'd never met these men. Some part of her associated them with the sadness and pain felt by the woman in her dreams. They couldn't be the men who'd done it. These had to be men from the first experiments, the First Gen. Rumors had been spreading through the various groups that a group called the *Norik* were the



First Generation of experiments. She hadn't believed the tales then. She'd thought the First Gen had likely been killed.

"Nials wanted a group of male *Arceins* to replace us. The Tribunal sent these men as reinforcements. Nials won't be pleased that he didn't get what he wanted." Jasi pulled out a seat from a nearby table and flopped into it.

"Nials isn't my concern right now. He'll growl a bit about not getting everything his own way but he'll move past it. They need to get settled. Tonight's going to be busy." She returned to wiping down the table.

They recognized her. She could tell by the way they were looking at her. Sexual interest burned in their eyes. She had to admit that they were sexy but she wanted to know more about them. Why they didn't seem even a little surprised to see her topped the list of questions.

"True. I'll take them back and show them the rooms." Jasi's white teeth flashed stark white against her dark brown skin.

"Check on Sela. She hasn't been in here to try leaving since you left. She could be still pouting but..." Denise shrugged and grimaced. They'd had to go out looking for the woman once when she'd slipped out. She didn't want to have to do it again.

"I'll check on her." Jasi stood and led the way to the door to the private staff rooms.

Denise looked up and watched as the men began to walk toward the door. All except for one of them. The man with blond hair tossed his bag to the redhead and took a seat on the opposite side of the table she was clearing.

"Hello." He leaned forward a bit, met her eyes and smiled. "I'm Camin Arohn."

She didn't return the smile. Her feelings were too confused. "I'm Denise Arensal."

"You've been dreaming of us." He placed his hand on the table, his fingers almost touching hers.

She took a deep breath. His scent filled her lungs and hit her with the force of a body blow. Memory and sensation rushed at her—hot, moist breath fanning across her neck as a muscled arm pulled her tight against him. The rich, exotic essence of *kinas* spice seemed to surround her. For a moment, she relished the security and desire she felt in that phantom embrace. That hadn't been a question. She knew she hadn't been able to hide her shock at first seeing them.

Reality returned with a thud as he repeated his remark in a more forceful voice.

"I dreamed of two men but we both know they weren't really you or that other man. You should be glad you're not them. Both of those men were bastards," she said.

His smile died as he sat back. He ran his hands through his gold hair, mussing it. She saw his eyes close.

"There's a lot you don't know." He looked at her and put his arms on the table, leaning forward.

"We have all the information from the known bases. I don't think there's anything about those labs that I haven't heard or read." She resumed her task of wiping down the table before moving on to another.

"It's not about the labs. It's about the *Norik* men." He rose from his seat, following her as she moved to the next table.

"Then I don't really need to know, do I? I'm here to watch Nials and his sister until a secure location is found for them. I won't be getting involved with you or the other man. I don't know if I could ever get past the resemblance." She tossed a smile at him and then threw the used cloth into a bin under the bar counter.

Even though the container was only half full at the moment, she picked it up and began carrying it toward the door to the living quarters. Anything to be able to walk away from him. The conflicting desires only made every feeling sharper, more intense.

He didn't follow her. Walking down the hall, she frowned. She didn't feel relieved, just a little disappointed. Somehow she hadn't expected him to just give up and let her go without even asking her to stop and listen.

\* \* \* \* \*

Davik walked out of the large room he'd chosen. On a level below the bar, each man could have a private room if they wanted. He'd put his bags as well as Camin's in the spacious room. The room was a little bland for his taste, minimally furnished with a bed and a small round table. With a little rearrangement, it would serve for the short time that they'd be on the planet. When he turned at the top of the stairs to go back to the bar, he saw her striding down the hallway with a slatted gray box in her hands. Her brown eyes sparkled with emotion and a flush darkened the skin over her high cheekbones. She stopped and her pink tongue slicked over her lush lips. He wanted to taste those lips again.

"Camin is out in the bar. I'm sure he wouldn't mind if you joined him. Keep an eye out for Sela. She's a blonde. Straight, long silver-blonde hair and the lightest skin I've ever seen. Don't let her out of the bar without an escort. I can't make her understand that she's as big a target as her brother." She looked back down the hallway to the main bar area.

Davik frowned as she gave him a sweeping look and stalked away at a fast clip. Astonishment curled through him. She'd just given him orders and dismissed him. If he hadn't guessed just by the fact that she was working as a bodyguard, he now had undeniable proof. This woman was so very different from their sweet Aeva. Aeva had never even talked back to them, much less ordered them to do something as if they were servants.

He was more than tempted to go after her but he knew something was wrong out there in the bar area. Camin would have been right behind her if she hadn't said something to him that held him back. They both wanted this woman in their lives. There had to be some reason Camin wasn't beside her, talking until she listened.

Davik headed for the bar, intent on discovering just what had happened. Whatever it was, they'd get past it. She'd been taken from them once. It wouldn't be happening again. This time she would be safe and happy with them.

He walked out into the bar and found Camin sitting on a barstool. His elbows rested on the dark, scarred surface and his fingers were laced together in front of him. He stared at the wall, so lost in thought that he didn't even know he wasn't alone anymore. Davik's eyebrows rose. Such lack of attention to his surroundings wasn't like Camin.

"What happened, Camin? I saw our woman stalking down the hallway, obviously a little upset but not enraged enough to warrant time for her temper to cool." Davik slid onto the stool next to him and turned to face Camin.

"She remembers everything." Camin raised a hand and ran it across his jaw.

"We knew she probably would." Davik nodded and waited. There had to be more to the story than just what she remembered, something that would have held him back.

"She called us both bastards and wants nothing to do with either of us. Even though she thinks we were created as she was, she's holding a grudge." Camin lifted his head.

That was a stronger reaction than they'd expected. They hadn't known just how much she would remember yet or if she'd remember it when she met them. Camin had let her walk away because he needed the time to think.

"So what did you decide?" Davik asked.

"That this is just one more reason to tell her the truth from the beginning. Denise—that's her name—would never come to trust us if we hid it from her." Camin looked toward the door.

"We'll tell her tonight after the bar is cleared of patrons. I don't want any interruptions." Davik slashed a hand through the air. "She's going to know everything."

## Chapter Two

Music played a little too loudly. The scent of liquor permeated the air along with the strong scent of perfume from the female pleasure workers moving among the tables. In many ways, this seemed like a normal night at the bar. There were two glaring differences.

Denise glanced back toward the bar as she moved among the tables. Both men had chosen to work the bar tonight and she couldn't ignore their presence. Or their stares. Their eyes left her only when they were serving liquor to the miners gathered in front of the bar.

Tonight a good portion of those waiting there happened to be female. They gathered and posed, trying to draw the men's attention. Almost indifferently, the two men brushed aside the flirting, feminine smiles and the blatant invitations.

She wasn't furious with them anymore. That left her a little confused. She didn't know exactly what she felt for them. The resentment, the anger and fury had just erupted inside her when she'd first seen them but had faded when her temper cooled. The curiosity hadn't faded. Her attraction to them had only increased as she'd calmed. She didn't want a relationship with them but she did feel drawn to them. Somehow she had to resist the temptation.

She moved back to the bar and put in the orders she'd received. The redhead nodded and began to fill them. She thought she'd heard one of the men call him Davik but couldn't be sure.

He frowned as he put the bottles on the bar and began filling two mugs. "Stop smiling and flirting with the miners. You're not going to be playing with any of them tonight."

She gasped, shocked and infuriated by the order. *Who did he think he was talking to?* "I'll do what I want."

His eyes narrowed and his lips flattened into a straight line. "You'd better want to stop flirting."

She hadn't really been flirting with the men before, merely smiling and taking their orders. Denise's lips formed into a determined line. He'd learn he couldn't tell her what to do. Their past-life relationship gave him no rights over her.

Turning, she was thrilled to see some familiar, friendly faces among the crowd of miners, one in particular. With an accentuated roll of her hips, she strolled over to the table with four men sitting around it. They were regular customers and she'd talked with the black-haired miner, Fallon, a few times on slow nights.

She walked around the table so she could be next to the lean, muscled, black-haired man when he ordered. Getting closer to him than she had in the past, she stood with one foot between his as he turned to face her.

She smiled and kept her eyes on Fallon as she addressed the table. "Hi, what can I get you tonight?"

Three of the men readily rattled off their orders. Fallon's eyes traveled from her head to her feet and back to the top in a slow, lingering, visual caress. He reached out and ran his hand up her thigh. Normally she wouldn't have invited or permitted his touch but the attitude from those two men pushed her to recklessness. She could feel the heat of Fallon's hand through the fabric of her pants but felt no excitement at his touch. The only thrill she found was in defying that autocratic despot behind the bar. She risked a glance over toward the bar. Camin's eyes glittered with anger.

"I'll have ale, Denise. If it gets slow, come and talk with me." His hand slowly skimmed her thigh one last time.

"It won't get slow for her." The voice of one of the men who'd arrived with her "dream men" came from just over her shoulder. "They're waiting for the orders, Denise."

Looking over at him, she wondered what he was doing out in the bar. Pushing aside the question, she focused on the coming confrontation. She squared her shoulders and walked slowly to the bar. Nervous flutters tore through her belly but she fought them, stirring her anger and irritation. They had no claim on her. She didn't need their permission to do anything. Other than yell at her, he couldn't really do anything at all. A smile curved her lips and she made sure her steps were brisk and light.

She paced to the edge of the bar and set her tray down, rattling off the orders in a cheery voice. Meeting Camin's eyes, she waited for her order to be placed in front of her. She didn't notice the redhead until he was standing beside her.

"You let him touch you." His breath brushed across her ear as he leaned close.

"Try to remember the reality, not the dream. We just met. You have no claim on me." She turned her head and drew in a sharp breath as she noticed the fury in his brown eyes.

A woody scent with a sharp bite teased her senses. The tantalizing smell seemed familiar but she couldn't quite figure out where she'd smelled it or what it was. Memories whirled through her mind. She could practically feel a hard, warm body pressing against hers. Warmth and excitement flowed through her.

She drew in a shaky breath as something seemed to unlock inside her. Feeling a little dazed, she looked at Camin and then into Davik's fierce brown eyes. A sense of peace blossomed inside her. For the first time she felt at home, right where she belonged with her two men. She wanted to get closer to them, to touch and caress them.

The past and present mixed. For a few moments everything seemed disconnected. She was stunned by the feelings and couldn't focus on her anger or the argument with

them. She needed time and space to deal with all of the conflicting emotions. Unfortunately, she had to face them now.

A muscle jumped along the redhead's jawline. "The reality is that any man you put between us is going to get hurt. Tonight we'll tell you about more reality. Until then, keep your distance from other men."

His arrogance infuriated her. She clenched her hands at her sides. They needed their attitudes kicked into shape. And after these latest orders, she was in the perfect mood to do it. She'd just have to wait for closing.

The night seemed to stretch for an eternity. Her angry, reckless mood must have shown on her face. The customers placed their orders and thanked her when she brought them but said little else. Every time something did manage to lighten her mood, a visit back to the bar would immediately sour it.

When the last of the customers had left and the doors were locked, she began cleaning the tables and bar. She focused on that task, determined to get it finished so she could deal with the two men who thought a past life gave them some claim on her. She shook her head as she wiped down a table. It hadn't even been a happy past life.

Occasionally she'd look up and see them talking quietly or feel their eyes on her as she went about her tasks. Finally she had nothing left to clear or clean. She turned to the bar, squared her shoulders and walked over to start telling them about reality.

"You two are going to listen to me." She put her hands on her hips and stared at them from across the width of the bar.

A small smile kicked up Camin's lips before he shook his head, apparently amused by her attitude. He walked around the bar and stopped less than a step away from her. She backed away from him, needing to put some distance between them. The redhead walked up to stand beside Camin. Both men stared at her with an amused, patient expression.

"You know I'm Camin. He's Davik. It will be easier for you to yell at us if you know our names." Camin gestured to the redhead but his eyes remained focused on her as if he were afraid she'd try to leave.

"Listen to me. I'm not her. I'm not sweet and helpless. Most of all, I'm not going to try to recreate a past-life relationship that was horrible from the start." She folded her arms across her chest and glared at them.

"We are the two men she knew." Davik stepped forward and his hand cupped her elbow. "She died in that lab along with the other women. We didn't. Hardly any of the men died there."

For a moment, Denise couldn't understand what he was saying. It didn't make sense. He couldn't be the man from her dreams. Every *Arcein* had been created.

"It's true." Camin caught her eyes and gestured to a table.

She numbly went with them as she tried to accept what they were saying. It was possible. With the *nano-cytes* flowing through their blood they wouldn't have aged but

that left so many questions. They'd be immune to disease and even severe wounds probably wouldn't be fatal. Dropping into a chair, she tried to think. Her disbelief rose only from the fact that there was no record of it. No one knew anything about the First Gen escaping. Everyone had thought they'd been killed.

"We weren't created and you're not a hybrid. They took us from our home planet to use in their experiments. You're a clone of Aeva," Camin explained.

She sighed. Yet another undocumented claim. She didn't doubt that the scientists would have used people in their experiments if they knew of an easily attainable group. Her only problem was the lack of proof. The scientists from Mari-tec, Vari-co and Bio-mech had documented every step of their experiments, every test and retest. There should be some reference to it. The only reason she wasn't screaming at them, calling them liars, was the limited documentation on the first generation of experiments.

"Easy to say when no one can prove or disprove anything you say." She tapped her fingers against the scratched, durable tabletop and glared at them.

"There's proof. We took it from the labs after we gained enough power to go back for the others. The lab had already been abandoned but it had been done in a rush. Plenty of evidence." Davik sat across the table from her.

"But you don't have any proof with you." She rolled her eyes. "Even if what you say is the complete truth, it doesn't change anything. It just strengthens my reasons for refusing to have anything to do with you."

Camin's hand thudded against the table. He scowled at her. "You're not Aeva. We know that and we celebrate that difference because we certainly aren't the men she knew. The experience changed us from the men you dream about."

"I don't want to start a relationship with you. I'm here to guard Nials and Sela and then I'm going home." She took a deep breath to get control of her temper.

Davik's eyes narrowed and his mouth opened just slightly. She had the impression he was going to say something. He hesitated, shook his head. She saw him move in the chair and he looked distinctly uncomfortable. Waiting, she tilted her head and ran her eyes over him. Gorgeous, broad-shouldered and she really didn't think a simple "no" was going to dissuade him.

"You're right. I was a bastard when Aeva met me. I had an attitude and I didn't think women were important. I was so damn proud of my status and impatient. If it didn't happen right when I wanted it, I wasn't going to wait for it." His eyes were focused somewhere beyond her.

"Why are you telling me this? I'm not interested in being with you." She raised a brow. Did they think she'd jump at the chance to be with them?

"Yes, you are interested in us. We can smell your arousal." Camin smiled. Smug male satisfaction and arrogance practically rolled off him.

"Sure, I'm physically attracted to you. You both have gorgeous bodies. I'm sure you've noticed the way women look at you. I'm also attracted to the man you objected

to earlier. I haven't done anything about my desire for him." Her chin lifted and she straightened in the chair.

"You won't be doing anything about your attraction to that other man. We're prepared to give you a little time but you won't be playing with other men." Camin leaned forward, his forearms resting on the table.

"I don't owe you anything, least of all loyalty or fidelity. She was too good for both of you. One man considered her only a breeder, the other didn't even try to ease her adjustment to her new life. She was lost and you didn't give her any help." She pushed back from the table, tempted to get up and pace. Talking or even thinking about the men from her dreams always infuriated her.

"I thought it would be better if she found the answers on her own. Aeva needed to learn how to deal with Davorik." Camin's eyes widened.

She glared at him. He seemed surprised that she blamed him as much as she did the other man. Did he think that just because he hadn't done or said anything that he had no part in what had happened?

"A few suggestions would have been giving too much direction? I'm sure she would have found ways of her own eventually. She wanted only to be the kind of wife you needed and wanted but you shut her out of everything, including the bedroom." She clenched her fists. Ever since she'd started dreaming of them, she'd identified very strongly with Aeva, with the wrongs that had been done to her.

"I've already admitted that I was wrong. I shouldn't have done it. I only trusted men. Women were for cooking, cleaning, sex and babies. That was the way I was raised." Davik's voice carried a distinctly growling tone and his lips compressed into a thin line.

"You act as if you think differently now." She ran her eyes over him and shook her head.

"It was what I was taught. But Aeva changed that. It was too late when I saw the truth but I did see it." His body was tense but his eyes never left hers.

"Funny, I haven't ever dreamed about this great change." She didn't know what to believe.

"No, I don't think she saw it as a real change in what we felt about her. She only saw that we protected her in that prison. I think it's just what she expected of us." Camin shrugged.

"The past and our past mistakes are irrelevant. We will be together. You know the truth now. We won't be letting you walk away from us." Davik stood.

He waited for Camin to rise, turned and left without another word. She couldn't believe that after all of that, they'd just left her alone in the room. When she was getting worked up for an argument, they walked away from her. Unsatisfied anger boiled inside her. She couldn't believe the arrogance of those two men.



She sat at the table for a long time, thinking about what they'd said. They were the same men from her dreams. She had no idea why they'd admitted it. They had to have known that fact wouldn't have softened her attitude toward them.

If they were telling the truth, it changed so many things, including exactly what the Second and Third Gen were. They'd been recognized by the Tribunal and almost every other galactic agency as a hybrid of human and unknown alien. If true, being clones wouldn't change anything, not legally. What had been done to them had still violated intergalactic law. It certainly wouldn't matter to any of the hate groups. They'd still be marked as targets for attack or murder.

As for the men's parting remark, she wasn't too worried. She only had to do guard duty with them. She didn't have to spend her leisure time even in the same building. While the thought of teasing them held some appeal, she knew it would be a dangerous game. There was no question that they reacted to her but she reacted just as strongly to them. Her desire could be used against her.

## Chapter Three

Denise peered around the corner carefully. The overhead lighting dimmed a bit, making the gray-walled hallway seem forbidding. Breathing a sigh of relief, she hurried toward the door. She needed to be outside, to feel the sun on her skin and the cool fall breeze against her cheeks. Dressed for the brisk weather, her red shirt and the thick black pants would keep her comfortably warm during the long walk she planned. Ever since her little talk with the men, she hadn't been able to so much as go get supplies without an escort. Disappearing for a day alone had been impossible. The feeling of being hunted grew. She didn't like it.

"Where are you going?" Davik's voice came from behind her.

*Did they have the hallway rigged for motion?* Her head snapped around and she stiffened. "For a walk."

He leaned against the wall, looking too relaxed. A blue shirt stretched across his wide chest. His pants outlined his thigh muscles as he slowly pushed away from the wall. Where had he come from? She knew there hadn't been anyone in the hallway when she'd left her room.

"Sounds good but you can't. It's time to go through the supplies to reorder what we need. Jasi tells me that it's your turn." His hand brushed over her shoulder.

She gritted her teeth and sent a few curses Jasi's way. It was technically her turn but Jasi knew how closely the men had been watching her. The task wouldn't be a short one. Most bars had gone almost or completely automated for reordering.

Not this one, not here. While the primitive computer system knew how much was supposed to be in stock, it wasn't connected to the equally primitive bar computer that kept the customers' tabs, as well as that of the special orders by the mining execs. The low-tech approach had been started when the bar opened. Power in those first days had been even chancier than it was now. Denise could understand the reason for it. They'd lost powers for a couple of hours at least three nights and there had been a couple of surges that had almost fried the system. It still irritated her.

"I'll go down to the storage area and begin cross-referencing what we have with the original totals." She sighed.

"I'll help you." He smiled and began walking down the hall without even waiting for her.

She raised her eyes to the ceiling and took a deep breath. She didn't need his help. Already she could see a long task becoming even longer with him near. He'd be a huge distraction even if he did nothing more than stand there. Not that she could see that

happening. She didn't think he'd waste the opportunity to try to get her to see his side of the argument. What she needed was some time to really relax.

Following at a slower pace, she went to the bar to get the hand-held comp used to track the bar's supplies. She made her way to the bottom level, delaying it as long as possible. Here the light gray walls seemed dark and because of the rows of shelves it felt confining. Davik was already there, looking at the bottles and barrels.

He made her nervous. She could see the hunger in his eyes every time he looked at her. It wasn't that she was scared of either one of them. No, it was the desire that made her want to keep her distance. She was too attracted to them. Sometimes she wondered if she'd actually seen a difference between his behavior now and that of the man in her dreams, or if she saw only what she wanted to see. She couldn't deny that she felt pulled to them or that she wanted to believe.

Turning her attention away from the gorgeous red-haired man browsing a row of liquor, she began to work. As soon as she finished tallying the supplies, she could get away from temptation. She began counting the bottles of one of the higher-end ales they kept in stock for the execs. The tally of what they *should* have didn't mesh with the amount they had. Checking for notations, she found a note in a file with an exec's name and the exact number of the missing bottles.

Turning, she bumped into Davik as she tried to move to the next section of the shelves. His hands came up and grasped her arms as she stumbled back. Her head shot up and her gaze locked with his intent, deep brown eyes.

Her eyes lowered to his full lips. She'd always wondered what they felt like. She'd always been outside looking in at what had happened. She'd felt the other woman's emotions, reacted to the situations but had known the physical sensation was just her imagination.

"Let me..." His hands slid down her arms.

On impulse, she rose on her tiptoes and brushed her lips across his. He drew in a sharp breath and she felt him tense beneath her hand. She drew his lower lips into her mouth and nibbled on it. His taste pulled her to him.

She didn't understand the feelings swirling inside her. She wanted to kiss, to hold and push him to the floor and take him until they were both exhausted. Her mind held her to just that one kiss. She didn't know him or the other man and her dreams of them were far from reassuring. Her doubts screamed through her head, pulling her from the grip of the intense attraction.

She drew back and licked her lips. His brown eyes flared and followed the glide of her tongue but he didn't move. The emotion in his eyes seared her but what really surprised her was that he waited, watching. He just stood there, his hands resting lightly on her forearms.

"I shouldn't have done that." She took a step back, shaking her head.

Nothing had been settled during their talk. She didn't understand why she seemed drawn to them. Every time she stepped close to one of them, she almost ached to touch,

to be touched. Their scent alone caused a rush of arousal to pulse through her. Equally strong emotions held her back. She knew their past actions hadn't been done against *her* but she identified too strongly with Aeva to just ignore what had happened.

"I didn't mind." A slow smile spread across his lips.

Denise's eyes narrowed as his eyes fell from her lips to her breasts. He seemed so damn confident, so sure that she'd just tumble into his arms. She stepped away from him.

"I'm not her," she said with slow emphasis.

"I know that. You don't have to worry about us confusing you with her." He reached out and brushed his thumb across her cheek.

"That shouldn't have happened." She shook her head.

"It will happen again you know. We're mates." He let his hand fall away from her face. "As I was saying before you kissed me, let me help."

She nodded slowly. Anything to get this finished faster. The longer she was with him, the less that past life seemed to matter. He was here and she wanted him. She was too confused right now to make any kind of a decision.

He worked with her but she didn't miss how his hand would rest for a moment at her back or his body would brush against hers. He took every opportunity to touch her.

"Stop it." She pushed his hand off her arm.

He smiled and cocked a challenging eyebrow. "I'm not the only one touching here."

"I'm not touching you." She shook her head at him but she did wonder. Was she touching him without realizing it?

She couldn't deny that she wanted to touch him, but she also wanted to know if he was actually different before she started anything with either of them. Once a certain line had been crossed, she knew that they couldn't go back to light kissing or touching. On top of that, there was the relationship between the men. If she accepted one, she accepted them both. They were a pair. She knew enough from her dreams to know that. She didn't mind that they had a relationship but she had to know that she could be part of it too.

As he was counting cases and single bottles of *Sirila* rum, she watched him, admiring his broad shoulders and taut backside. Her mind readily supplied her with images of his toned body. Her body reacted, loosening, slick fluid beginning to flow from her pussy.

He was staring at her with a raised brow and she knew she must have missed something. When he repeated the total, she nodded and compared it to the number they should have. It was short. Suddenly she remembered another case that was stored on a different shelf because there hadn't been room for it when they'd stocked the last time.

She stepped over and reached up to touch the edge of the case. "Did you get this one?"

His hands clamped at her waist. The fact that she'd just plastered herself against his side became abundantly clear. She could feel the warmth of his body, the muscles of his chest and thighs and his cock pressing against her. He took a deep breath and set her a step back.

"No, I didn't get that case. Let me pull it down to make sure they're all there." A growl roughened his voice and he gave her a long, hard look before he turned to his task.

Denise had no idea what had come over her. She hadn't thought about doing that. It had just happened. Now that the idea had formed in her mind, she couldn't get it out. The more she was around these two, the faster her curiosity increased. Not only sexually. She wanted to know who they were and what they did. They had dropped a few tidbits about themselves while they were talking to her but nothing substantial.

"The bottles are all there. Let's move to the next type of liquor." He took a step back and watched her every move, almost as if he wasn't sure what she was going to do next.

She walked around him to the next item on the inventory. A delicious thrill ran through her at the sight of that cautious behavior. It made her want to do something wicked just to see how he'd react. He was such a big man, more than capable of pushing her away from him. The thought of him walking in fear of her was almost hilarious.

She stood aside and let him pass so he could do most of the counting. Occasionally as they worked, her body would brush his or his hand would trail across her arm. Unintentional touches, they drew the tension between them even tighter.

He walked in front of her around the back of the shelf they'd just finished. He stopped suddenly and she ran right into him. He turned and grabbed her shoulders.

"Are you trying to make me insane?" Davik glared at her, his brown eyes burning with heat.

"You're the one who stopped walking." She raised her hands and pressed her forearms against his. His hands fell from her shoulders.

"Not that. All the little touches, the smiles, the way you brush your body against mine again and again." He put a hand on his hip and stood waiting.

"I didn't plan to do any of it, didn't even think about it. It just happened. I'm not a tease." She frowned at him. "At least not in the way you mean right now."

"What do you think I mean?" He smiled and leaned his shoulder against the shelf.

"You thought that I was teasing you so I could watch your excitement and frustration and then walk away from you. I'm not sure enough of my own feelings to start playing with yours. When I tease a man, I definitely intend to satisfy him, just as he will please me—eventually." A corner of her mouth kicked up. When she thought of teasing it was love play, not a power play.

"I don't mind playing games. I just wanted to let you know that there was a limit to how much I could take." His hand lifted and his thumb traced her lips.

She had to fight the urge to slick her tongue over his finger. Time to get back to work before she tested his limits even more. She'd been watching the flex of his buttocks, the easy grace of his body. She hadn't even noticed he'd stopped. Her eyes had returned repeatedly to the flex of his buttocks outlined by the tight black material of his pants. She just couldn't keep her mind off him or his body. The urge to cuddle up against his muscular chest seemed to grow stronger with every breath.

Denise went around him and began looking at the contents of the shelf. She heard the slight scuff of his shoes on the floor. She thought he was going to slip around her but his steps stopped directly behind her. *What is he doing?*

"I think I've reached my limit. It's been too long since I've held you." His normally smooth, deep voice sounded rough. He stepped forward and turned her to face him in an easy coordinated move.

His hand rose and tipped up her chin as his mouth lowered to hers. She drew in a startled breath and his tongue swept deep inside her mouth. Her hands rose to push him away even if only to give herself a moment to think.

He drew back, his tongue tracing her lips. Her lips tingled at that tantalizing touch. She couldn't resist closing the small distance between them. Her breasts pressed against his chest and her lips settled firmly on his. She wanted to be close to him. Desire and anticipation managed to block most of her doubts.

Her action seemed to be all that he needed. He groaned, the low sound vibrating against her chest as he backed her against the shelf. She slipped an arm around his waist and opened her mouth for his tongue. Hot and enticing, the kiss slammed the last trace of rational thought from her head.

Davik's hand slid under her red shirt. The soft rasp of slightly calloused fingertips sent a shot of heat straight through her. She could feel the rapid thump of his heart against her chest, echoed by her own heartbeat. She arched into his touch, wanting to feel more. His fingers brushed over the taut peak of one of her firm breasts. He caught her gasp with his lips. He leaned into her, letting her feel the hard ridge of his cock. Bottles clanked as she pressed against them.

Her hand moved restlessly over his back. She could feel the heat of his body through the fabric but she wanted to feel his skin beneath her fingers. Working her hand beneath his shirt, she swept it up his muscled back.

He seemed to have the same idea but his hand eased under the front of her shirt. When the shirt bunched around his hand and he couldn't move freely, a frustrated growl rolled through him. Slipping his hand free, he worked on the fastenings, her shirt parted and he again lifted his hands to one of the plump mounds.

His mouth brushed from side to side against hers, sparking a tingling rush of sensation to her lips. She drew in a sharp breath. Her lips felt swollen and lush as the cool air hit them. She rose on her toes. Her mouth fastened over his and she dived into the kiss. The heat of his mouth against hers felt so good, so right.

A sharp tug on her nipple garnered all her attention. A hot jolt of pleasure streaked straight to the ache low in her belly. She moaned against his lips.

"Your nipples are darker than I remembered. I'm going to have them soon, taste and nibble until you're begging for more." His thumb flicked across the hard tip.

She wriggled, turning her body into that touch. "Not now?"

"Not yet." He nuzzled her cheek, trailing kisses along her jaw.

"Why?" She angled her head to give him better access as his lips blazed a sizzling path down her neck.

"Because I want to see you find your pleasure this time. When I get my lips on your breasts, I'm going to feast." His tongue traced along the muscles above her collarbone.

She held her breath as hot, moist air touched the sensitive, darker stripe of skin but he didn't touch it. She wondered if the marks on his shoulder would be as acutely responsive as her own were. She knew he had them. Every *Arcein* did. With one hand molded to her buttocks, he lifted her and walked a few steps down the aisle. He set her on a large metal keg of ale. Stepping forward, he moved between her parted thighs.

He lowered his head, kissing her again as his palms cupped her breasts, giving the mounds a firm caress before sliding down her rib cage in a brief foray. Her breath jittered from between parted lips. It felt so good. She'd never imagined that any touch could feel that good. She felt his fingers against the skin of her belly just above her waistband.

His hand slipped down into her pants. She gasped as she suddenly felt the fabric loosening around her waist and realized that he must have unfastened them. His fingers brushed over the smooth, shaven mound of her pussy.

His fingers twitched against her and stopped for a moment. She looked up and caught flecks of gold lighting his brown eyes. He licked his lips as his fingers traced over the plump folds. The flaring heat in his eyes riveted her. She'd never seen a man look so hungry, so carnal.

"So smooth. I never thought... The silky feel makes me want to run my tongue over the folds to see if you taste as good as I remember." His fingers pressed between the plump lips.

A gush of liquid heat pulsed from her. She drew in a shuddering breath. Just the thought of his mouth on her pussy was almost enough to send her over the edge. She squirmed and tugged at him.

"You like that idea." His fingers stroked down, brushing over her clit before he swirled his fingers in her juices.

Her back arched and she widened her thighs, offering him better access. "Yes."

His thumb flicked across the hard sensitive nub and began moving in slow circles. His fingers thrust in and out of her. Her nails sank into his shoulders. The sweet ache built inside her, tightening her muscles and driving everything but release from her mind.

"Have you made any progress, Davik?" Camin's voice echoed in the large storage area.

Denise tensed as she saw him come around the corner. Davik's thumb swept across her clit. Pleasure slammed into her. She shook and a low, keening cry ripped from her throat. All she could do was hold on to him and feel.

Gradually the pleasure faded and her heartbeat returned to normal. She blinked and turned her head. Camin stood at the end of the aisle, staring.

"Now that's progress." Camin smiled, his hungry gaze sweeping over her body, lingering on her exposed breasts and her splayed thighs.

"Progress? As in you planned to seduce me?" She planted her hands on Davik's chest and pushed.

"No, progress as in not being at each other's throat. We know you want us but we know you're having problems letting yourself enjoy it because of the dreams, the past." Camin licked his lips as he took a slow step forward.

"Why you conceited ass! What makes you think that I want you?" She glared at him and crossed her arms over her breasts.

Furious, she pushed past the feeling of being exposed and glared at them. She wasn't going to *admit* that she wanted them. They already seemed more than willing to just take over. Any opportunity she gave them, they'd use.

A single finger curled inside her and stroked along the sensitive inner wall. She tensed and heat rushed into her face.

"Well, I do have a rather unique view of it." Davik grinned, twisting his wrist as he thrust his fingers into her.

"Your sweet scent gives you away every time. When we're just in the same room with you, your juices flow from your pussy." Camin glided forward and his fingers trailed over her arm.

"Just because the idea is appealing doesn't mean it's going to happen." She reached down and grabbed Davik's wrist. His thumb glided over her clit. He was starting something she wasn't ready to finish again.

"You want both of us. I've seen the hunger in your eyes when you watch us. You need both of us. You want both of your men." Davik's coated fingers withdrew from her pussy. He drew them along the inside of her thigh and then traced them around to the curve of her buttocks.

*Yes!* She kept the shout silent. Controlling the wild impulse to throw her arms around him and forget everything else, she narrowed her eyes and tried to gather her wits. There were too many questions to be answered. What they wanted was a relationship and walking away from them wouldn't be a real option.

"I don't have *men*. Aeva had men." She took a deep breath.

"I'll watch you come again soon." Davik stepped back away from her. "And Camin will be there. You'll cry out for both of us."



He might have stopped touching her but the desire hadn't faded. She closed her thighs but that only made the aching need seem worse. She buttoned her shirt furiously and then fastened her pants.

"Out. Get out! I'll finish this." She stood and flung her hand out, pointing in the general direction of the door, although shelves blocked her view of it.

"You won't get much done if we stay." Camin nodded and half turned before looking back at her. "No more hiding behind Aeva. You're not her. Use your own feelings and instincts."

After they'd left, Denise leaned back against one of the shelves and closed her eyes. What had happened to her resolve to take it slowly? She rolled her eyes. Davik had happened. When Davik's hands had touched her, it had felt so right. Almost as if his touch had filled an unknown empty spot inside her. Everything had changed. They weren't waiting and watching anymore. The two men were definitely on the hunt.

## Chapter Four

Aeva pressed as close to the energy shield as she dared. She could practically feel the pulse of the energy but she needed to see. The wide, gray double doors on the far wall had opened. Her mouth felt dry as hope and fear built inside her. Two of the armed, uniformed prison guards stalked into the huge common area of the prison block. Disappointment rose but then she noticed that the doors hadn't closed. Two gleaming silver gurneys were guided into the open area outside the cells.

She strained to see who was on those gurneys. Davorik and A'Camion weren't the only men who'd been taken to be punished. They'd defied orders again as had a few of the other men. Aeva was so afraid that one day the scientists would kill them for it. Every time it happened the guards became more brutal, crueler in their punishment. The men came back badly beaten, burnt and bleeding.

She saw Davorik's mass of red-blond hair falling off the edge of the table. The uniformed men wheeled the two unconscious men back to the cell. Aeva backed away from the shield just before it lowered. While the guards aimed their weapons at her, the two attendants dumped Davorik and A'Camion onto the floor.

As soon as the shield was back in place, the guards and the attendants left. Her heart raced and her mouth felt absolutely dry. They had to be alive. She rushed over to her two men.

She brushed the hair away from Davorik's face. Bruises covered the familiar angles and planes, and the swelling made him almost unrecognizable. This was all because of her. If they hadn't tried to protect her again... She shook her head sharply. No crying. She had to help them now.

Usually the scientists' methods of torture left very little physical sign, but when they wanted to leave a mark, they made sure they left plenty of hurt along with it.

A'Camion groaned. She turned and brushed his blond hair back behind his ears and off his face. Jumping to her feet, she ran over and grabbed the cup, filling it with water. She dipped her finger in it and wet his lips. He licked the swollen, cracked flesh.

"More." His rasping growl, so unlike his usual life-filled voice, almost broke her resolve not to cry.

She lifted his head, bracing it against her leg. Tipping the cup, she dribbled water into his mouth.

"Give me some, *be'rai*." Davorik's demand barely rose above a soft whisper.

She turned her head and found him watching her. Gently, she lowered A'Camion's head. She moved over to Davorik and trickled water over his bleeding lips, careful not to give him too much and choke him. He swallowed the cool water and his eyes closed.

The small act of taking a drink of water seemed to have taken an enormous amount of energy from him.

"You shouldn't have done it. They hurt you so badly this time." She gently brushed her fingertips over his brow. It was the one place there didn't seem to be bruising. She didn't want to hurt him even more than he already was.

"I couldn't let them do anything to you." His mouth lifted as if in a grin but then he tensed and it faltered and faded.

Even with all the problems they'd had before they'd been taken, he took care of her as if she were the most important thing in his life. He made her feel so special, but she knew that it was only his protective instincts and his sense of duty driving him.

"They won't do half the things to me that they do to you. You're making them angry, furious. What happens to me if they decide it's too much trouble dealing with you two and kill you both? Do you think I want your deaths on my conscience?" She ran her hands over Davorik's arms, trying to see how much damage those sadistic scientists had done this time.

"They're not going to hurt you, not if I can stop it." He lifted his hand but it fell back to the tiled floor before he touched her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Denise woke. Sadness and near panic lingered in her mind and she could feel her heart racing. She brushed the tears away from her eyes with a knuckle and rolled over onto her back. The feelings in those dreams were always so intense. Aeva had blamed herself for their getting hurt, for the men stepping in front of her. She'd seen it as only another example of her weakness and why the men could only be motivated by duty.

Denise had no idea how many times the men had been hurt because they were protecting her, but just from the dream she knew it was more than once. She doubted that simple duty had caused them to take that kind of punishment again and again. What that more they had felt for Aeva, she had no idea but it had to be something deep and strong.

She shook her head. What they had felt for Aeva didn't matter right now and was only going to confuse the situation. She wasn't Aeva. Those men didn't know her. At most, they might want her but it couldn't be anything deeper.

Denise pulled the brush through her wet black hair in long slow strokes. Separating the hair into three thick sections, she worked it into a tight braid. Taking more time than usual, she secured the end with little black ties that almost perfectly matched the color of her hair.

She didn't want to chance running into Camin and Davik just yet. After the episode in the liquor supply room, she'd had too much to think about. She still hadn't come to any decisions.

So to get a little more time and to stay away from that wicked sexual pull, she'd switched duty with Layla. She'd work in the bar tonight instead of tomorrow when Camin and Davik were scheduled to work. Denise waited until almost opening time to head down the hall to the bar. She didn't have any doubt about the all of the men's loyalty to each other. Philan and Rael would warn Camin and Davik if given time. She needed a nice, relaxing evening away from Davik and Camin's searing glances and the hunger in their eyes. Dealing with her own needs and wants was giving her enough problems. She didn't have time to worry about theirs.

She strolled into the bar and smiled as the two men behind the bar stared at her as if they were surprised that she was there. They frowned suspiciously. Philan and Rael both glanced toward the door as if expecting someone else to follow her into the room. She hadn't talked with them and didn't know much about them. Any time she'd been near the men, Davik and Camin had commanded most of her attention.

"Do the... Do Davik or Camin know you're here?" Philan, a muscled man with slanted amber eyes, watched her as she went behind the bar and tied on the small apron.

"Why would you think they don't know exactly where I am?" She braced her elbows on the bar and leaned back against it. Her head tilted and she kept her eyes on them as she spoke the words. The misleading question was as close as she was going to get to a full answer. She knew she had to avoid giving a more direct answer. They just might be able to see the outright lie.

"Well, you know they like working with you." Rael's eyes narrowed suspiciously, looking very blue against his dark brown skin.

Denise struggled to keep her face impassive. Those two men wanted to be with her and if it meant working that's what they'd do, but the work was secondary. "Well, I'm here and so are our first customers of the night."

The two men looked at each other and then shrugged as if they'd decided to just let the incident pass. She didn't know if they'd given up questioning her or decided to wait until later when there was a lull in patrons. At least they weren't running to tell Camin and Davik. She really needed a break. Maybe she'd get it, at least for a while.

After the sporadic arrival of the first few groups, the bar filled quickly and the music began to pulse through the room with a heavy bass beat. She was kept busy taking orders and getting refills for the customers. She looked up as she set down two foam-topped mugs and saw the door to the private quarters swing closed.

That wasn't an altogether unusual occurrence but the fact that no one was walking away from it did catch her attention. If someone had just come out of the private hallway, they should be nearby. No one should be going into the private area right now. Both men were at the bar, so one of them hadn't left. It could have been a mistake but that wasn't likely and Denise wasn't the type to take chances. That left one option. Someone had come out of the private area and left the door unlocked. Only one person had demonstrated that much sheer stubborn blindness to the danger of the situation.

Sela. Denise could only guess, but she'd bet one of the men guarding Sela had bought one of her "helpless" acts. They'd probably gone to fetch or carry something. The girl did have an annoying talent for slipping away at the slightest chance. As for Rael and Philan, in spite of the warning, they probably hadn't been paying too much attention to the door from the private section of the bar.

Denise dropped the tray and leapt toward the bar. A man loomed in front of her as she moved through the crowd. She gave him a hard shove on the shoulder and he stumbled to the side, trying to maintain his balance. It seemed that the entire crowd was determined to get in her way. With determination and a healthy shot of adrenaline pulsing through her, she continued to push her way to the bar. She heard the shouts behind her but ignored them. In four strides she reached the crowded bar. The two men behind it stared at her with their mouths agape.

"Push the button under the counter now!" She pointed to the area where it was.

They must have heard something in her voice because they moved. Rael slammed his palm onto the button. The men who'd remained in the personal quarters tonight might not know what the alarm meant but they'd figure it out.

She spun on her heel and looked toward the street exit. A flash of silver-blond hair caught her eyes when the dancing bodies of a couple moved apart for a moment. Running, ignoring the calls for service, she wove her way through the crowd, shoving people out of the way when there was no clear path.

Denise grabbed the shoulder of the silver-haired woman and spun her around just before she reached the exit. Sela gaped at her and pulled back. Denise released Sela's shoulder but quickly latched on to her wrist. With a muttered curse, she began pulling the other woman back through the crowd to the bar. She had to clench her teeth to keep from yelling at the stupid woman. This wasn't the first time she'd tried a stunt like this but it was the first time someone might have gotten into the private area because of it.

If someone had gotten hurt because of her— Denise cut off the angry thought. They'd deal with the results after the situation was under control.

Denise took a deep, calming breath, all too aware of the sea of eyes on them. "Come on, Sela. You're still sick. You don't know what you're saying or doing. Let's get you back into bed before you hurt yourself."

"I know what I'm doing. Let me go." Sela strained against Denise's hold, planting her feet and refusing to go another step farther.

"The pretty girl doesn't want to go with you. You'd better leave her alone." A big dark-skinned man at a nearby table slowly rose to his feet.

Denise's eyes widened as he finally stood at his full height. The man was a walking wall. He was huge, tall and muscled and didn't look to be in a good mood. She didn't know what she was going to do if he actually decided to help Sela. Trying to ignore him, she tugged Sela a few more steps away from the door. A bystander getting involved was the last thing she needed. This whole scene would draw too much

attention to the fact that no one had ever seen Sela before but Denise couldn't just let the idiot run the streets when it could get her killed.

"Let me go!" Sela swung an open-handed slap at Denise's face.

Denise jerked back, managing to avoid most of the blow. Two of Sela's nails scraped across her cheek. Silently cursing, she tugged hard, jerking the smaller woman off balance and moving a little closer to the bar.

"You're going to make yourself even sicker than you are now. Do you want to spend the next week in bed? You'll exhaust yourself just like you did last time." Denise resolutely kept moving toward the bar. She'd like to put Sela in bed for a week with a broken ankle. Unfortunately her brother was ultra-protective of the woman in spite of her dangerous antics.

"I told you to leave the girl alone. She's an adult and can make her own decisions." The big man who'd appointed himself Sela's protector stepped in front of Denise.

Denise looked up at the big, muscular man, one of the miners, judging from his build and the identification tag on his shirt. Just what she needed, a man who liked to save damsels in distress. "Go away. She's sick and she doesn't need your help."

If the man only knew how much trouble Sela could cause, he'd run the opposite way. The woman had been on a one-woman rampage since they'd arrived on the planet. She certainly didn't need any help from a protector. What Sela needed was to really listen for once.

The man's feet shifted and his eyes narrowed. Denise noticed his hand move down to his side as she tightened her grip on Sela's wrist when the woman tried to twist out of her hold. She caught a flash of silver. His hand slashed up. A long, curved blade sliced up at her. Stunned, she jumped back. She felt a sting along the side of her ribs.

The drunk hero had just cut her! Anger slammed through her. She tensed, keeping a hand on Sela and urging her back.

A body rammed into the big man, tumbling them both to the floor. She saw long, dark hair and knew that Rael must have moved to stop the man before he could take another swipe at her. The two men struggled. The knife skittered across the floor.

Denise tugged on Sela's hand, pulling her in a wide arc around the wrestling men toward the dark-wood bar. Denise slid her free hand up her side to her ribs. She felt warm, sticky wetness beneath her fingers. She pressed her hand over the wound. Glancing down quickly, she saw a slash in her shirt from the waist to just under her breast. She didn't know how deep the cut was.

Sela stumbled after her, still resisting. Denise felt a rush of relief as they finally reached the bar. She pushed the blonde behind the safety of the high counter.

"Are you all right?" Philan walked over to her and lifted her arm to get a look at the wound.

"I just got cut. What about Rael? He is the one who is fighting the man because of sick and dim here." She kept her fingers wrapped around Sela's wrist as she looked

over to where Rael had tackled the man, but all she saw was a group of people milling around near the door.

"He's fine. They broke apart almost as soon as you pulled Sela away from them. You need to get our sick friend back into the private quarters and clean your wound." Philan nodded toward the door.

"Are you sure he's all right? I can't see him." She didn't want to leave if Rael was still fighting.

"Yes, I'm sure. He's coming back this way. Go on. You're still bleeding." Philan looked pointedly at the slash on her side.

"I'm going." She turned toward the door to the private quarters.

The door to the private quarters swung open just as she urged Sela out from behind the bar. Camin stepped out of the open door first. A black shirt clung to his broad chest, enhancing his golden hair and tan. Behind him a woman was urged into the bar. Denise tensed as she recognized the woman. She was a mercenary. The petite woman with short, dark hair looked livid. A flush rose on her golden cheeks and she jerked away from Davik's guiding hand.

Camin let the woman pass and then his eyes began searching the area beyond the bar. He was obviously looking for her among the tables. If Sela hadn't tried her little flit, that's just where she would have been. Davik spotted her as he stepped out into the bar area. His green shirt was mostly unbuttoned. Movement behind him caught her attention. Layla stepped out into the bar.

Just from Davik's expression, she knew he hadn't seen the blood yet. He was smiling at her and didn't look at all worried. Both of those men were much too protective to smile when she was hurt. Especially Davik. If she wasn't mistaken, he felt very guilty. Not only because of the way he'd treated Aeva but also because Aeva had been taken from them and been killed.

Denise didn't call to them. She continued pulling Sela to the door. The woman still kept pulling back and struggling when they both knew she wasn't getting out of the bar tonight. Denise had to give the woman credit for being determined. The knife incident hadn't even fazed Sela. She muttered curses under her breath and sank her nails into Denise's arm.

Denise gritted her teeth. The girl didn't know when to quit. And she kept pushing. Denise didn't know how long she could keep holding back. Only the fact that Sela hadn't grown up with the daily danger most *Arceins* knew from birth had kept her temper under control to this point. That wouldn't save Sela much longer. The urge to give the dense woman a good shake grew with every day.

"If you don't let me go, that little scene you just went through will be nothing compared to what will happen!" Sela slapped at Denise, her hand catching her fully across the face. If Denise hadn't been so aware of the need to keep up the pretense of Sela being sick, she would have taught the spoiled woman a few manners.

"You're sick. You don't know what you're doing. And you'd better be glad you are because if you weren't..." Denise tugged on the woman's arm, taking them closer to the door to the private quarters.

Davik's eyes suddenly widened and he took two quick steps forward. "How did you get hurt?"

Denise waved that question away. They could talk about it later, in private, if she couldn't get out of it. "We've got to get her back to bed. She's still delusional."

"Bitch," Sela mumbled, but she didn't pull back when Denise took a few more steps toward the door.

"I'll escort her back to her bed." Camin stepped up and took Sela's arm. As soon as Denise released her hold, he led Sela toward the door. Davik came over to her and placed a hand in the small of her back.

"Let's get you cleaned up. Layla's taking duty tonight." With gentle pressure at the base of her spine, he guided her toward the door.

Denise went along gratefully, more than willing to let Layla work in the bar tonight. The night had just begun but everything had gone horribly wrong. None of it would have happened if Sela had just stayed back in the private area.

Denise stepped through the door and into the hallway. The door's slight squeak and the thunk of the lock clicking into place reached her as Davik stepped up behind her. She saw Jasi slowly pacing down the hallway with a small comp in her hand. Denise knew that Jasi was making sure that the intruder hadn't planted any bugs.

"We're clear now. She'd planted two before we caught her, Jasi said as she tucked the comp into her pocket. "Did Sela do that to you?"

"Her theatrics attracted a protector." Denise grimaced.

"Well, she also bought us a load of trouble. You recognized our visitor?" Jasi came over and looked at the slash on her side.

"Of course. It would be hard to forget any of that group." Denise shook her head. As if she could forget the two times they'd seen that woman, not to mention the crazed white-haired leader of that group.

"You've met that woman?" Davik stepped up beside her and frowned.

"Um... I'm hurt here. Can this wait until after I tend to this?" Denise gestured to the hole in her shirt, trying to get a little time and distance. Maybe they'd get their answers somewhere else while she was doing it.

"We'll clean that for you and you can tell us about that woman." Camin came over and took her hand.

"I can do it myself," she began.

She might as well have saved her breath. They didn't even respond to that. He pulled her down the hall to the stairs and to the next level where most of the private quarters were. They urged her to the room they'd taken, ignoring the fact that her room was just down the hall. Opening the door, he nudged her inside.



She blinked. The bed certainly wasn't the standard version that was in her room. They had to have put at least two mattresses together to get that width. A creamy white blanket was spread across the wide mattress. A small night table sat nearby. Across the room, a round table sat near a corner surrounded by three chairs. On top of the table was a wooden block with hunks cut out of it and a small knife rested nearby. She frowned, wondering whose that was and what it was supposed to be.

Camin nudged her toward the door near the table. He pushed the door open and followed her into the room.

"Out of that shirt. What's left of it," Davik ordered from somewhere behind them.

Denise shook her head slowly but her hands went to the fastening on her shirt. She knew this was a mistake. The hunger and possession had burned in their eyes the first time they saw her. Since Davik had brought her to orgasm, they'd only become more intense. Undressing, being in any way intimate with them would only make that worse. She shrugged the fabric off her shoulders and then winced as pain sliced up her side. Camin stepped forward and tugged the dangling fabric free of her wrists.

"Here's the cleanser." Davik handed it to Camin.

"Come over here." Camin walked over to the basin.

She followed at a slower pace.

"How do you know the woman who snuck into the quarters?" Davik lounged in the bathroom doorway.

"I've never met her, so I don't know her in that sense. I've seen her on two other planets. Both times she'd been with a group of mercs who work almost exclusively for the Vari-co and Bio-mech companies. If it's the same group, it's led by a man named Magnus Drake," she said as she turned so that her side was near the sink. She kept one arm across her breasts and lifted the other to give him better access to the wound.

"A merc..." Camin tensed, and his hand stopped cleaning the cut. "They're after Nials?"

She nodded. "Thanks to Sela's foray out into the bar tonight they know he's probably here."

"What happened the other two times you came up against them?" Davik asked, his voice sounding as if he was moving closer.

Denise looked over her shoulder and saw him stop only a step or two away from them. With just her and Camin in the room, it had seemed tight. Now she felt crowded, cramped. It didn't help that she was already uneasy about seeing that female merc. If she still worked with Drake, they'd know it as soon as he showed his face. The man was impossible to miss with his white hair and intense blue eyes.

"They attacked a few times but we weren't stuck on a planet then. As soon as we could, we got off it and disappeared," she said, and grimaced. She only wished it were that easy now. But taking Nials anywhere could be even more dangerous than staying. The man had a huge bounty on his head and this location was very isolated.

"Will any of them be able to recognize you? Do they know that you're an *Arcein*?" Camin dabbed some gel-like goo over the cut and scratches and then covered it with a bandage.

"No. They don't know my face or that I came from those labs. Both times we saw them, another group of women were the primary guard team. We mingled among the guards provided by those planets, dressed like them too, in light body armor and a helmet. Our faces were hidden at all times." She looked down as Camin pressed the bandage, wondering how long he was going to hold it there. It should have adhered by now.

"You're just lucky our kind heals fast. The medical facilities here aren't exactly the best." He put a hand on her arm.

"The cut wasn't entirely my fault." She folded her arms across her chest.

"It wouldn't have happened if you hadn't switched nights with Layla." Davik was waiting as she turned around. A smile curved his lips and he looked entirely too comfortable leaning against the wall, blocking the way out of the bathroom.

"Doesn't matter when I work as long as I do. Maybe I have plans for tomorrow." She put her hands on her hip, forgetting for a moment about her nudity. It was the cold air against her nipples that reminded her. She felt heat rise in her cheeks and she grabbed for her shirt, slipping it on and fastening it even though it was ruined. The fabric rubbed against the sensitive, hardened peaks and tingles shot down her spine.

"You don't have any plans other than to keep your distance from us, you little coward." Camin's hand at the small of her back gave her a small nudge forward.

Davik didn't move as she drew close to him. She raised her eyes to his and couldn't stop the rounding of her own when he let his hunger show.

"Feeling a little hunted?" Davik drew his finger along the side of her cheek before he stepped back, turned and led the way out of the bathroom.

"Maybe I didn't want to deal with all the orders and two men who think they have some claim on me." She bared her teeth in a fierce smile. What they called cowardice, she considered good sense.

A need for time to think had been part of her decision but she had wanted some distance as well. Not that it had worked. Here she was, alone with them. Just the thing that she'd wanted to avoid until she'd finished thinking.

"We need to talk to Sela and Nials now. We'll finish our talk later tonight." Davik moved close for just a moment. His hand cupped her cheek and she felt the heat of his body against hers. For a moment he looked into her eyes as his thumb stroked in small circles along her jawline.

## Chapter Five

Denise walked with Davik and Camin down the hallway to Nials' quarters located at the very end of the corridor. The door swung open only a moment after they'd knocked. Nials stood in the doorway. He looked tired and frustrated. His blond hair was ruffled as if his fingers had just recently combed through it. Usually he seemed almost too perfect, too neat. He stared down at her stained shirt and the bandage revealed by the gaping ends.

"I'm sorry you were hurt tonight." Nials reached out and clasped her hand.

"It wasn't your fault. You're not the one who should be apologizing to me." Denise smiled and squeezed his hand.

In most cases, Nials had been very reasonable and the perfect person to guard. He'd dealt with confinement, only leaving his room when no one was in the bar. She really wouldn't have blamed him if he'd griped or started snapping at times but he was usually cheerful. His attitude about his sister, *that* was one thing she wished he'd change.

"We need to talk to you. More has happened tonight than Sela's little jaunt. The entire situation has changed." Davik frowned, glancing significantly at their joined hands, and stepped forward, glaring at Nials.

Nials caught that look. He released Denise's hands, stepping back and letting them into the room. Sela sat in a chair at a table on the far side of the room. She grinned, a vicious, almost triumphant curve of the lips.

"What's happened?" Nials turned and walked over to stand near Sela.

"The woman who slipped into the private area while Sela tried to do her flit is a merc." Davik's arm curved around Denise's waist and he tugged her to his side.

Denise tilted her head up and frowned at him. What was his problem? He might have only been here a couple of days but he should know that Nials had no interest in her. The man hadn't ever looked at her in anything other than a friendly way.

"Are you sure?" Nials' eyes narrowed and his body tensed.

"Yes, Jasi, Layla and I have seen her before. Those times, she worked for a group who was associated with Veri-co and Bio-mech," Denise explained.

"How do you know they're not after one or all three of *you*?" Sela sneered.

"First, we're not even near the top of the company's wanted list. Second, that group doesn't know us. But thanks to your little foray tonight, anyone who did come here on a suspicion now knows with certainty that you're here. And if they know anything about your brother, they know he's here too." Denise took a deep breath and tried to calm

herself. Yelling at Sela might be satisfying but it wouldn't solve anything. It would only make Nials protective of her.

Sela's blindness always infuriated her. For the most part, the woman seemed like an intelligent, capable woman. Someone Denise might come to like. On the issue of staying hidden, Sela seemed completely incapable of seeing anything but her own views. In spite of the proof, she wouldn't admit that she was in just as much danger as her brother.

"Do you think they'll attack directly?" Nials leaned back against the wall and closed his eyes.

"Probably not immediately." Camin grimaced and shrugged.

"Based on what they saw tonight, they'll probably wait for a few days to see if they can get an easier opportunity. They won't hesitate to use your love for your sister against you." Denise looked pointedly at Sela.

Nials' eyes fell to the top of his sister's head. "Do you know what they'd do to her? Would she survive?"

"They're here to kill, not take captives. They'd use her to get you out in the open and probably kill her right in front of you." Denise didn't try to lessen the impact or soften the truth. She'd been telling him that Sela was in danger since the beginning.

"He's already talked to the Tribunal. There's no reason for them to kill either of us. You're just using that woman as an excuse to keep me penned in this bar." Sela shook her head and jumped to her feet.

"Sela, we're marked for death. We'll probably always be hunted because the amount of the reward," Nials said.

"They don't know that the Tribunal already has the information. If they did, it wouldn't change their orders. Any mercs who find you will be after the bounty for your death." Camin's face hardened and his lips thinned. He looked absolutely fierce.

"Not every merc is a killer. I'm not stupid. Those mercs probably aren't any different from the mercs who hire out to fill in for the police on some worlds." Sela tossed her head, sending her hair flying.

"These mercs aren't just people wanting a fat bounty. I told you. If this woman hasn't changed to another group, this group works for Bio-mech and Vari-co almost exclusively. People who do that have reasons. Usually it's because of a deep hatred for any species other than human." Denise knew that explaining was probably useless. From the closed, disinterested look on Sela's face, the other woman wouldn't be seeing the truth soon.

"I'll help in any way I can but Sela's feeling caged. She's used to going where she wants, when she wants." Nials put a hand on his sister's shoulder.

"We'll arrange for her to go out in the barroom when the bar is closed. She can't just go out onto the street like she keeps trying to do. If she does, we can't guarantee her safety." Camin tilted his head and thought for a moment.

"Being out in that barroom when everyone is gone and it's safe isn't enough. I need to move and meet people." Sela put her hands on her hips and thrust her chin forward in open challenge.

"She either learns to deal with the isolation, shows that she has some survival instincts or she'll end up dead. If she causes anyone else to get hurt with her stupid behavior, I'll throw her to them myself." Davik's voice hardened and his eyes narrowed as he studied the woman.

Sela gasped and drew back, shocked, her eyes wide. "You're supposed to keep me alive!"

"I'm here to keep your *brother* alive. You're just extra baggage. If I think you're endangering the others here, then I won't hesitate to let you find out exactly what type of mercs you're dealing with." Davik's lips twisted and his eyes never left Sela.

Denise fought to keep her face expressionless. She'd never thought of threatening to throw Sela out among the mercs. The woman actually looked scared. Maybe she'd finally think. Then again, maybe Sela wouldn't have taken her seriously. Denise knew she probably didn't have the attitude or the body to successfully look as menacing as Davik did.

"Nials won't let you." Sela shook her head forcefully.

"He won't be able to stop me. Besides, even if you don't want to live, any fool can see he does. One way or another, you won't be a risk to us." Davik stood there with one hand on his hip, looking very much like he'd enjoy tossing her out into the street at this moment.

Denise looked at Sela and saw the woman look toward her brother questioningly. Nials had been protective of his sister from the beginning of this jaunt, invariably taking her side even when her actions endangered them all. Denise didn't know if he'd be able to see past his protective streak to the fact that Davik was trying to keep the woman alive.

Nials stood silently, his hands falling to his side. His entire body almost seemed to vibrate with tension. "You've endangered all of us over and over again. He's right. I want to live. You have to make up your mind about what you want to do."

Sela's face went pale.

"There are three women here and seven men. If you want to talk, you have plenty of people to do it with." Camin stepped forward, drawing everyone's attention to him.

"I don't have anything in common with anyone here," Sela mumbled, staring at the floor.

"Why don't you try actually talking to them? You might be surprised at how much you have in common," Camin suggested.

"Our lives have been nothing alike. They grew up in those labs. We wouldn't have anything to talk about." Sela fold her arms across her chest, her lips clamped in a stubborn line.

"Sela!" Nials' mouth dropped and shocked horror flashed across his face. He clearly couldn't believe his sister had said that.

Denise wasn't surprised. Sela's attitude had screamed superiority since she'd first seen them. Although the woman was an *Arcein*, she clearly believed that the way she was reared made her somehow different from all of those reared in the labs. She hadn't ever tried to talk to them unless she was screaming obscenities when someone stopped her from leaving.

"What?" Sela's eyes flashed with anger. "It's true. I grew up with a brother and a family who loved me. They were reared like animals in a regimented, sterile facility, surrounded by technicians and guards. They were experiments not children."

Denise took in a slow, deep breath and reminded herself that keeping Sela safe did not involve beating her bloody. Denise had lived the hell Sela described so disparagingly. The woman should have been thanking whatever fate kept her out of the labs rather than feeling she was somehow better because of her luck.

Nials' cheeks flushed and he gripped Sela's shoulders, spinning her around to face him. His muscles were tense and his breathing was faster. Denise frowned as she realized he was angry. That was a change. He'd never gotten angry at Sela before.

"We were just as much experiments as they were. Oh, our cages were a lot more comfortable and we had a normal-appearing life but we were just as much prisoners," Nials said as he took Sela's hands in his and held them.

"I wasn't an experiment." Sela jerked against Nials' seemingly loose hold.

He held on to her hands. "You weren't examined twice a month like I was? Everything charted? Your every moment wasn't scheduled, every course in school chosen for you?"

Sela closed her eyes and shook her head silently. At that moment Denise almost felt sorry for Sela. She was trying so hard to deny the truth.

"They were just trying a different tactic. They wanted to see if we could be trained and used if they didn't torture us," Nials said softly.

"They loved us. We were chosen." Sela drew in a shaky breath. Her eyes brimmed with unshed tears.

"Sela, stop. You know the truth as much as I do. Two times every month they left us in that doctor's hands. If they had really loved us, they wouldn't ever have left us near him. They knew he hurt us." Nials drew her into his arms, holding his sister.

"They didn't know." Sela's voice was muffled against his chest.

"I told them and I know you told them. The only relief from that torment came when they our parents and the doctor died while they were with him. They sent us to him for a reason. Not once did they ever pull us out of those exams." Nials' expression became grim as he spoke to his sister.

He didn't wait for her to agree or come up with some other excuse. "They tested us. Our intelligence, our strength, our will. They wanted to know how malleable we were

and what we'd do before our conscience stopped us. They were trying to make us into good little soldiers."

Sela seemed to wilt. Nials guided her back to her chair and she slumped into it. She sat quietly for a few moments, her hands clenched on the table in front of her.

"I'll stop trying to leave but don't expect me to get all chummy with those women. I've told you we have nothing in common." Sela lifted her head and shot a narrow-eyed glare toward Denise.

"That's fine. I don't want to lose you." Nials grasped Sela's hands and squeezed.

Denise looked at the silver-haired woman sitting in the chair. Sela was shocked now and maybe a little scared but that wouldn't last. What would happen when what she was feeling now faded? Would Sela keep her word or would she try to leave again?

"Come on, Denise. We have things to talk about now that this is out of the way." Davik's hand pressed against the small of her back.

Denise drew in a sharp breath. She'd been hoping for a chance to delay that talk. Indefinitely if possible. She didn't feel up to dealing with them right now. It took a lot of energy to argue with them. She knew arguing about her shift change wasn't all they had planned. Heat flared in their eyes. She could smell their arousal, a warm, spicy, too-appealing aroma swirling around her.

She didn't know how much longer she could resist. Her desire for them grew every time she was near them. Only uncertainty held her back. She wanted to know more about them before she became physically involved with them.

She left Nials' room with Davik, Camin just in front of them because the hall was too narrow for them to walk side by side. In the hallway, after the door had closed behind them, she stopped. Davik's hand at the small of her back urged her forward but she held firm. Camin turned and walked back to them when he noticed they weren't following him. Davik looked down at her, one brow arched in silent demand.

She reached around her back and grabbed his wrist, trying to pry his fingers away from her body. "We'll talk tomorrow."

"No, we're going to talk tonight, *be'rai*." Camin put his hand on his hip and leveled a hard stare at her. "You're not going to avoid this. The time for running is over."

"Try to remember I was injured. Even if I wanted to make love with you, I'm not up to a tussle with either of you." Denise gritted her teeth.

"We remember that you're hurt. We're not going to make love to you but we *are* going to talk. And you're going to sleep with us." Davik's hand pressed against her back, urging her forward a couple of steps.

The thought of sleeping with them sent a surge of desire and nervous fear through her body. It had been a while since she'd had sex, but the feeling when she was close to them was so intense that she knew more than abstinence was behind that sensation. Just from the thrill she felt at their touch, she knew making love with them would be amazing but they wanted so much more than sex. They didn't have to tell her that. It

was in their eyes. They wanted a commitment. Being in any kind of relationship with them scared her. There was too much she didn't know about them.

"I'm not sleeping with you!" Denise shouted. Her hands slammed onto her hips.

No way was she ready to take that step. She knew better than to just go with them to their room. Out here she had a chance to talk them around to her way of thinking, but in their room they'd immediately begin the "talk" they wanted to have. By the time that argument was finished, she wouldn't be able to budge them about going back to her own quarters. She had no idea what they'd do if she tried to leave. Although she was sure they wouldn't hurt her, she'd rather save that for a time when it was unavoidable.

"You *will* stay with us. It's where you belong. You know that." Camin strode forward and grasped her hand.

"It's where *she* belonged, not me," Denise gritted through clenched teeth. "I might just want to explore other options. Philan just might be one of them."

Davik glowered. "We're your only options. No other men will touch you."

"That's really my choice to make." She tugged at her hand.

"You've always been ours. I was a fool when Aeva was alive but I've learned my lesson. I'm not taking any chances of losing you this time." Davik's jaw tightened.

"You're not listening to me. I've had a full night already and we're not going to agree on this. You know that." Denise took a deep breath. That had to be one of the most amazing understatements ever. They hadn't even tried to see things from her point of view.

"That doesn't mean we ignore what you say. Davik and I disagree all the time. We argue, move on and work through the differences." Camin drew his thumb along the inside of her wrist.

Denise looked at the ceiling. Were they having a totally different conversation from what she was? "There's no reason that I need to stay in your room tonight."

"Almost every night you dream of us, don't you?" Davik used the hand at her back to urge her a step closer to their door.

She closed her eyes. She dreamed of them every night, sometimes normal dreams. Others were those dreams of the past. Each dream made her feel more and more as if she knew those two men, that she could trust them when the opposite was true.

"What difference does it make if I dream of you?" Her voice sounded like a croak and her throat felt as if a vise had been tightened around it.

"You know you can trust us. You let us care for your injury." Davik stopped for a moment and turned her to face him.

She shook her head minutely. It wasn't that simple. She hadn't thought it all out before she'd stepped into the room. Not that they'd really given her time to worry about it before rushing her to their room. Cleaning a cut was an entirely different matter from sleeping with them.



"Davik, please..." Denise looked up at him through her lashes. Her eyes swept from one man to the other, looking for some kind of support or softening.

"I'd like to hear that again but in a very different circumstance." He tucked a loose strand of her hair behind her ear.

"Tell us why you're being so stubborn about this. Why don't you want to sleep with us?" Camin tangled his fingers with hers and gave an encouraging squeeze.

She looked down at the floor. Maybe she should have gone to the room with them and snuck out at the first chance she got. Why she didn't want to sleep with them should have been obvious to anyone.

"Come on. Tell us why you're being so hesitant?" Camin lifted her chin and looked down into her eyes.

She licked her lips and swallowed. "I know what your relationship with each other is. I know how strongly you defend it." That was an understatement. From what she remembered, their relationship was the most important thing in their lives.

"And why would you not sleep with us just because you know of how we feel for each other?" Davik arched a brow but she caught a hint of aggression in his tone.

"I know that you want me physically but I also know I'll never mean as much to you as Camin does or as you mean to him. I don't want to come between you but I do want to be important in any relationship I have." Denise's lips twisted. She knew what it was like being on the outside of their relationship from those dreams. It wasn't happening again.

"You're probably the leading authority on how important my relationship with Camin is to me. But I've learned that you're a vital part of our bond too. We need a chance to prove it to you." Davik exhaled heavily, his expression very somber.

Denise didn't know why she couldn't relax and let things flow. She knew they'd be on this planet for a while. There was time to see if they really had changed. The Tribunal needed time to find a safe place for Nials and Sela. In spite of an almost-assured opportunity to leave without them, she was wary of involvement.

As much as she wanted Davik and Camin, she couldn't simply jump into a bed with them. Something inside her kept her from treating sex with them casually. Everything she felt for Davik and Camin was too intense, too raw to let her separate her feelings from sex. And that scared her. She didn't want to be hurt by them like Aeva had been. From her dreams, Denise knew that Aeva's hopes had been smashed again and again by these two men.

"You're ordering me around, not giving me time to think." Her hands balled into fists.

"We can't lose you." Camin's hand slid up to her elbow.

She could see the intensity in his eyes, almost feel it in his touch.

"Where am I supposed to go? I'm not leaving this bar for anything other than supplies." Her free hand swept out in a wide arc, narrowly missing Davik. They acted

as if she'd just suddenly disappear if she wasn't with them. "I'm here for the same reason you are. Until the job's finished, I'm staying right here. There's plenty of time for us to get to know each other."

Davik swooped. She yelped as his arm slipped under her knees and the other braced against her back. Before she could even react, he'd lifted her off her feet. He carried her down the hallway to their room. Apparently he'd gotten tired of talking. After a single look at Denise's face, Camin rushed ahead, opening the door. Denise's fists clenched and she resisted the urge to hit Davik. Camin stepped back and waited for Davik to carry Denise through the doorway before he entered and locked the door. Davik lowered Denise to her feet when the door was firmly closed.

Denise stepped slowly back from him. Her heart thumped against her chest. She tried to push back the anger and gain a little control. Her teeth clenched. Her throat ached with the need to scream at them. They didn't even seem to realize they'd infuriated her.

"This is what I'm talking about. Your words weren't getting you anywhere so you picked me up and carried me to your room. You don't hear anything I say unless I'm saying yes." She spun on her heel and stalked away from them.

"I picked you up and carried you because you were getting loud and flippant. If you want to pick a fight, you can do it in here." Davik stood in almost the exact position he'd taken after he'd released her.

"I wasn't being flippant. Where would I go? My room, one of the other women's rooms. If I'm in a different room than you are, it doesn't mean that I'm in danger." She met his gaze.

She frowned as she noticed the tenseness of his body. His brown eyes seemed a little lighter. Shot with gold, the brilliant orbs drew all her attention for a moment.

"The situation has changed. We know for certain that there are mercs here now. Everything is much more dangerous now." Camin left his position near the door and moved to the large bed. He pulled the white blanket back, revealing crisp, white sheets.

She sighed heavily. Just an excuse for their behavior. They'd always known that there was a chance mercs would track them here. Nothing had changed in that sense. Yes, they did know without doubt that they'd been tracked here but that didn't mean it was suddenly dangerous for her to be away from them.

"Are you going to invite the other women to sleep with you too? Now that you know it's dangerous? You're going to need a bigger bed." She smiled sweetly but didn't bother to hide the sarcasm in her tone.

She was almost certain she knew exactly why they were acting like this. Protectiveness was a part of it but definitely not all of it. She'd seen that same utterly determined expression on their faces in her dreams. Davik had even said it. They weren't taking any chances this time. Guilt was the main emotion that drove them to keep her close to them.

"I'm not her and we're not in that prison. Don't start confusing the situation. I'm not the one who needs to be guarded." Denise put a hand on her hip. She had to put a stop to this now, before it got worse. They couldn't see her as someone weak or she'd never be able to get them to stop trying to shield her.

"We know you aren't Aeva." Camin frowned.

"We lost her because we didn't protect her as we should have. That's not happening this time." A muscle along Davik's jawline flexed.

Denise's jaw dropped open and she shook her head. She couldn't be sure because she only had the patchy knowledge from her dreams, but she was almost positive she knew what they were talking about.

"It wasn't your fault." She took a step forward and looked from one man to another. Strangely, she had the urge to comfort them, to smooth away the lines of worry and sadness she could see on their faces.

"It was our duty to make sure they didn't hurt her. We failed." Camin shook his head, a quick, sharp, negative movement.

"She was more afraid for the two of you than she was for herself." Denise looked at Camin. Maybe they needed to talk about it, to see that there wasn't anything they could have done. Everything had been out of their hands. Maybe they'd also see that she wasn't the woman they'd once known.

"You dreamed about her being taken from us?" Davik walked over to her and took her into his arms.

"I know they took her more than once. My dreams seem to jump around in time. So I can't be sure that the time I dreamed about was the last time. She felt guilty because you were hurt over and over protecting her from them. She was afraid for you." She leaned into him and stroked her hand up his side. She needed to be held almost as much as she needed to comfort and touch him.

"That was our duty and privilege as her mates." Camin came over and joined them. His chest pressed against her back as he hooked an arm around Davik's waist.

"She didn't want you to die because of her. She was certain that anything they did to her would be less than the beatings and torture you received. Aeva never thought they'd kill her," Denise whispered. She wanted them to find peace, to accept the past and realize they couldn't, wouldn't be recreating it with her.

"We won't fail you, Denise." Camin's hand brushed down her arm in a long sweep.

Denise closed her eyes and sighed. She hadn't really expected them to hear her words and suddenly be willing to let her go back to her room. It would have been nice but not very likely under these circumstances. Their guilt and protective instincts were pushing them to keep her close to them.

"This isn't solving anything. Let's have that talk you two insist on having." Denise shook her head and edged out from between them. Words weren't going to change how they felt right now.

"We've said almost everything in our argument out in the hallway but there is one thing." Camin turned to watch her, a small smile kicking up the corners of his mouth.

She looked up at them through her lashes. Knowing them, it could be anything and it would probably infuriate her.

"There won't be any more trading shifts for you. You work with us, only with us." Davik's eyebrow raised, his chin lifted. He seemed to be waiting for an argument.

She gaped at him for a moment. "How are you going to stop me?"

She couldn't just let their arrogance pass without a word. Even before Davik had spoken she'd known it was going to make her angry. She just hadn't thought it would make her this angry. Those two men didn't seem to care much about tact or inciting her temper.

Camin's eyes narrowed. "First, our men will be told tomorrow that you won't be trading shifts with any of the other women again. They'll come get us if you try it. Then you can explain everything to us."

Denise took a deep breath. "And second?"

"If you do try it, the consequences will ensure that it doesn't happen again." Davik slid a glance down her body, lingering below her waist.

Denise frowned. "What consequences? What do you think you're going to do to me?" As if she'd just let them reprimand her. She wasn't a child or under their command. They had no rights over her.

Camin smiled. "Think about it. Let your imagination play with it. Maybe it will keep you cautious because if we have to do it, we're both going to be furious."

She glared at him as she stepped forward. Her index finger pressed against the soft material of his black shirt as she pushed sharply against his chest. "You don't order me around."

Davik's arm curled around her waist. "It's time for bed. You can argue about it later."

Her eyes darted to the bed. Sleep with them. The idea was too attractive. She couldn't deny she wanted them as much as they wanted her. It just wasn't a good idea. Staying in the same room, the same bed without sex would be torture. Her eyes fell on the table and the carving on it. She walked over and picked it up and slowly ran her fingers over the intricate figure. From her dreams, she remembered Davik, Davorik, working on carvings like these.

"You did this?" She looked over at him.

He smiled. "Yes, this one's not quite finished yet. Are you trying to distract us?"

She shrugged. It would be nice but she really didn't think there was much chance of that. "The sight of the carving just sparked my memory. You liked to work with your hands and Camin played some kind of stringed instrument."

"I'll take your interest as encouragement. Most of our interests are still the same. I still play the *capiar*. Are you ready for bed?" Camin asked.

"I need to go get something from my room." She took a step toward the door, hoping she could get through it before they thought about it.

"You're not hiding in your room." Davik's arm tightened, hauling her back against him.

"I need something to wear to bed. I'm not sleeping without clothing in that bed with the two of you." Denise stared up at Camin. She raised her chin and refused to look away from his unflinching stare. She wasn't giving in on this.

"Why not? That's how we sleep." Davik took a few steps closer to the bed, taking her with him whether she wanted to go or not.

"Either let me go get something from my room to wear or get me something," she demanded. Did they ever listen to her?

Camin thought about it for a long moment, his eyes never leaving her face. "Until your wound is healed, you can wear one of our shirts."

Denise nodded, too relieved by the easy concession to argue about the time limit. With the quick healing of her kind, by late tomorrow only a thin red line would mark the blade's path. She'd fight with them about it then if she couldn't figure out a way to get out of sleeping in their room.

She put on the white shirt they gave her and climbed into bed. Camin took the right side of the bed and Davik the left. They scooted over next to her and she could feel the heat of their bodies, smell their scent. They seemed to have no problem falling to sleep. Her mind raced and she couldn't relax. Sharing a bed felt strange. She'd slept alone for a long time. Not even a little sleepy, she stared up into the darkness.

## Chapter Six

Aeva flopped onto her stomach in the center of the bed. Bracing her chin on her arm, she stared at the wall. She didn't know what she was going to do. They weren't treating her like a mate. Like she knew a mate should be treated. She just wished there was someone here she could ask, but she didn't know anyone. She felt trapped and so alone. The few women she'd tried talking with had treated her with such condescending arrogance that she knew they didn't see her as Davorik's and A'Camion's wife. How was she supposed to change that when her two mates ignored her almost completely?

"You look sad. What are you thinking?" A'Camion's voice sounded from the doorway.

She tensed, rolling onto her side. She hadn't heard the door open. A'Camion leaned against the side of the door. His blond hair looked a little mussed. She guessed that he'd been outside training because his white shirt had smudges of dust. His pants had a rip along his thigh.

"Nothing really. What have you been doing?" She sat up and crossed her arms over her chest.

"Hand-to-hand training with the men." He smiled. "Would you like to come with me?"

She bit her lip, a little anxious. She didn't want to start making love to him only to be interrupted by Davorik. If Davorik wanted A'Camion to leave, A'Camion wouldn't argue. He raised a brow and just stood there watching her. She *did* want to be with him.

"Don't you want to get sweaty with me?" he asked with a wink.

She couldn't hide her smile. His sense of humor never failed to make her feel a little better. She could tell by the grin on his face that he had no doubts. Sliding off the bed, she took a step toward him. She couldn't deny the thought of feeling him inside her sent a tingle of desire through her. She squeezed her thighs together. Being with him was just too tempting.

"To your room or somewhere else?" She wouldn't mind going with him to the bath or even staying here. The room he shared with Davorik didn't have the happiest memories.

"To my room and then we'll take a bath together." He held out his hand.

She put her hand in his and stepped close to him, savoring his heat. He pulled her close and guided her out the door and down the hall to his bedroom. The bed was huge and had a dark blue blanket draped across it. She licked her lips as he softly closed the door behind them.

With a laugh, he scooped her into his arms and carried her over to the bed. She thought he'd put her on the bed and let her take her clothes off, but he fell onto the bed with her. He turned, taking the brunt of the fall. They bounced once before settling onto the soft mattress. He was chuckling softly. She shook her head. He was such a boy sometimes.

Releasing her legs, he began unbuttoning her shirt. While he was busy with that, she straightened alongside him. As soon as her toes slid against his leg, he rolled, leaning over her with his body braced on an elbow.

"I think you're forgetting something." She brushed her fingers along his jaw. She couldn't resist touching him.

"I'm not forgetting anything. What do you think has slipped my mind?" His teeth nipped at her neck.

She arched her neck and squirmed eagerly. Just his lips touching her neck shouldn't feel that good. He nudged her shirt aside and continued to nibble and kiss. Heat blossomed wherever he touched and spread straight to her core. A steady ache began to build. He was distracting her without even really trying. She could barely remember what he'd said.

"Your clothes, mine." She tugged at his hair, trying to get his full attention.

He lifted his head but didn't look worried. "I'll get to those. Don't worry."

She swallowed at the intensity and hunger in his eyes. From that look, she knew he had very definite plans. Her mind spun and her body went wild. She wanted to touch him, to make him burn as she did, but she wasn't really sure what to do.

He pushed the shirt wide, baring her breasts. She drew in her breath, holding it as she waited to feel his mouth. Anticipation grew, tightening her muscles. She loved the feel of his mouth, the way he sucked and drew his teeth across her nipple. His hand slid down, unfastening the buttons of her skirt. She exhaled in frustration. He seemed determined to do things his way.

As soon as he freed the last button, he tugged the skirt down. She lifted her hips to help him. She hoped he'd get back to her breasts once he'd finished with her clothes. He tossed her skirt away and turned back to face her. His eyes traced over her body from head to toe. She felt a tide of heat flood her cheeks at the blatant hunger in his eyes. He moved between her legs. She eagerly waited for him to slide up her body.

He smiled and his head lowered as he kissed her thigh then the top of her bare mound. She tensed. He'd never kissed her there before. His fingers parted the plump lips. Before she could decide if she should tell him to stop, his tongue swiped over her clit. The muscles inside her sheath clenched. Sharp sensation spiked at that slow caress.

Her hands moved to his head. She clutched at his hair. He laughed. The sound vibrated against her. Tingles raced up her spine. She moaned, her head shaking from side-to-side. It felt too good. He sucked on her clit. Her hips rose involuntarily as his mouth worked. She ached for more. Two of his fingers slid into her pussy.

Slowly he drew them in and out. Her inner muscles clenched as his tongue lapped over the sensitive hood. Pleasure ripped through her. Her eyes closed and shivers rolled over her body with the flood of satisfaction. She opened her eyes as the feelings began to fade. He was watching her. Emotion lingered in his eyes and on his face. She saw satisfaction but there was something there she couldn't identify.

"I want to see you, touch you." She ran her hands over his shoulders.

"Later, Aeva, I'll let you stroke and touch all you want in the bath." He kissed his way up her stomach but stopped to take off his clothing.

His hand slipped back between her legs as he returned to her. His thumb stroked over her clit and two of his fingers pushed into her pussy. Her inner muscles tightened, trying to pull his fingers deeper. She could feel the warm liquid beginning to flow again. She was astounded when the need rose, as sharp and intense as it was before.

His mouth fastened onto one hardened nipple. Just as his teeth scraped over the tip, his fingers pushed deeper into her. His thumb circled her clit. Her back arched off the bed. Unable to remain still, her hands ran over his back and her hips rose against his hand.

She could feel the climax waiting just out of reach. When his fingers slipped from her pussy, she wanted to scream. She felt empty and the tug of his lips at her breast only reinforced that. His mouth lifted and his big hands cupped her buttocks. He lifted her hips off the bed and joined them. The feeling of his shaft sliding into her nearly sent her over the edge. He pressed forward until she felt his balls brush against her. He remained absolutely still for a moment.

"A'Camion, I need..." A groan ripped from her as he pressed her to the bed.

"I know." He smiled as his hips slowly pulled back.

His hands moved up her sides to her breasts. He lifted and cupped the full mounds. He rocked into her, short thrusts that only built her desire. She arched against him. Her nails scraped down his back. He growled and his hips ground against hers. Her thighs tightened around his legs, urging him to move. His fingers plucked at the tight nipples as his hips surged against hers. She held him tightly. The tension rose, finally exploding, leaving her shaking beneath him.

His hips jerked against her. She felt the hot splash of his semen and his entire body shook. He collapsed on top of her, his hand still stroking her breast. She rested beneath him, content to enjoy the moment. He raised his head and drew his finger down the side of her cheek. His lips brushed hers gently. For a moment she thought he was going to say something.

The door to the bedroom opened. Davorik stood there, his hands crossed over his chest. She saw his eyes sweep over them but there wasn't a flicker of emotion on his face. She didn't know if he was angry or what. She really hated it when he was angry. He could be vicious. His eyes locked on A'Camion.

"I need you, A'Camion." Davorik turned, left the room and slammed the door.



She knew what A'Camion was going to do even before he rolled out of bed. He never denied or argued with Davorik over anything. She watched A'Camion as he dressed. She didn't try to hide her hurt. There was no need to turn her face to mask her tears. He didn't even look at her as he dressed and left the room. She pounded her hand on the bed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Camin turned onto his side and drew his hand over the soft cloth covering Denise's stomach. Sleeping soundly, she looked so peaceful. Finally she was with them where she belonged but she still had her fears. She was so cautious, afraid to trust them. He wished he could take away all the pain and doubt inside her.

"What do you think you're doing?" Denise asked in a quiet voice.

He looked up and found her watching him curiously. "Just looking at you and enjoying having you here. Did I wake you?"

"Every time one of you moved last night I woke up. When you touched me, it pulled me right out of sleep. I usually sleep on the left side of the bed even when I'm alone. Sleeping in the middle, between two huge men, wasn't easy." She shot a significant look toward Davik as he turned onto his side, facing her.

"Ah but we couldn't cuddle you if you weren't in the middle. Aside from that, neither Camin nor I would feel comfortable on the inside of the bed. We need to be able to move so that we can protect you." Davik drew his hand up her thigh.

"I can protect myself. I don't need bodyguards." She shot them a ferocious frown and pushed their hands away and tried to sit up, incensed.

Laughing, they tumbled her back down between them.

"Not so fast. We have to check your wound." Camin began nudging the tangled white shirt up above her waist. A smile curled his lips. He wanted to do more than aggravate her but he'd settle for almost anything that kept her from looking at him with doubt and distrust in those gorgeous brown eyes.

She grabbed the hem of the shirt before he could get it above the cut on her side. Pushing it back down below her waist, she fisted her hands in the material. He chuckled and tugged at it. The material stretched taut as she struggled to keep it covering her sweet little pussy.

"The cut is fine, almost healed. It didn't even hurt when I sat up," she said, and glared at him.

"There's no reason to be shy. I know what your body looks like." Camin smiled at her as he pried her fingers away from the fabric.

"You don't need to look at the cut and you know it." Her brown eyes narrowed into mere slits, anger and suspicion almost radiating off her.

Her body was tense but it wasn't all anger. He could smell her arousal. That sweet scent shot through him, hardening his already-stiff cock. He couldn't hide it and smiled

widely when her eyes locked on the tenting sheet. He absolutely loved tussling with her.

Davik leaned down and brushed his lips over hers in a swift kiss. "I'm always ready to see more of you."

Camin saw the open hunger burning in Davik's dark eyes as he drew back from Denise. Davik's hand slid down her thigh, drawing teasing patterns with his calloused fingers. Her tongue slicked over her lips, leaving them ripe and glistening. Denise shivered and Camin almost threw away all thought of waiting.

"This is getting out of hand. Can't you just accept what I say?" Her voice was tight and the words clipped.

Camin frowned. He'd swear he heard a little fear in her voice. He didn't know if it was because she was really afraid, or if she was afraid of where this was heading. "I just want to make sure that it's really healed. This isn't going any further than you want it to."

She stopped resisting, her hands relaxing. He pulled up the shirt, baring the cut on her side. Camin probed and prodded the thin red line, all that remained of the injury. He ran his fingers over her ribs in a slow stroke. She shivered and her breath hissed out from between her teeth. Davik leaned in close, whether to get a better look at the wound or just because he wanted to be close to her, Camin didn't know.

"Are you happy now? Certain that I'm not going to bleed out from the scratch?" She frowned up at him and tried to pull down her shirt. She almost ended up pulling it over Davik's head.

Davik's teeth flashed as he looked up just before he dropped a kiss on her stomach. "Yes, tonight only the scar should be there."

She drew in a sharp breath. Her hands lifted but she pulled them away before she touched Davik. Camin raised a brow. He knew she wasn't shy or averse to touching them. He saw her fingers flex a bit. A chuckle rose as he realized that she wanted to touch but kept herself from it.

The scent of her arousal had intensified and he was thrilled that such innocent touches could do that. He wanted to see her go wild. He loved watching her body come alive. Her brown eyes glowed. Her cheeks were flushed, a noticeable darkening of that light brown skin. He could also see her hesitation, her caution. That was what kept him from pressing for more now. He didn't want to push her too far too soon. She'd back off and it would take them longer to get her to relax around them.

As Davik raised his head, Camin reached over and slipped his hand beneath his hair, cupping the back of his neck. Camin tugged and leaned across Denise's stomach to kiss him. Davik's lips brushed against his and opened. True to the man's nature, Davik soon became the aggressor. His tongue stroked over Camin's lips. Camin met the thrust of his tongue and returned it. Their tongues dueled in a brief battle for dominance. Before it could become more arousing, Camin drew back, laughing.

He looked to the side and saw Denise staring at them, her eyes wide. He knew she wasn't surprised that he'd kissed Davik. She knew that they were lovers. So it had to be that he'd kissed Davik in front of *her*. That did surprise him but it also made him think. Remembering his time with Aeva, he couldn't remember hiding his relationship with Davik from her but he didn't think she'd seen much. She'd been relegated to one side of their life, completely barred from certain parts.

Camin regretted allowing that to happen, even though it hadn't been entirely his decision. She should have been an integral part of their bond. This time she wouldn't be left out of any area of their relationship. She belonged with them. That was something both he and Davik had agreed, but this time it wasn't them trying to keep things light and uninvolved. She was trying to keep a distance between them.

"He likes to take over if you let him." Camin cast a searing glance at Davik before meeting Denise's eyes. He lifted his hand and trailed it across her cheek.

"You just go too slowly for me," Davik teased. "Now I need a good-morning kiss from our woman before we get up and start the day."

She blinked, looking very surprised as she looked from him to Davik. She didn't tense or struggle when they pulled her into a sitting position but he could see the caution in her eyes. Camin took encouragement from the willingness but wished she didn't feel the need to protect herself from possible hurt. Only time would show her that she could truly trust them with her body and heart.

Davik turned her to him and took her lips in a fierce, swift kiss. She leaned into him, her hands brushing up his arms in a soft caress. When he pulled back, she groaned and her hands gripped his arms, holding him to her.

By the way she was trying to climb into Davik's lap, she wanted more. A little bit of envy burned through Camin but he pushed it aside. He'd taste those lips soon. He brushed a hand over her shoulder. She definitely wasn't unmoved by that touch. She shivered. He tugged her back a little until she turned to face him.

"My turn. I've been waiting to kiss you for a long time," he revealed, watching her face.

Her eyes rounded. Camin brushed his lips over hers. His tongue flicked out and traced the full shape of her lips. The slightly salty tang of her skin zinged through him. Her arms lifted, circling his neck as she pulled him closer to her. He reveled in her eager response. Her body arched against his as her tongue darted into his mouth. He deepened the tongue-tangling kiss. His fingers cupped the back of her neck.

Her sweet taste hit him with unexpected force. He stiffened as spikes of heat slammed into him. He hadn't remembered how intoxicating her taste was or how soft her lips felt. How could he have forgotten that? He gently pulled away from the kiss before he could become any more tempted to lay her down and make love to her right now. He watched her eyelids flutter and then lift. Her brown eyes were molten with arousal. Waiting for tonight was going to be torture.

\* \* \* \* \*

Denise moved the piece on the gameboard. She kept her eyes on the grid and resisted the urge to look toward the door. Not that keeping her eyes on the game had done her much good so far tonight. Her mind hadn't been on the match. She was just too distracted to concentrate.

She'd come to Layla's room as soon as she'd had a free moment. The room was a little messy but it was warm and inviting. The bed was spread with a vivid purple blanket. Where Layla had gotten it Denise had no idea but color abounded in the gray-walled room. A red cloth was spread over the small table beside the bed and a spiraling mass of yellow feathers hung from the ceiling.

"Want to talk about them?" Layla asked as she moved one of her pieces.

"Not really. I'm thinking about them enough as it is. You're winning." Denise grimaced and looked up at her friend. Normally a game between them was so competitive it lasted deep into the night. Those two men had a definite effect on her concentration.

"They're your men? The ones you dream about?" Layla met Denise's eyes but she wasn't grinning anymore.

Denise could see the curiosity in the other woman's eyes but also a little wariness. Denise knew just what that felt like. The need to know but at the same time feeling a little afraid of the answers. As far as she knew, every woman created in those labs had dreams of another time and place. She didn't know much about Layla's dreams, just the basics that had been mentioned. None of them had talked about their dreams too much. Some of them felt too real, too raw to share when they happened. Others would sometimes leave Denise wondering if her mind had decided to play a little with bits and pieces of her life and what she knew. They were always intense. It was as if she were getting only the very good or very bad. Unfortunately, Denise had seen a lot of hurtful memories. The only really good memories had been of Aeva's childhood.

"They're my men." Denise nodded. No use denying it. Those two wouldn't be relegated to just a part of her life.

"Are they like the men in your dreams?" Layla asked.

"No and I'm glad they're not. Most of my dreams weren't happy. I wouldn't have any trouble knowing what to do if they acted like the men in my dreams." Denise shook her head. She had no doubt about that. She'd never settle for half of them or being pushed into one corner of their life.

"My dreams are." Layla frowned and seemed to be looking beyond her.

"Your dreams are what?" Denise frowned, pulled from her own thoughts, thinking she'd missed part of the statement because she couldn't understand what Layla meant.

"My dreams of my man are happy. I'm not really the woman he was with but I like the way he was." Layla grimaced. "I don't know if I'd want him if he changed."

Denise blinked and drew in a startled breath. She hadn't ever realised she was so fixated by the past, even to the point of letting it control her in the present. But hearing Layla talk about possibly not wanting her man if he changed had made her see that was what she was doing. Layla's dreams were of a happy, loving past. Denise knew that Aeva had been miserable with A'Camion and Davorik. The relationship had only improved when they were imprisoned. In a way they had been given another chance to do it right. Thinking about the whole situation now, Denise felt no hesitation about being with them anymore. She'd take a chance and grab for a little happiness. She wasn't going to think about the future, about leaving this planet.

"I'm not the woman in my dreams. She was too soft and much too nice. I've dreamed about times when she should have hit one or both of them with a big, hard stick." Denise smiled. She was grateful to Layla for the insight. It might have taken her days to see that on her own.

"In my dreams, the woman was very sheltered, naïve and clumsy." Layla toyed with one of the pieces on the board. "He always seemed to be picking her up off the floor or ground."

Denise moved a piece and looked up at her friend, almost not believing what she'd heard. Clumsy—that didn't sound like the Layla she knew. Denise had known the woman her entire life. Layla was one of the most coordinated, agile women in the group. Maybe it had been a medical condition that didn't exist in Layla because of the *nano-cytes*.

"How much have you dreamed of your old life, Layla? There's still so much I haven't dreamed about my— Well, Aeva's life," Denise asked. The chance to know if others dreamed as much or more than she did was too good to let pass.

"I've only dreamed a little of the time when Dria was married. I know more about when she was young and her life before she was married. The time when she was in the prison comes to me but only in small bits and pieces." Layla slid her piece to another square on the playing board. She seemed a little sad.

"You want to know more?" Denise countered Layla's move on the board but lifted her head to meet her friend's eyes.

Layla nodded. "I want to know if her life was really as happy as it seemed but I only get small clips, bits and pieces of happy scenes. Some things I've already dreamed. It's frustrating when I need to know more."

"It was like that for me when I started dreaming. I'd get little images of her childhood, all happy, wonderful and then nothing when I wanted more. But that changed." Denise's lips twisted and she leaned back in her chair. When the dreams had lengthened and became clearer, she hadn't wanted to see them anymore. That hadn't made any difference. She couldn't get them to stop.

"How did it change?" Layla slid her piece to another position.

"The dreams became sharper and longer when the feelings associated with the dream were stronger. Pain, anger, sadness, even happiness—any emotion as long as the

feeling was intense.” Denise drew in a long breath. She’d had some long nights trying to avoid those dreams until she’d finally realized it was impossible. She pushed her piece forward, taking one of Layla’s pieces.

“You didn’t dream too much about happiness, did you?” Layla tilted her head and shot a sympathetic look across the board.

“No, I haven’t dreamed of many happy times with the men. The dreams of her life before she met them are happy enough.” Denise shrugged, not wanting to go into too much detail about how unhappy Aeva had been. It would only make her angry or sad.

“Do you know what kept her from being happy with them?” Layla asked.

“Our stubbornness and a lot of stupidity.” Davik’s voice boomed off the walls in the room.

Denise jumped. Her head whipped toward the door. Her heart was pounding in her chest. At first she didn’t quite believe her ears but it really was Davik. Surprise and fright mixed, shortening her temper and patience.

Camin stood to the side. He’d obviously entered the room first. He wore a green shirt that seemed a bit too tight as it stretched across his wide chest. Davik stood beside him, looking handsome in a cream-colored shirt and black pants. Just how long had they been in the room, listening to the conversation?

“What are you doing here? This is Layla’s room. You can’t just come barging in here any time you feel like it.” She frowned at them. She’d come in here to get a little space to think. They’d stayed at her side almost all day long. She hadn’t been able to think with them next to her.

“You’re here.” Camin shrugged and leaned against the wall next to the door.

“And I’m still busy. We haven’t finished our game yet. Go away. I’ll find you when I’m finished.” Denise shook her head and looked down at the board.

They both acted as if they thought she was going to disappear if they weren’t with her. She wouldn’t mind a little more time alone but she hadn’t even thought about leaving yet.

Davik strolled across the room. He looked relaxed and too smug. Almost the exact opposite of the nervousness she felt. He rested his hand on her shoulder and looked down at the playing board.

“You seem to be losing, or is this some strategy you’re attempting?” he asked slowly.

“I know I’m losing. I saw that for myself. Now leave and let me play.” She folded her arms across her chest and turned enough to glare up to him.

“Whose turn is it to move?” Camin walked over to join them and looked at the pieces on the board.

Denise saw their eyes meet and knew that they were planning something, somehow, even though they didn’t say a word to each other. She tensed, wondering what they were going to do.

"It's Layla's move." She rolled her eyes. They definitely weren't simply going to leave and she didn't think they were going to stand there and watch.

Camin stepped to the side of the board and leaned down and moved one of Layla's pieces. Denise gasped, her eyes widening as she looked up at him. It really wasn't what she'd expected from him. Before she could work out just why he was being so rude, Davik pushed one of her pieces forward, leaving it unprotected, in perfect position to be taken.

"Hey! That's my piece you just sacrificed. We were playing. If you want to play, go set up your own board." Denise grabbed Davik's hand, holding on to it as she saw Camin move another of Layla's playing pieces, taking the open piece.

"You were losing. We're just helping that along." Davik smiled and, in spite of her grip on his wrist, reached for one of her few remaining playing pieces.

"I don't need you to throw the game for me. I still had a chance until you gave away one of my pieces." She pulled at Davik's hand.

"It would be nearly impossible for you to win now," Camin remarked as his fingers hovered over a piece. He waited for Davik to make his move. "Don't worry. We'll give you lessons. You won't lose so badly the next time you play her."

Denise sighed, although through clenched teeth, it sounded like a growl. "I don't lose generally. I don't need any lessons from you."

Davik slid another of Denise's playing pieces forward, leaving it in perfect position for Camin's next move. Camin of course took it. In moments her last few pieces were taken off the board.

"Game's over. You can come with us now." Camin smiled as he held his hand out to her.

Denise narrowed her eyes on the two men. Both of them radiated smug satisfaction. They'd gotten just what they wanted. Layla hadn't even said anything when they'd taken over the game. Her friend had just sat there, grinning, as she watched the two men. Denise shook her head. Somehow, for her own peace of mind, she was going to have to learn to handle them.

"I'll go with you. I've got plenty to say to you both." Denise stood, ignoring Camin's hand. If she'd had something in her hands, she didn't know if she could have resisted the urge to smack them. If she hit them, she wanted a weapon. They both had corded bodies. Her fist wouldn't make much of an impression on them.

Davik's arm curled around her shoulders. "And I'm eager to hear every sound."

Denise's eyes widened at that blatant sexual reference. Talking to them wasn't going to be easy. They clearly knew what they wanted and it wasn't conversation. Guiding pressure against her back urged her away from the table. Denise looked back over her shoulder at Layla.

"I'll talk to you tomorrow. We'll play again soon. Without interference." Denise flashed a smile at her friend.

“I’ll see you tomorrow. And we’ll definitely play again. Maybe after they’ve given you a few lessons.” Laughter lurked in Layla’s voice.

Denise frowned and shook her head. It was fine for Layla to laugh. She didn’t have to deal with these two.



## Chapter Seven

Denise let Davik lead her out of the room. In the hallway, they walked toward the door to their room without hesitation. Denise wasn't waiting for privacy to demand answers. Once they were alone, she didn't think she'd have too much time to ask questions.

"Now why did you have to do that? I wasn't going back to my own room. I told you that I'd join you after the game." She slipped free of Davik's loose hold.

"It's getting late. We wanted to be with you. Tomorrow we'll be working late." Camin put his hand on her shoulder.

"You saw the board. Even without your interference, it wouldn't have taken long to finish the game. You couldn't have been that impatient." She refused to take another step toward their door.

She could see the anticipation, the hunger on Davik's face. A flush rose on his golden skin as her eyes swept down his body. The thick ridge of his cock was clearly outlined by the black pants. His thoughts definitely weren't on talking about what had just happened.

"We've been thinking about this since we saw you on that vid from the Tribunal. It's seemed like an eternity waiting to see you and then talking you into trusting us." Davik slipped his hand under her shirt and trailed his fingers up her spine.

Denise shivered. "You knew I was here? That's why you didn't look surprised to see me."

"We came because we saw you. You walked just behind Nials for only a moment. Just from that glimpse, we knew we'd found you again." Camin's fingers glided over the curve where her shoulder met her neck.

"I have plans for tonight. While I wouldn't mind taking you in the hallway, I want to make love to you in bed." Davik's breath brushed over her ear as he leaned close to her.

His hand swept up her side to the swell of her breasts. His large, warm palm settled over one of the mounds. It would have taken larger breasts than she had to fill his hands but he didn't seem to mind. His fingers flexed and a soft hum sounded low in his throat. She felt the inner muscles of her pussy clench.

"Your nipples are hard." He flicked his thumb over the taut nub. "Are you thinking about what happened in the storage room?"

He definitely didn't have a problem with his confidence. Neither of them needed help in that area. They needed to realize she had an opinion too and they needed to respect it. She had a feeling if she let them get away with too much they'd take over her

life. She had no desire to be ruled by them or, worse, be taken for granted as Aeva had been.

"I'm thinking of what I'd like to do to you." She ran her eyes up and down Davik's body. "Right now I can't decide what I'd like to do more—make love to you or knock you on your ass."

"A very interesting threat. Are you going to join him on the ground after you put him there?" Camin laced his fingers with hers and led her a few steps closer to their door.

She growled and tugged her hand free. They weren't even trying to listen to her. What did she have to do to get their attention off sex for a few moments?

"I think we've played enough." Davik swooped, scooping her up into his arms.

Denise gasped and grabbed at his shoulders. Looking up at him, she found him smiling down at her. His eyes gleamed with laughter and triumph as he carried her through the door into their room. She looped a strand of hair around her finger and tugged sharply.

"You won't get your way all the time. Unlike Aeva, I'm not so easily led," she told him when he looked down at her.

"You think she gave in too easily to what we wanted?" Camin seemed surprised that she'd feel that way.

"I think she allowed you to push her away, to keep a distance between you. She didn't even really try to fight for you at times." Denise shook her head. All in all, Aeva had been much too nice a girl.

"She tried to make us see. We're the ones who were the most at fault." Camin moved to stand in front of her, his hands braced on his hips. He frowned, clearly offended on Aeva's behalf.

"You don't have to convince me of that. All I'm saying is that if I want something, I won't hesitate to take drastic measures to get it." She pressed her finger against his chest. *Well, as soon as I know what it is I want,* she amended silently. She'd learned patience and perseverance through some hard lessons.

"We've been warned. Are you ready to be with us?" Davik stopped in front of the bed, his eyes running over her face.

She nodded as he lowered her feet to the floor.

"You want us?" Davik's hands rested loosely at her waist.

"You know I want you." She frowned at him. What was his problem now? He'd been so intent on getting her here and now he was asking her if she wanted him. She just didn't understand him.

"Undress for us." Camin toed off his shoes.

He pulled off his shirt and tossed it to the corner. Climbing onto the bed, he leaned back against the headboard. His chest gleamed golden in the soft light. She wanted to reach out and run her hands over that tempting expanse. Her eyes traveled lower to the

thick ridge of his cock pressing against the black fabric of his pants. She'd like to do much more than stroke that. An image of him lying beneath her as she rode him flashed through her head. An almost-piercing ache tightened low in her belly.

Davik peeled off his shirt and tugged off his boots. Unfastening his pants, he pushed them down and stepped out of them, leaving them where they fell. She enjoyed the play of muscles on his chest and abdomen as he moved. She was more than tempted to go over there and begin nibbling on that hard flesh immediately and skip the undressing. He settled on the bed, his back against the headboard, shoulder-to-shoulder with Camin.

The man was gorgeous. His light golden skin gleamed. Her eyes drifted over his broad chest and flat, taut midriff. Between his corded thighs, his thick cock thrust up, erect and just as impressive as she remembered from her dreams.

"Eager, aren't you? We have all night." Denise folded her arms across her chest. She didn't want to rush this. She wanted to enjoy every moment they had together. Especially this first time.

"*Be'rai*, I've been hard and ready for you since I saw your image on that screen. Waiting for you to finally calm down and see us as men and not your enemy seemed to take an eternity." Davik smiled. He sounded just a bit put out. "Are you ever going to undress?"

Denise licked her lips as her eyes went from the totally naked Davik to the half-dressed Camin. She exhaled a soft, relieved sigh. She'd had a few worries about being with both of them. Luckily it seemed they weren't going to rush her.

Her hands went to the fastening of her shirt. She slowly opened it, taking her time and watching them. She noticed the way their eyes followed her fingers as she released the snap. Their intent stares sent a spark of arousal shooting through her. Just to tease them, she left the open shirt on. She toed off her shoes. She felt the fabric of her shirt shift and catch on the tip of one breast. Making a show of putting her shoes along the wall next to the door, she moved briskly, enjoying the rasp of fabric against her skin as well as the avid attention of her two men.

Unbuttoning her tight pants, she shimmied her hips a little, pushing the fabric down over her buttocks. She smiled and took longer than necessary removing them. Stepping out of them, she left the pants on the floor. Shrugging her shoulders, she let the cloth of her shirt slip down her arms and fall on top of her pants.

She walked over to the side of the bed. Before she had decided what to do next, Davik reached out and curled an arm around her waist. A scowl curving his lips, he tugged her off her feet. She sprawled across his chest.

Laughing, she planted her hands on his chest. She swung one of her legs over his hips, straddling him. Her hands swept over his warm chest. She loved the feel of the muscles moving beneath her fingertips. He gasped as she scraped her nails across his chest. The stripe of darker skin at his collarbone drew her eyes. Running her finger over it, she watched his reaction, wanting to know if a light touch felt intense to him. His

eyes closed and his body tensed. She could feel his shaft pressing against her labia. Her skin tingled from the contact.

"I want inside you." Davik's hands slid up her back.

"What, no foreplay? I'm disappointed in you." She shook her head and brushed a kiss over his lips.

"Ah, that's a challenge." Camin laughed and turned onto his side to watch them.

"You think you're not ready for me? Then I'll have to make sure you're wet and aching." Davik nipped at her lips.

"Did I say that? I was just teasing you." Denise shifted restlessly as his hands slid across her ribs.

"Now you'll see what happens when you provoke me." He skimmed his fingers over her stomach.

His mouth slid across her jawline. Nibbling and nuzzling, his lips moved along her neck. She shivered and groaned. His hot, moist breath tickled. It felt almost too good. Her hands tangled in his hair, trying to draw his mouth back to hers for a real kiss. Soft laughter vibrated against her neck.

"Lean back. Put your hands on my legs. I'm going to practice my foreplay." Davik smiled, gently grasping her shoulders, urging her back.

She braced her hands just above his knees and leaned back. His eyes swept over her, lingering on the high, firm mounds of her breasts. His tongue slicked over his full lips, leaving them glistening in the light. She wanted to lean forward and taste those lips.

"Foreplay. I haven't even gotten a decent kiss out of you yet. You definitely need practice." She raised her chin and tried to keep her lips in a straight line and not leer at him.

"Well, I definitely can't leave you wanting. You'd never respect me," he said, his voice filled with soft laughter. He cupped the back of her neck with his palm.

He tugged her forward as his lips touched hers. She opened her mouth, eager to taste him again. She loved that sharp, spicy flavor. His tongue stroked against hers, enticing a response. She returned the kiss, hunger building and growing.

His lips slid away from hers. "I want to taste those dark nipples now. Lean back."

She obeyed again without argument. Her lips tingled. The growling tone of his voice seemed to ripple through her. She'd almost swear that she felt that low vibration in her pussy.

His teeth scraped over the mark on her collarbone. Anticipation sizzled through her body. His lips trailed over her chest, dropping a kiss in the dip between her breasts. She drew in a sharp breath. Her breasts ached, felt swollen.

His lips closed over the hard, dark brown nub of her right nipple. He tugged at the peak, teasing, tormenting. She was certain that he was deliberately keeping his touch

light. More. She wanted more. She needed to feel him take her nipple in his mouth and suck but he seemed content to play.

"Please..." She arched her back, trying to push more of her breast into his mouth.

The bed shifted a little but she didn't take her eyes off Davik. She didn't care if they fell on the floor. Davik's lips opened over her nipple and he drew it deep into the wet warmth of his mouth. She groaned. Heat streaked through her. She felt a gush of liquid slip from her pussy.

Fingers found her clit and began to rub the hard nub. She tensed and shook as the sensation reached an even higher level.

A hand glided up her ribs as Davik released her nipple after a last, lingering swipe of his tongue. His fingers tweaked the hardened peak of her left breast.

Denise blinked, momentarily pulled out of the haze of desire by the realization that there were three hands on her.

Looking over her shoulder, she saw Camin kneeling behind her. A grin slashed across his face as he moved even closer, until his chest pushed against her upper back. She looked down and realized that it was his fingers stroking her clit. A shot of desire streaked through her. The dark suntanned gold of his skin seemed somehow erotic as it contrasted with her light brown skin.

"Why are you doing that?" She drew in a gasping breath and rocked her hips.

"Do you think I can just watch as he loves you?" Camin whispered against her ear. He dropped a kiss on her shoulder. "I need to touch you even if it adds to my torment."

Davik groaned and his hands clamped around her hips. "I can feel every move, Camin. Much more and I'll lose it. She's so wet that her juices are coating my cock."

Camin's fingers left her clit and slid lower. He traced his fingers around the opening. She licked her lips and squirmed. Two fingers stroked into her. She gasped and her body shook as a white-hot streak of sensation shot through her.

"She's wet and tight, Davik. I think she's more than ready." Camin's fingers withdrew and his hand left her pussy.

Denise almost wanted to cry at the loss of those fingers.

"Have you had enough foreplay?" Davik flicked his fingers over her nipples.

She swallowed and drew in a panting breath. Oh yes, she wanted him. She nodded and rocked her hips. Rising to her knees, she watched as he reached between them and curled his fingers around his cock.

A wet finger traced down the divide between her buttocks. She trembled and her knees felt weak. Camin's fingertip pressed against the tight rosette. She tensed, drawing in a hissing breath. Her eyes rounded and she very nearly came right then. His fingers left her buttocks and she felt him move back before she could tell him how much she liked that.

Davik drew her attention, his hands urging her onto his cock. Lowering her hips slowly, she closed her eyes as her channel stretched to accommodate him. She felt a little sting but that just added an edge to her pleasure.

His hands glided to her hips and urged her to move. They rocked together. She rose until just the head of his cock remained inside her and then lowered her hips until she'd taken him deep again. She reveled in the control he gave her.

That was something she hadn't expected, especially not with his domineering attitude. She'd expected him to take control. Soon she couldn't think beyond the sensations ripping through her body. Hot pleasure arced as his calloused fingers skimmed up her sides to her breasts. His thumbs flicked across her nipples.

Her hips drove down, taking his entire length inside her as he nipped at her lips. She drew in gasping breaths. Every inhalation pulled his woodsy scent deeper into her, making it almost part of her. She shivered. Her nails sank into his shoulders.

Davik drew in a hissing breath. "Put your mark on me, *be'rai*. Show me that you want me."

His fervent urgings drove her desire even higher. She slanted her mouth across his and plunged her tongue deep. Her teeth nipped at his lips. He groaned, the sound rolling through her. His hips bucked against hers.

Desperation grew inside Denise. Their skin brushed and slapped as she rode him. His hands left her breasts and cupped her buttocks. He urged her to move faster. His fingers pressed into the two globes, grinding her against him.

Her nails raked over his shoulders as the sensations tightened and stretched. Teetering on the brink of climax, she pushed her hips down, grinding her clit against his pelvis. She screamed as intense pleasure ripped through her body. It became hypersensitive, even the slight brush of his chest against the tips of her breasts sent another wave of bliss crashing over her. Her pussy rippled and clasped around his cock. His hands rocked her against him before his arms wrapped around her in a fierce hug. He tensed beneath her and a low moan tore from his throat. She felt the hot spurt of his seed inside her.

"I've missed you." Davik's lips brushed over her neck.

She tensed. "I'm not Aeva. You can't have missed me. You didn't know me."

"We knew that you existed and we knew that we wouldn't be wasting this new opportunity. We planned to do things right this time." Camin's hand brushed over her shoulder as if soothing her. "We'll talk about that later. Now it's my turn. I'm feeling neglected."

"Neglected? You've had your hands on me the whole time. You haven't been forced to sit and just watch." Denise laughed. Turning her head, she found his face only a breath away from hers.

Camin's lips brushed over hers. "But *you* haven't touched *me*."

Davik grasped her by the waist and lifted. Denise moaned as his cock withdrew. She wanted him back inside her. He smiled and brushed a kiss along her jaw.

"Don't look so disappointed, *be'rai*. I'll have you again later. You want Camin," Davik whispered against her ear.

Denise focused her attention on Camin as his hands closed around her waist, lifting her. He tumbled them both back onto the bed.

She rose up onto her elbow and trailed a finger across his chest. "You're still partly dressed. I can help you with that if you want."

Leaning down, she traced her tongue around the flat disc of the dark nipple. He drew in a sharp breath and his body shook. She thrilled at drawing such a strong reaction from him. Her teeth scraped and teased before closing over the hard bead and tugging at his nipple.

"You enjoy playing too much." His fingers tangled in her hair for a moment before he rolled away from her.

His hands worked on the fastenings of his pants. She heard a rip as the fabric parted. With an economy of motion, he stripped off the pants, tossing them across the room. In a single fluid roll, he resumed his position beside her.

"Come here and give me a kiss," he ordered. His hand brushed over her arm and trailed across her shoulder.

His light touch sent a cascade of sensation through her. Denise leaned over and feathered her lips over his in a slow caress. His arm slipped around her waist and his mouth opened beneath hers. In a single move that didn't break contact with her lips, he rolled, pressing her back into the bed. His tongue surged inside, tangling with hers.

Her hands gripped his shoulders but she wasn't going to push him away. Her thumbs stroked over the stripes there. The switch in positions excited her.

He drew back, his lips leaving hers. His blue eyes burned and the lines of his face looked even harder than normal. She could almost see the sensual hunger boiling through him.

"See what happens to teases." His teeth nipped at her lips.

A fiery sensation shot through her, going straight to the tight knot of sensation low in her belly. His hands swept over her body, trailing over her thighs and hips in teasing, too-fleeting touches. He dropped a kiss on her chin. Soft kisses rained over her neck. He continued moving down her body.

She twisted beneath his touch. She wanted more. Her heartbeat quickened as his breath brushed over the hardened tip of her right breast. His tongue flicked at the hardened peak. She cried out and tried to pull him closer.

"You want my mouth on you, Denise?" His hands skimmed up her thighs. His fingers just brushed the wet lips of her labia. She thought she'd go crazy if he didn't touch her soon.

That barely there touch seared her. Her need built to a fiery ache so quickly that she could hardly believe it. Her hips lifted into his touch but he didn't touch her more intimately. He seemed to be waiting for something. After what seemed like an eternity, she realized he wanted an answer.

"Yes," she hissed through clenched teeth.

His hand traced the soft folds, brushing her clit. He kept the touch tormenting, light, seemingly intent on making her beg. She moaned and her thighs widened in silent demand.

His tongue circled her nipple, leaving a tingling, wet trail in its wake. His teeth closed over the taut tip, tugging it before drawing the hard bead deep into his mouth. Her fingers and toes curled at the delicious sensation. Just when he seemed to be preparing to feast, he switched to her other breast and the torment began again.

He drew his fingers up between her slick folds. His thumb flicked across her clit again and again. Her hips rolled into the firm touch.

"You're excited, wet and wanting me." Camin's tongue batted at the hardened peak in front of him. "I'm going to make you scream for me."

His body moved over hers. She almost shouted her relief. He reached between them, positioning the rounded head of his shaft at her entrance. She arched, wanting, needing more. Her hands stroked over his arms and back. His shaft pushed into her slowly.

His hips pressed against hers. For a moment he remained absolutely still. Looking up into his eyes, she could see the heat and the tightly leashed hunger blazing down at her. The sight of his passion increased hers.

He withdrew and surged into her in a steady, unrelenting rhythm. Her hips rose to meet his. Desire roared and clawed inside her. His mouth slashed across hers in a hungry kiss. Almost delicately, his teeth nibbled and pulled at her lips. She moaned, straining to get closer to him.

With each thrust, he ground his hips against her. The slight pressure on her clit tore away the last of her control. Her nails sank into his back. Sharp, intense pleasure raced through her body. Tremors shook her and a scream tore from her throat.

He thrust into her, his body moving against hers. His muscles tightened and she could feel his heart pounding when they touched. She could see the desperation on his face. His hips flexed as he rocked against her. Hot seed spurted into her channel as he came. His arms shook and he toppled them both to the side.

Denise frowned as he held her. She knew he thought he was saving her from being crushed by his heavy body but a flicker of disappointment filtered through the lingering pleasure. She wanted to feel his muscled weight pressing her into the bedding. Most of all, she didn't want him holding back in any way. Even when he'd been desperate for release, she knew he hadn't let go of his control.

Resting her head against his chest, she tried to sort through the riot of emotions whirling through her mind. Being with them felt right. She hadn't thought it would.



The dreams, memories of that other life had always been so bad that she hadn't thought she'd be able to relax with them. She readily admitted the sex was great, but a part of her just couldn't enjoy the good times. Fear of rejection played a big part in it. She couldn't simply trust that they really were different. Not yet. She'd have to see that she could really be a part of their lives.

"I hope you've had plenty of rest because we want more." Davik's hand traced down her spine.

She blinked and turned to look at him, torn from her thoughts. Hunger blazed in his brown eyes. He wasn't joking. His cock jutted up, already hard and ready. Surprisingly, she felt her own arousal rising in answer. She didn't have time to think about why she felt that way. His mouth covered hers.

## Chapter Eight

Aeva walked slowly across the creamy-white tiles of the walled garden. The sweet song of a mountain bird floated through the crisp, early afternoon air. She could hardly believe that the man sitting in the chair near the large fountain was real and not some wishful dream. His long golden hair flowed around his face, the ends fluttering in the gentle breeze. After days of barely seeing him, he looked almost too good. He wore a sleeveless blue-gray shirt over his broad chest and tight black pants.

Today he seemed relaxed, happy. Very different from the last time she'd seen him. Both men seemed to have been avoiding her for the last few days. She was glad that only A'Camion was here. It wasn't easy facing them both at the same time. Davorik generally ignored her. When she tried to get closer to him, to them, he glowered and put distance between them.

"Come here, Aeva." A'Camion held out his hand.

His blue eyes flashed with flecks of silver. She could see the hunger there and it reassured her. Sometimes she wondered if they felt even half of the desire she did. She crossed the tiled area and slipped her hand into his. He tugged her down into his lap, laughing at her startled gasp.

His lips brushed over hers. She opened her mouth underneath his, eager for his kiss. It had been too long since she'd known her mate's touch. His tongue stroked into her mouth, tangling with hers. Her hands slid up his shoulders and she pressed closer to him.

He groaned, pulling her close. She could feel the hard ridge of his cock pressing against her hip and longed to feel that thick length inside her. His hand roamed over her stomach and slipped underneath the edge of her top. She pressed even closer to him. She wanted more. His palm cupped her breast.

"I want to taste these hard little buds." His thumb flicked across the tight peak of her right breast.

She drew in a gasping breath and arched into his touch. Gods, she wanted that.

"A'Camion." Davorik's hard tone broke through the haze of passion.

Aeva turned and saw Davorik standing near the large wooden door into the house. His face was set in hard lines and he looked as approachable as the cold peaks of some of the mountains around them. Dressed in a sturdy, slightly faded black shirt, black pants and thick, scuffed boots, he definitely wasn't dressed to laze around the garden. He looked ready to go on a long trek or hunt.

A'Camion's fingers plucked at her nipple and he nibbled at her ear. "What do you want, Dav?"

"Come with me. We need to talk. Now." Davorik just stood there, waiting, watching, his eyes mostly on A'Camion.

*Please don't.* Aeva looked at A'Camion with wide eyes. She wanted to beg him not to leave her but pride wouldn't let her voice the words.

A'Camion tensed but stood, still holding Aeva. He held her close for a moment then put her down in the chair. Without a glance back at her, he walked over to Davorik, who led the way back into the house.

Aeva just sat there — stunned and hurt. He hadn't even offered to take her with him or said goodbye. The man had walked away as if those moments had meant nothing. As if they hadn't affected him. And they probably hadn't, she thought. She felt wetness on her cheeks and realized she was crying. Wiping at the tears, she rose. What did she have to do to get and keep their attention?

\* \* \* \* \*

Denise opened her eyes and took a few deep breaths to get herself under control. She'd woken several times during the night to the feel of a hand stroking over her leg or fingers on her breast. This time, she wished she'd been woken by their cuddling. It would have been better than feeling the searing sense of rejection still burning through her mind. For once they weren't holding her and she wished they had been. She wouldn't feel so alone, so unsure if she could feel even one of their hands on her.

She needed to get out of here, find somewhere to think. If they woke and she was close enough to touch, thinking wouldn't be on her mind for long. This wasn't something that would simply go away with time. The dreams would keep coming, especially now that they were here with her. She managed to move down the center of the bed and off it without waking them.

A dim, yellowish glow from a single overhead inset light provided illumination. After pulling on her pants, she walked to the door as she fastened her shirt. Turning the latch, she quietly, slowly opened the door. She left, her bare feet making no sound on the floor as she headed for her room directly down the hall from theirs.

With a sigh of relief she walked into the privacy of her small bedroom. The simplicity of her room had never seemed so welcoming. The small table in the far corner and the bed held no surprises. Everything was as she'd left it. The red blanket with black trim on the bed was a little rumpled. A cup sat on the table.

Locking the door behind her, she leaned against the wall beside it. Closing her eyes, she wearily brushed a hand over them. She exhaled a ragged, shuddering breath. Those dreams always had some kind of effect on her. This one couldn't have come at a worse time. At least as far as her confidence in her decision was concerned. She'd known she was taking a chance by having sex with them. She'd thought she was ready for it.

After that dream, she wasn't so sure. It wasn't that she expected them to turn away from her after one night. They'd already shown they wanted to be with her. The dream had just underlined the fact that the men's relationship with each other had always

been the most important thing to them. Aeva hadn't even come close to being a priority. As a result, Aeva had been pushed to the side, forgotten in some cases. Denise didn't want to be an afterthought or a way for them to atone for what they'd done to Aeva. She wanted to share in their relationship, truly be part of it.

*What do I really know about them?* She couldn't help questioning her belief that they were different from the men she knew from her dreams. She hadn't known them long enough to really see any kind of behavior that would confirm or discredit the belief that they had changed. These *were* the two men who had walked away from Aeva. Left her there as if she were a cheap piece of ass and they were finished with her for the night. Now Denise was a little worried. The lack of real fire, the very absence of the dominance and arrogance she knew was a part of them, made her wonder just how much of them she was really getting.

She pushed away from the wall and walked toward her shower. There were really only two choices and she didn't know if the second was a possibility anymore. She could take a chance and see if they'd let her be more than a female sex partner or she could end it. As for the second option, she didn't know if she could stay away from them. And that wasn't even thinking about Davik's and Camin's reaction. A very large part of her wanted to be with them. When she was with them, the restless part of her that had always wanted to move to another job calmed.

As she left the bathroom after her shower, she heard the click of the door's lock as the latch was tried. There was a moment of silence. It didn't last long. The door rattled as a fist pounded on the metal door.

"Open the door, Denise. Tell us what's wrong." Davik's voice carried clearly through the panel.

Her eyes widened. For her to hear more than a mumble through that steel door, he had to be yelling. She'd hoped for a little more time before trying to explain to them.

She walked over to the dark gray metal door and put her hand on the cool, smooth surface. "Go away, Davik. You really don't want me near you right now. Not good for your health."

"You dreamed." His voice was a little softer now.

"Just let me deal with this in my own way." She took a deep breath, hoping he didn't press. Tension stretched her nerves until even the air seemed to press in on her and her muscles tightened.

"What did you dream?" Camin's voice barely reached her ears.

*I dreamed of you walking away from a woman who wanted only to please you and be accepted.* She rested her head against the door but didn't say the words out loud.

"How are we supposed to help if we don't know what's bothering you?" Davik asked.

"I don't need help. I just need time." She slowly pulled away from the door. They couldn't change what they'd done and explaining wasn't necessary. In fact, knowing the motivation behind that act might just make matters worse.

She heard a low murmur outside her door. Tilting her head toward the door, she tried to understand the words but couldn't. They must have been talking to each other. Curious, she wondered what they were going to do. The murmur continued for a few moments and then stopped.

"We're going to let you have your time. When you finish your thinking, come back to the room. We haven't changed our minds. You'll be sleeping with us all night, every night." Determination coated Davik's voice, clear even through the muffling surface of the door.

Relief flowed through her as she heard the words. The muscles in her neck and shoulders loosened. The longer they'd stood out there, the tighter her muscles had become. For a while, she'd been certain that they weren't going to leave without her. She'd half expected them to at least try to force their way into her room.

She walked over to her bed and piled a few pillows against the wall. Sitting on the bed and leaning against the fluffy back rest, she tried to focus. She had some major decisions to make and she didn't really have all day to think about it.

\* \* \* \* \*

After the last patron of the night had left, Camin stood behind the bar, watching Denise. She wove her way through the tables, wiping the scarred tops until they gleamed in the light. It had been a quiet night, luckily. She looked vividly beautiful tonight. Her green shirt seemed to make her eyes sparkle and the matching skirt hugged her hips, flaring out in loose folds and falling just short of her knees.

She hadn't come out of her room until late in the afternoon. For the most part, things were just as they'd been before she'd left the bed this morning. She didn't pull back when they touched her and enjoyed their kisses but she seemed withdrawn. Whatever she'd dreamed, it had caused her to retreat mentally and emotionally. He cursed the timing. They'd just begun to connect with her.

The change drove him to the edge of his control. Every instinct demanded he go to her and find a way to get a response. Any response. This, on top of the strain of holding back his baser urges, made even watching her difficult. He wanted to love her in every way possible. Going at the slow pace she seemed to need threatened to break his grip on his darker needs.

She didn't even seem to realize that they wanted more than just to make love to her one at a time. Her disappearing act this morning had almost destroyed their plans. For a few moments the urge to break down the door had been the only thought in his mind. Resisting it hadn't been easy. All the plans to give her time, to let her become accustomed to them, had been driven right out of his head.

Denise finished the last of her work and turned to smile at him. That small curving of her lips reminded him that there was more hope now than he'd ever had before. She was here and she was alive. They'd work out the details no matter how long it took. This was another chance for all of them.

She walked around the bar and stopped in front of him. "Where'd Davik go?"

He reached out and pulled her close, hooking his arm around her waist. "He went back to the room."

"Is something wrong, or is he just tired?" She frowned and looked toward the door to the private area of the bar.

"He's not tired. He just went back when he finished work." Camin dropped a kiss on her forehead.

She frowned, looking as if she really didn't believe him. Camin couldn't tell her that Davik had left to give him time with her. When they were both in the same room with her, the desire to have her together was almost too strong to resist. He didn't know how much longer he could keep up the easygoing act. He needed more than sweet and light. Davik was having even more problems keeping his control. They both wanted every part of her.

"Give me a kiss." Camin brushed his lips over hers, wanting her to make the next move.

She leaned into him and her tongue traced the shape of his lips before slipping into his mouth. Her hands gripped the fabric of his blue shirt as he deepened the kiss. Her taste and smell filled his senses. Her teeth nipped at his lower lip. Then she drew it between her lips and sucked.

His hands gripped her hips, pulling her against him as he rocked into her. She moved restlessly. Her hips twisted and she finally hooked a leg around one of his. Cupping her buttocks, he lifted her. His cock rubbed against her mound as they strained to get closer to each other.

He moved around the bar and set her on the closest table. He tugged her shirt over her head, letting it fall to the floor. He bent and captured the dark tip of one breast as his hand rose to the other.

She leaned back on her hands, her head tipped back. A soft moan rolled from her lips. Her back arched, pushing her breast more firmly against his lips. She widened her legs.

He tugged at her hard nipple as he stepped into the V of her thighs. She shivered beneath his hands. He could smell her arousal and knew she was already creamy and wet. He swept his hand up her thigh, pushing the skirt up to her waist.

He kissed his way to the neglected peak. His tongue curled around the hardened tip. He slid his hand to the inside of her thigh and up to the silky material of her panties. He stroked her through the soft fabric. She writhed, her legs tightening around his hips.

"Let's go find Davik. I want both of you." She lifted one hand and brushed her fingers through his hair.

Sharp heat shot straight to his cock and balls. For a moment he thought she might mean exactly what the words implied. Taking a deep breath, he slowly pushed away

the image of taking her at the same time as Davik. He wanted that but he knew she wasn't ready for it. Her reaction last night had proven it. She just wanted them both in the same room, maybe even both of them holding her. One wrong move could do too much damage to risk. It was better to move slowly. She straightened, reaching out for him.

He groaned. "I want you here, now."

Stepping back, he tugged the silky panties down her thighs. The soft underwear fell to the floor unnoticed as he moved back between her legs. Her hands slid under his shirt, brushing her fingers over his ribs. He closed his eyes and savored the heat of her hands. He loved the feel of them on his body.

Her nails left a burning trail as she drew them across the hard, flat disks. She laughed softly as he tensed. His hands fell to the fastenings of his pants, almost ripping at them. He needed to be inside her. The fabric parted and his cock thrust forward.

The head of his shaft brushed against the slick lips of her pussy. Her hot juices coated the tip. He closed his eyes. He struggled to keep from pounding into her. Fitting his shaft to her, he slowly entered her tight channel.

Her thighs clamped around his hips and her inner muscles rippled over him, drawing him deeper. His eyes closed. He reveled in the sharp sensations radiating from every move, every touch. His hips pumped against her. He enjoyed the soft, wet sounds of their bodies moving together. Pulling in harsh breaths, he knew he wouldn't last long. He tugged at one of her hardened nipples. She gasped and shivered. The hot juices around his cock increased.

He drove into her, brushing against her G-spot with each forceful thrust. He lowered his head, drawing her nipple into his mouth. Sucking on the hardened peak, he savored her taste, the sound of her moans. Her body shook as climax hit her.

The contractions of her pussy around his cock tore away the last of his control. He needed to come. His hips jerked forward in sharp lunges. He groaned and stiffened as he came. Fire shot up his back as semen spurted deep into her.

He caught his weight on his forearms and rested his forehead against hers. They'd find a way to blend their needs with hers, to introduce her slowly to their ways. There was no way he could walk away from her. She belonged with them. She always had.

## Chapter Nine

Denise removed the last of the bottles from beneath a section of the bar. Dust swirled in the air. This wasn't her ideal way to spend an early evening on the one day a month the bar was closed. She shifted to the side, stretching out her legs. The move helped a bit, easing the kinks out of one of her legs. It didn't help with the warm, sticky air or the feeling that her clothes were clinging to her. The long blue pants felt thick and a little warm in the deserted bar but perfect for the grungy job ahead of her.

Layla leaned into the ice machine, scrubbing the emptied bin. This cleaning had been scheduled for weeks. Denise just wished it could be put off for a little longer but knew it was impossible. Things couldn't be left dirty. Not on this planet.

She grimaced as she noticed some kind of mold growing around the cap of a bottle she'd just put to the side. The bottle must have a faulty seal. That gray fuzz was exactly why they were scrubbing every nozzle, hose and surface in the bar. Dirt and mold had almost taken over the bar when they'd arrived. It had taken days to get the place clean enough to open without fear of someone getting sick from the mold's toxins.

She opened the bottle and dumped the liquid down the sink. Dropping back down to the floor, she looked under the counter for more of that fast-growing gray fuzz. According to a few of the geologists who came into the bar, the stuff was unique to the planet. Getting the cleaner and the scrubber, she began working on the shelves.

"So how did you manage to get out here without your two escorts? They've been sticking to your side pretty closely," Layla said, her voice muffled by her body being half in the ice machine.

"Oh you noticed." Denise rolled her eyes.

They'd been attentive and caring for the last few days. Davik and Camin didn't press, ask questions or make any demands. She should have been thrilled but she wasn't. She wanted to yell at them, provoke them. Their behavior just didn't seem right. Every sweet kiss only reinforced the fact that she didn't want nice. She wanted the whole of who they were even if it was rough and dominant at times.

"How long are you going to stew and steam?" Layla straightened, rubbed at her back and looked over at Denise.

Denise didn't ask how Layla knew something was wrong. They'd been together practically their entire lives. It would be strange if Layla didn't notice something was wrong. Denise had to admit that she had been quieter than usual.

"I don't know. I don't know if they're being like this because this is so new. Maybe they don't want to scare me with the darker sides of themselves. If I do say something, it will have to be more than telling them that I want more than sweet kisses and a soft



touch. I want the fire. That doesn't work, I already tried it. I want to scream at them. They make me so angry." Denise ran her hand over the back of her neck, trying to ease a little of the tension. She couldn't be sure of anything about them.

"So what are they... No, first tell me how you managed to slip away from them. You never said," Layla demanded. She went back to work on the ice machine.

"I told them you needed a private woman-to-woman chat. And we're talking, aren't we?" Denise smiled, enjoying her freedom and the small trick she'd played. If they hadn't been so nice and agreeable lately, they might have pressed for more details.

"So you lied to them," Layla accused.

"Yes." Denise scrubbed at the shelf.

They worked steadily on the cabinets. Denise finished one section and moved to the next. The sound of metal clicking against metal drew her attention. At first, she had no idea where the sound came from. Then it came again, a dull, metallic thud. Her eyes flew to the outer door. No one should be coming to the bar at all today. All the miners knew the schedule, learned it within days of arriving on the planet. She stood and reached for the wooden stick kept under the bar.

"Layla, I think we're about to have trouble." Denise moved out from behind the cluttered bar.

Layla lifted her head. "Tell me you're joking."

Denise shook her head. Layla grabbed a bottle and slipped out of the crowded area to stand just to the side of the bar. She watched the door. It didn't take long. The door swung open silently and two men walked slowly into the bar.

From their startled expressions, they clearly hadn't expected to find anyone in the bar area. The men straightened and began moving carefully forward. The soft hiss of metal against leather sounded as they pulled knives out of sheaths at their sides.

"Let us by and we'll let you live. We only want to kill the machine you're protecting," a dark-haired slim man offered in a coaxing voice.

"Now I wouldn't be doing my job if I just let you kill them. I have a reputation to protect. Haven't lost a person yet." Denise smiled, not too worried about the threat the men posed. Only two of them and they seemed overconfident.

The man was obviously a true believer as well as a bad liar. He wouldn't let anyone live if he managed to get to Nials. That was part of the group's tactics. They left no witnesses to their crimes.

His eyes narrowed and an angry flush reddened his cheeks. He took a gliding step forward, his body lowering into a fighting crouch. Denise moved, countering him. Her mind focused on the coming fight. She regretted leaving her knife in her bedroom, but this bar was going to have to do.

He lunged forward, the knife slicing toward her upper chest. She leapt back, bringing the wooden bar up to block him. The knife glanced off the rounded surface

without doing too much damage. The man muttered beneath his breath and began circling again.

Denise was vaguely aware of Layla fighting the other man but didn't shift her focus. She heard the crash of a bottle breaking but couldn't risk looking over to see what had happened. The slim man might not have been anywhere near as strong as she was but he'd obviously fought more with a knife than she had.

Her dark-haired opponent thrust the blade toward her midsection. Her heart pounded against her chest and her breath rushed out of her in fast pants. All her senses seemed sharper. She brought the bar down in a swinging arc, striking the blade.

"Fucking bitch! You're going to die," the dark-haired man hissed. Venomous hatred coated every word.

She clenched her jaw. It was time to stop reacting and act. She'd been on the defensive long enough.

Changing her grip on her weapon, she swung the rod at his ribs. The assassin's hand swept up and blocked the blow. Pain flashed across his face but even that small sign was hidden quickly behind a stoic mask.

He wasn't going to stop until he was completely disabled, Denise realized. She'd had a tiny hope that he might run if he saw he couldn't win. The man was apparently blinded by his hatred or he thought he could somehow win and get past the other men and women.

His knife slashed upward in an arc toward her face. She jumped back, away from the sharp tip of that gleaming blade. She felt the shift of the air near her nose as the blade whizzed past. Her eyes narrowed and she slowly moved toward him again. She had to get that damn blade out of his hand.

He shifted his weight from foot to foot. Denise swung the stick. The end caught the back of the hand that held the knife. The weapon went flying. He stumbled back, cradling his hand to his chest for a moment.

She saw movement behind him. Before she could worry, she recognized Layla. Denise moved the piece of wood back and forth, keeping his attention focused on her. She was all for ending this without any injury or serious damage. It would be easier to explain.

Layla smashed a bottle on his head. He staggered forward but it didn't look like a single blow was going to take him down. Denise stepped forward and slammed her fist into his jaw. The man fell back and sprawled on the floor, unconscious.

"Go get the kit and if you can manage it, have Jasi quietly summon the mining commission guards. We should be finished with everything we need to do by the time they get here." Denise looked around and saw at least five broken bottles and as many puddles of liquor.

"I take it quietly means without the males knowing if possible." Layla smiled and crossed her arms.

"Of course. We didn't need them to put the men down. They'll just get in the way when the guards come." Denise shrugged. She wasn't ready to deal with Camin and Davik yet. Not while in the mood they'd be in if they walked out to find this.

She hadn't even come close to finding a solution. She didn't know if they really couldn't see that she needed more or were just satisfied with what they had. Whichever reason it was, she had to find a way to make them see the truth and telling them hadn't worked.

Layla left the room. Denise gathered up the pieces of broken bottle near her but kept an eye on the unconscious men. They probably wouldn't wake before Layla returned. She just didn't want to chance that they'd escape. She had no idea how many mercs had actually come to Mayoon. These men wouldn't be rejoining their numbers. Taking two of them out of the action could only help.

Layla returned with the kit but Davik and Camin followed her into the barroom. Layla grimaced and shrugged her shoulders, sending Denise an apologetic look. Davik's eyes settled for a moment on the two unconscious men and then swung to her. Anger simmered in his brown eyes. His entire body practically vibrated with the suppressed emotion.

"What happened?" Camin stopped in front of her and folded his arms across his broad chest. His eyes glittered with emotion.

"They came in, wanted to kill Nials. We took care of them," Denise said as she met that intense gaze briefly.

She quickly turned her eyes to Layla as she bent to inject a clear liquid into both men's arms. Denise tried to appear relaxed and calm but it was a little difficult. Those two men gave intimidating a new meaning. She had the feeling they were a breath away from tossing her over their shoulders and carrying her off.

"Was the door unlocked for some reason? Did they surprise you?" Davik shot the question at her. His eyes moved to the men and then the disarray near the bar.

"No, the door was locked as it always is until the bar opens. They didn't surprise us. I heard them try the door," she admitted, even though she knew it would probably infuriate them.

"Why didn't you sound the alarm, get help?" Davik's voice rose to a near roar.

"For two men? We can handle two men. If we'd needed your help, we would have hit the alarm. Your confidence in my abilities just amazes me." Sarcasm coated her words.

"And what if it had been four or six? Would you have been able to get to the alarm?" Camin stepped forward aggressively. A muscle along the side of his jaw worked.

"We didn't even know you two were out here in the bar. No one would have thought to check here for you until it was probably too late," Davik ranted.

This was getting out of hand. He already had her dead at the hands of four hypothetical men. Maybe he had a point that she should have hit the alarm at the first sound of someone trying the door but she couldn't change what had been done. And no one who counted had gotten hurt.

"And what about these men? Do you think they'll stay long in the mining holding cells?" Davik's hand slashed out to indicate the two unconscious men.

"Well, if they were going to the holding cells, probably not. They'll go to the small hospital here. The doctor's a Tribunal operative," Layla revealed as she walked over to them.

"When they wake up, she can't keep them there if they don't want to be there." Camin glared down at Denise, not paying the slightest attention to the other woman in the room.

"They won't wake up. That injection Layla gave them will keep them unconscious until the doctor can ship them out on a shuttle for 'better medical care'. We won't have to worry about them." Denise smiled. She hoped that helped improve their mood.

The hope died a moment later. They frowned down at her. Standing side by side, they seemed like a wall of simmering masculine disapproval. Davik and Camin watched her every move as she and Layla finished cleaning up the mess from the fight. The guards arrived just as they were wiping up the last of the liquor from the broken bottles. They listened as Layla explained how the men broke into the bar and how they'd found them drunk and passed out. The company guards took the two unconscious assassins away after only a cursory glance around the bar.

Denise locked the door and walked back behind the bar. She picked up the cloth and bucket and sat down in front of the shelf. If they wanted to yell at her, they could do it while she got some work done. She didn't have time to coax and cajole them into a better mood. They could be angry if they chose.

"What are you doing?" Camin asked.

She glanced over at him. He stood at the end of the bar, hands at his sides. She didn't need the scowl on his face to know what he was feeling. From the tense set of his muscles and the clipped words, he was still furious.

"Cleaning. There's a mold that grows quickly on this planet. Everything has to be cleaned often, especially if it's near moisture.

He nodded. "Someone will be out to check on you periodically."

Denise rolled her eyes. That statement was loud and clear. They were too furious to be near her right now. Well, she was angry with them too. They had no right to be so furious. She hadn't gotten hurt and the situation had been handled. She couldn't ever remember getting yelled at or interrogated the way they yelled at her. As if she were some raw recruit in a military company.

\* \* \* \* \*

Davik drew in a deep, steadying breath as the door into the lower-level housing section swung shut behind them. He flexed his hands, relieving a bit of the tension from the tight muscles. The urge to turn her over his knee had never been stronger. The need to fuck her until she couldn't think of doing something that risky again wasn't far behind. This wasn't some minor mistake as she seemed to view it. He couldn't remember his control over his temper ever being this shaky. If he didn't get his mind on something else, he'd end up back in that bar with her bent over it. And he'd probably scare her witless.

Camin's hand brushed Davik's shoulder as they walked down the hallway. Turning, Davik didn't need more than a glance at his bond brother's blue eyes to realize the direction Camin's emotions had taken. Davik felt the anger flaring into a raging desire. Davik's hand rose and cupped the back of Camin's head. Davik inhaled slowly, pulling Camin's spicy scent deep.

"It's been too long since I've had you," Camin said just before his lips slashed across Davik's.

Camin's tongue drove into Davik's mouth, claiming, demanding. Davik met the fiery kiss and returned it. He needed that fierce, savage joining. Even as the kiss deepened, he guided them toward the door.

They barely made it into the privacy of their room before they began stripping out of their clothes. Davik finished first and went into the bathroom for the can of lube. He was smoothing it on his cock as he stalked over to the bed.

Camin lay on the bed, watching as Davik strode across the room. Davik took in the golden body sprawled across the blanket and felt his cock harden even more. He wanted every bit of that corded body. He wanted to rip away the charming cover Camin showed to most people and make him scream with pleasure. He heartily approved of Camin's choice of location. The table wouldn't hold up to a wild session. Walking over, Davik joined Camin on the bed.

His slick fingers grasped Camin's cock and stroked. Davik enjoyed the sight of Camin's hips pumping as the need built. Blood already rushed through Davik and it was all he could do not to drive into his bond brother right now. He wanted to fuck or be fucked. At this point he didn't care. Camin reached over and gripped Davik's cock before his fogged brain could react.

Davik groaned. His hand left Camin's cock. He gripped Camin's wrist, pulling the fingers away from his engorged flesh. He couldn't take any more. With a sudden move, Davik flipped Camin over on the bed, drawing him to his knees. Davik's cock jerked as anticipation slammed into him. He drew his finger along the muscled curve of Camin's buttocks. He needed to feel the tight clasp of Camin's flesh squeezing him. Davik smoothed slick gel around the tight, puckered ring. Pressing, he slid a well-lubed finger into the channel before pulling it out and moving behind Camin. The rounded head of his cock pressed against the ring of flesh. Camin pushed his hips back at the same time as Davik drove forward. Davik set a fast rhythm. His hand slid around and stroked Camin's cock as he fucked him.

Davik felt an intense climax building. His balls felt rock-hard, drawn tight to his body. Camin met each thrust, Davik's hips pounding against his buttocks. Camin came, a harsh groan rolling from his lips as his body jerked. Only moments later, Davik stiffened, the orgasm ripping through him.

Davik fell to the bed, tangled with Camin. A vague sense of something not quite right roused him from the languor. He raised his head and looked around the room.

When his eyes got to the door, he saw her.

Denise stood just in the doorway, her hands clenched at her side. Her breath rushed from her in fast, loud pants and her light brown skin was flushed. She looked... He couldn't quite put his finger on what emotions radiated from her brown eyes.

"Come here, Denise." He held out his hand, palm up, inviting her to join them.

She shook her head slowly back and forth. "I told you I wouldn't be an afterthought."

Tears trailed down her cheeks. He drew in a sharp breath and tried to untangle himself from Camin, who also was pushing at him, trying to get free. They both fell back to the bed, more tangled than ever.

"I want someone to want *me* the way you two want each other. Neither of you has ever touched me with that kind of need." She turned and disappeared out the door.

Davik scrambled to his feet the moment he was free of Camin. Camin ran out the door in front of him. The hallway was deserted, she'd had plenty of time to get out of there, to go anywhere. They checked the bar first. Davik didn't want her going out on the street in her present mood.

Davik burst through the door and stopped. His eyes scanned the room. Layla lightly ran a cloth along the scarred surface of the long bar. Her eyes widened when she saw them. Then she shook her head and let her eyes roam. Davik didn't need to ask why. He'd remembered his clothing not long after they left the room but he wasn't going back just yet. Not without Denise.

The room seemed undisturbed and there was no sign of Denise. Everything had been put back in its place. He and Camin stepped into the room and checked both sides of the bar and the bathrooms. Denise couldn't have gotten that door unlocked and left and had Layla relock it before they arrived. She had to have gone into one of the rooms along the hallway on the personnel level.

They turned and left the bar. Davik needed to find her. He had to make her understand. To take away the hurt he'd seen in her eyes. When he'd first seen her standing in the doorway with that look on her face, he'd been half-afraid that she couldn't accept a relationship between Camin and him even though she'd already known about it. He wasn't sure exactly why she was so angry but he knew she was. They'd touched her with passion, as much as they dared show her right now. She wasn't ready for their stronger needs.

## Chapter Ten

Denise dropped onto the floor beside the bed and stared at the door. She half expected them to come storming into Jasi's room at any moment. After she'd run out of their room, she hadn't known where else to go. She definitely didn't want to be around them right now. Their emotions, their bond had been so clear when she'd seen them making love. She couldn't call it anything else. It certainly hadn't been the light sex they'd had with her. Witnessing that emotion, she knew that whatever they felt for her, it didn't come close to what was between them.

"Thanks for letting me in so quickly." Denise looked over at Jasi, who sat on the bed.

The dark blue blanket contrasted with Jasi's white shirt and light purple pants. Fluffy handmade pillows scattered in various places made the room look more inviting. It was a nice room but Denise couldn't get comfortable. Tension and anticipation whirled inside her. Jasi watched her with concerned eyes.

Jasi's arms hooked around her raised knee. "So your two men will probably be coming after you, knocking on my door."

"They'll be here. I don't want to talk to them or see them. Not tonight and maybe not tomorrow." Denise jumped as a heavy hand banged on the door.

Jasi stood. Her black hair flowed around her shoulders as she made her way over to the door. She placed her hand on the door, standing just in front of it, but didn't release the lock. She turned and smiled at Denise before responding to the summons.

"Go away. I'm trying to sleep here," Jasi called loudly to be heard through the metal security door.

"We know Denise is in there. We only want to talk to her." Davik's voice sounded amazingly clear. He had to be shouting.

"If Denise has left your room, perhaps you should be thinking about why she did it instead of chasing after her while you're still emotional." Jasi leaned a shoulder against the edge of the door.

"Tell her to get out here or we're coming in," Davik ordered with a warning tone.

Denise pushed to her feet and stomped over to the door. Jasi moved out of the way, apparently letting her decide what to do. That threat broke her control. They wouldn't threaten her friends just because they weren't getting their way.

"I'm not going back to your room with you, Davik! I've had enough of your coddling and your pity lovemaking. I told you. I'm not Aeva. I won't take the scraps you're willing to give me." Denise pressed a hand to the door.

They wouldn't break the lock. Just her presence in front of the door would keep them from going through it. Silence hung for a long time. She had no idea what they were doing on the other side of that steel barrier but knew it would only be moments before they did something. They wouldn't give up this easily. It would go against their natures.

"We're not just leaving you here to sulk. Come out and talk to us," Camin called. "It's not pity. We want you."

"No, I'm not opening the door to talk to you. You don't know me. You don't know what I need. I'm just a way for you to relieve the guilt you feel over your treatment of Aeva! Take your pity and go to bed with it." Denise pounded the palm of her hand against the door as her anger rose again.

"How are we supposed to learn anything about you when you're hiding in another room?" Camin reasoned.

"You've had plenty of time to ask me, to talk to me, but we didn't talk much about *me*, did we?" Denise clenched her jaw. They'd talked a little about Davik and Camin, a little about their relationship with Aeva but mostly when they talked it was about the mercs, the threat to all of them.

"You can bet that we'll be talking about you when we get you out of there." Davik's growl filtered through the door.

"Just go back to bed. I'm going to sleep right here in front of the door. So you're not going to be able to get in." She turned her back against the door and slowly slid down to sit on the floor.

It was the only way she could think of to keep them out of the room for the night. The lock wouldn't slow them for long.

She heard the murmur of voices but no distinct words. The voices got a little louder and she heard the words, "no", "tantrum" and "leave" without any trouble. She closed her eyes and ran a hand through her hair. She'd been tired before she'd walked in on them and had the truth explode in her face. Now she felt completely exhausted, emotionally and physically.

"You can't keep running when you find something you don't like about us. We're not going to walk away from you." Camin's stern tone sounded so clear that she almost thought he was right beside her.

The man was either being intentionally dense or he hadn't heard a word she'd said. She wasn't running. Not really. There was nowhere to go. She just needed some time away from them to think about what to do. She had needed a little time before but it wasn't as if she'd had a lot of time to adjust to this. Seeing them together, just talking, their tie was unmistakable, but seeing them making love had really opened her eyes. She knew now just how much feeling was missing when they made love to her. It had scared her to the soles of her feet. She wanted them to feel that for her. The only thing she'd ever wanted this much was her freedom.

"One night, Denise. I expect to see you tomorrow morning early," Davik ordered.



Relief rushed through her but a wave of sadness quickly followed it. She hadn't really expected them to give up and walk away from her this easily. She'd wanted them to talk to her for as long as it took, to really want her enough to try.

"Well, you might try smiling or being happy now. They went back to their room without trying to go through the door or wall. It looks like you won this round." Jasi stepped close and knelt down to put her hand on Denise's shoulder.

"Did I win?" Denise ran her hands over her face. She'd never thought of herself as an emotional person but the gamut of feelings racing through her was as undeniable as it was confusing.

"You told them to go away and they did." Jasi said, and her head tilted as she looked into Denise's eyes. "Ahh. You might want a little time to think but you needed them to show you that they feel more than pity for you. They just walked away, leaving you wondering what they really feel."

Denise grimaced and nodded. "They didn't argue with me much before they went back to bed, did they?"

"You haven't known them long. Why do you expect them to want your life story right after meeting you? You probably don't know too much more about them than they do about you." Jasi bit her lip, obviously trying to come up with an explanation. She sat down on the floor beside Denise.

"I want them interested in me enough to ask. I asked about them. They didn't want to go into too much depth." Denise closed her eyes for a moment. Their disinterest in her life had hurt but she'd pushed the doubts away and reveled in being with them.

"They can't read your mind and they don't think like you do. So they may be doing one thing for a reason and you may think they have a completely different reason." Jasi stretched her legs out in front of her.

Denise rolled her eyes.

"Why don't you get some rest and think about all of this in the morning with a clear head. Maybe it won't seem so intense after a good night's sleep. I don't know exactly what happened but you're obviously still angry and hurt. Don't make any decisions out of anger that you'll regret," Jasi suggested.

"I'm sleeping here. Just in case they come back." Denise knew that Jasi was right. She wasn't thinking clearly. Even now she hoped they'd come back and try to talk to her. At the same time, if they were in front of her, she'd probably take a swing at one or both of them. Her feelings were so out of control.

Jasi stood and heaved a long sigh. She walked over to a corner and picked up a few large cushions and a light blanket.

"Here. These are comfortable." Jasi smiled as she put the cushions down and handed Denise the blanket.

"Thanks again. For letting me in and for putting up with me." Denise looked up and returned the smile, although hers felt a little shaky.

"We all have times when we just need to get away. As for putting up with you, that's what friends are for." Jasi squeezed Denise's hand and then walked back to her bed.

Denise arranged the pillows and draped the blanket over her legs. She closed her eyes and expected to lay awake long into the night, thinking. Within moments she drifted into a deep sleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

Aeva watched as nearly twenty armed guards in black body armor walked through the wide hallway between the cells. Dread curled in her gut and her heart began pounding in her chest. Who were they after this time?

Davorik stepped forward and gently slid his hand up her back. "Get to the back of the cell, Aeva."

She nodded and moved behind him. She kept going until her back was pressed against the dark gray back wall. Her mouth felt dry and nervous energy coursed through her. When would this nightmare end?

A'Camion and Davorik stood right in front of the energy shield. Their feet were braced apart and they looked ready to face anything. Aeva saw the wall of black-clad men stop in front of their cell. One of the helmeted guards smiled. Aeva knew that some of the guards enjoyed seeing the fear on their victims' faces and inflicting pain. Even if no one resisted they used their weapons, a rod that sent muscles into spasm at the slightest touch and a stunner especially designed to work on the *Darsat* men and women. The men already had their weapons out.

"We can do this easy or we can do this hard. It's your choice. The woman is coming with us." The man's eager expression indicated he hoped A'Camion and Davorik chose to try the hard way.

A'Camion and Davorik didn't say a word. Aeva took a deep breath. Her hands twisted in front of her. Goddess, she just hoped that the guards didn't kill Davorik and A'Camion. Every time the guards came for her, her fear grew. She didn't know how she'd survive without them. They were the only spark of light, the only hope in this entire situation. Just their presence, being close to them, made her feel better.

The energy shield dropped and the first four guards marched toward the cell. The guard on the left end raised the rod in his hand and swung at A'Camion. Aeva gasped. A'Camion spun, dodging the descending rod, and shoved the man back.

The man's eyes narrowed. Aeva swallowed as she saw his eyes harden and a mean look crossed his face. The guard at the other end of the line lifted his stunner. Davorik's foot slammed into it, sending it flying.

One of the rods slammed across Davorik's back. He fell to the ground, his body jerking and twisting. Aeva rushed forward and grabbed for his wrist, trying to pull Davorik back to the corner and safety. A'Camion caught sight of her just as a beam

from one of the stunners hit him. One of the men walked up to him and kicked him in the ribs.

Aeva lunged to her feet, anger flooding through her. "Leave him alone!" She ran at the man. She saw a flash of white and then the world went black.

\* \* \* \* \*

Denise blinked and rubbed at her eyes. By the moons, that had been intense. She could still feel the fear and anger from the dream. She'd known they'd done their best to take care of Aeva while they were in that prison. Seeing it had only thrown her feelings into further chaos.

Sitting up, she leaned back against the door and ran her hand through her hair. Looking across the room, she saw Jasi sitting on the bed, dressed in a tight blue shirt and black pants, just watching her.

"Feeling better?" Jasi asked.

"Well, I'm not tired anymore." Denise shrugged.

All she had to do was find a way to know if Davik and Camin actually felt something for her besides pity. Shouldn't be hard. Grimacing, she closed her eyes. She didn't think they were going to start volunteering emotions when they never had before.

"So I gathered from your conversation that you saw them together last night and it made you feel that what you have with them doesn't come close to real feelings. Did you know they were lovers?" Jasi stood and walked over to Denise. She sat down beside her on one of the cushions.

Jasi had stepped forward when Denise needed her. She'd already been caught in the middle of it. Denise had no problem sharing the details of what had happened. It wasn't as if it were the first time they'd talked sex. Besides, she'd welcome another opinion. She certainly didn't know what she was going to do.

"Yes, I knew. But damn, Jasi, just seeing them making love took me by surprise. Their feelings were so obvious. It's impossible to miss the difference between what they have and what they give me." Denise shook her head and swallowed.

"The difference in intensity might not be a lack of feeling. Like I said last night, it might be a communication problem," Jasi offered.

"Hell, if I knew they felt anything for me other than pity, this would be an easy decision." Denise shook her head.

"What makes you think they only feel pity for you?" Jasi turned to face her.

Denise looked over at her friend and rubbed at the tense knot of muscles at the back of her neck. Grimacing, she decided to tell Jasi. They'd stood side by side in battle, lived through the years of captivity together. They'd even spent their first days of real freedom together.

"It's always the same. Soft, gentle touches, a few kisses, maybe they'll play with my breasts. Have sex then a kiss goodnight and I'm tucked into bed between them. Sometimes I feel more like someone they've been assigned to guard than their lover." She sighed and shook her head. It wasn't exactly boring but she wanted to feel real passion from them. She knew that there was more and it was driving her slowly insane.

"A lot of women would kill for that. In fact, I'm jealous. None of the other men will touch us. I might as well be a piece of furniture for all the attention they give me." Jasi flicked at a strand of shoulder-length black hair that had fallen in front of her face.

Denise's lips twitched at the aggrieved tone. Jasi was trying to make her smile, to get some kind of reaction from her. And it was working. The last thing Jasi did was blend in with the decorations. She had a very light brown skin color, lighter than Denise's. What set Jasi apart were her clear green eyes and her stunning, exotic beauty.

"That does bring up an excellent question. What do you want if it's not sweet, gentle?" Jasi asked.

"Sweet and gentle are all right but... They're holding back part of themselves from me. I can feel and see the distance they put between us sometimes. If it's not that they don't care for me, what are they hiding?" Denise stood and began pacing back and forth across the small room, feeling more trapped, more anxious with each pass.

"That doesn't answer my question." Jasi relaxed back against the door. "What do you want from them?"

Denise stopped suddenly. Nervous energy pulsed through her. She fisted her hands. She wanted to turn away, to move, to somehow avoid the question. Physically, she knew what she wanted from them. It was the emotional part that scared her right down to her toes.

"I want both of them. I don't want them to hold back from me anymore," Denise said slowly. There, that should satisfy Jasi.

Jasi actually chuckled. "Remember who you're talking to Denise. I was in those labs with you. I learned to dodge questions and always give short, seemingly full answers at the same time you did. I want the real answer."

Denise heaved a long sigh and ran a hand through her hair. "I gave you the easy answer because I don't really know the whole answer. Physically, I want their passion and I want them both."

"Them both? Don't you have them?" Jasi frowned, clearly confused.

Denise shook her head. "Yes, I have them but I want them both at the same time. I told you, they only touch me in a sweet, gentle way."

"And you've told them this, not just expected them to know?" Jasi raised her brows. Laughter lurked in her voice.

"You're enjoying this too much." Denise thought about the question long and hard. "Yes, I told at least Camin. I told him I wanted to go find Davik. I wanted Davik too. He ignored me."

"Are you sure he didn't misunderstand you?" Jasi suggested.

"The only way I could have made it clearer is to give him a vid image of what I wanted to do." Denise had been tempted to do that in the past few days. But that kind of vid wasn't exactly readily available here.

"Now what about the emotional part? What's so hard about it? I know you feel something. If you didn't feel something for them, you wouldn't be in here. How they acted or what they were holding back wouldn't matter." Jasi leaned back and waited.

Denise looked up at the ceiling. Jasi was right. She had feelings for them. In truth, she felt too much and it was all too intense to separate the emotions. And now on top of that, add a healthy dose of fear because she knew how much she could get hurt if they weren't serious.

"I want too much, Jasi, and I know that what I want is probably impossible. They pushed Aeva away and they're keeping me at a distance." Denise walked over to the wall and leaned against it.

"You don't know what they've been trying to do. What's so impossible and too much about what you want from them?" Jasi asked.

"I want everything, Jasi, not just bits and pieces. All their passion, all their trust, all their love." Denise closed her eyes.

"Love takes time. Are you willing to give them *your* love?" Jasi's eyes locked with Denise's as she waited for the answer.

Denise swallowed loudly. She hadn't thought about that. She didn't know what she felt for them, but it was strong. It could even be love. The pull to them hadn't lessened and she doubted it would. Fear welled inside her. That feeling could easily overwhelm everything else.

"Yes, I'd give them love. If it grows, I don't think I'd be able to hide it from them," Denise revealed.

Slowly a decision took form in her mind. She realized that talking had helped her see things clearly. The fear hadn't lessened but she knew what she wanted to do. Peace washed over her. It felt right.

"You've finally sorted it all through?" Jasi asked with a smile.

"Not about everything and my feelings are still confused but I know what I'm going to do about those two." Denise straightened away from the wall.

"Are you sure you'll be able to make them understand?" Jasi teased.

"If all else fails, I'll draw them a picture." Denise smiled. "Now get out of my way, I have to go talk to them."

Jasi stood and stepped out of the way. "Go to them. They're probably waiting for you."

Denise knew they'd be waiting for her. They probably wouldn't be in the best mood. She'd just have to work around that fact because there were things that needed to be settled between them. She wouldn't go back to the way things were before.

## Chapter Eleven

Stepping out into the deserted hallway, she was a little surprised and a bit disappointed that they weren't waiting for her. It would have been a sign that she meant something to them. Denise sighed.

Maybe she had been expecting them to read her mind. How could they have known she wanted them to be more assertive? Then again, she hadn't thought she'd have to tell them. She'd just thought it was part of who they were.

After going to her room for a quick shower and a change of clothes, she went straight to their room. They wouldn't have left it while they were waiting for her. Opening the door, she stepped inside before she lost her nerve and decided to go for a long walk to delay this meeting. The idea was too appealing.

They were waiting for her. Davik sat on the bed, his back against the wall but one of his bare feet resting on the floor. His green shirt looked rumpled and the black pants were only partially fastened. Camin had just come out of the bathroom. His wet hair gleamed and he was wearing only a pair of black pants. Although they were dressed, they looked like they hadn't slept much last night. Closing the door, she took a deep breath. Both men were scowling and looked about as approachable as the long-thorned branches of a *carush* bush.

"I've got a lot to say to you both." She licked her lips nervously as the long stares began to have an effect on her.

Camin strolled over to her. His blue eyes glittered with suppressed emotion. His fingers lightly brushed over her chin.

"Oh yes, we have plenty to say to you as well." His hard voice gave very little hint to what he felt.

"That won't be happening again, Denise. If we have to take out a wall you put between us, you're going to stay and work through whatever the problem is." Davik slowly stood. His feet braced apart in an aggressive stance.

Denise could feel her anger rising. "What? You two never need time to think?"

"You needed time to think because you saw us making love. You knew we were lovers." Camin shook his head. The doubt was clear on his face.

"Did you even listen to what I said to you last night? Neither of you ever seems to hear a word I say! It's no wonder you don't know anything about me or my needs." She threw up her hands and started to walk to the other side of the room.

Camin's hand gripped her shoulder and turned her to face him. His lips were clamped tightly shut.

"Then why did you need the time?" Davik walked over to stand on her right side as if to prevent her from walking away from them again.

"I told you. When I saw you two in bed, I realized that neither of you had ever touched me with that kind of emotion. Both of you are always gentle, always controlled with me. The comparison between the emotions you shared and what you show me made me wonder why you even touched me. I wondered if you even really saw me at times." Denise looked up into Davik's brown eyes and saw something intense flash through them.

Camin's jaw tightened but his voice was tightly controlled. "Give us some examples of not listening to you besides last night when we were angry."

"How about the fifty or so times I've told you that I'm not Aeva? That I'm not like her? You both gave me soothing words but you obviously didn't really get that it meant I'm different from her. That I need things she didn't." Denise narrowed her eyes. Her anger rose as she thought about all those times. She might as well have been talking to a wall. Apparently they'd never wondered just how different she was.

"We thought that you meant you weren't meek and wouldn't be bullied by us." Davik frowned.

"Apparently we've had more than one misunderstanding. I don't want to come between you two. I know that your relationship with each other is important to you but I want to be important to you too. I want more," she said, and sighed. That had to be one of the biggest understatements of her life.

"You *are* important to us." Camin's hand tightened as if he were trying to reassure her.

"Tell us about more of these misunderstandings we've had about our relationship," Davik demanded. "Why do you think we don't care for you?"

"Except for that one kiss in front of me, you always keep your relationship with Camin separate, never really let me be close to that part of your life. Until last night, I hadn't had time to think about it." She worked at keeping her voice even and her muscles from tensing with the anger building inside her.

She saw the two men look at each other. Some form of nonverbal communication took place and they seemed to come to a decision.

"There was a reason for that," Davik began, but stopped when she shook her head at him.

Denise decided to delay the explanation for a few moments. They wanted to know what bothered her and there was one thing that she had to tell them. Now that she'd started she wanted it all out in the open. She rubbed her hands down the soft blue fabric of her pants.

"Neither of you pressed for more from me. I know what kind of relationship you wanted with Aeva. It scared her at first. When you seemed satisfied with gentle and sweet with me, at first I didn't believe it. Then I started wondering why you were

satisfied with less than it all." Energy pulsed through her. She wanted to move, to pace, but they held her still directly in front of them.

"We wanted..." Camin's voice trailed off.

Fury rose within her. "You wanted *what*? Because I know you didn't even ask what I wanted from you. I told you I wanted you and Davik both. You ignored me! So can you really say you wanted me?"

"Not really want you? Woman, we made love to you every night at least once, most of the time twice a night each!" Davik glowered down at her.

"Yeah, and you might as well have been male prostitutes I'd paid for all the real emotion you gave me. You always held yourselves back from me!" she yelled. She'd tried to keep her anger under control but they didn't even seem to be trying to understand.

"You want to know why we held back?" Camin's hand fell from her shoulder.

His voice was soft but she couldn't stop the shiver from ripping up her spine. Nothing was hidden now. Anger and dominance rolled off the man in front of her. She took a step back and felt the cold, solid surface of the wall behind her. But she wasn't afraid. Excitement surged inside her.

"Because you didn't feel that way for me?" She shrugged and tried to keep from smiling. She liked this side of them and didn't want to ruin it.

Davik growled. "Because we didn't want to scare you. We didn't know how much experience you had or what you liked. It seemed like a good idea to wait."

"And of course asking me was out of the question." The sarcastic remark slipped out before she could stop it.

"You don't know what you're courting." Camin stepped forward. His hand circled her wrist and lifted her arm, pressing it to wall beside her head.

"Don't try to scare me. You don't know me. You don't know what I like. You wouldn't be the first person to tie me up or hold me down."

Camin's eyes widened and he seemed stunned.

"Shocked? I'll go even further. I want everything you have to give to a person, no holding back. Or walk away from me now. I won't accept only what you think I can handle." She leaned forward and bared her teeth at him.

Davik's hand cupped her cheek. "You'd better be sure."

"I'm not the one who's been confused about who I'm dealing with. Stop assuming I'm an exact copy of her. In thoughts, feelings, actions and experience, I'm very different." Denise held her breath as Davik stepped back. Were they backing away from her, from what she needed? She could see the intensity in their eyes but their touch was so soft.

Davik pressed her other arm against the wall. "A pity we don't have the restraints to hold her. I'd like to watch her writhe as I warm that firm ass."



"You tensed when I touched your anus when we were making love to you. We thought that maybe you didn't like it or hadn't tried it," Camin offered as his thumb traced circles on the inner skin of her wrist.

"Maybe you should have asked. It felt good. Forgive me for reacting." She exhaled heavily and blew a strand of hair away from her mouth.

His eyes had locked on her and she could swear he hadn't blinked since he'd pressed her hand to the wall. The man was testing her again. Seeing if she'd go into hysterics over a spanking or a little mild bondage. He had a lot to learn.

"What's a pity is that I left all my toys at home. I could show you how to use a flogger since you're all talk." She smiled. "Now are you going to do something, or have you forgotten what you like, old man?"

Camin drew in a sharp breath. "Ooh, now that wasn't very smart but who am I to interfere in your headlong rush to a red ass?"

Denise took a deep breath. If they didn't stop testing her every step of the way, she was going to completely lose her temper. They still doubted her. She wasn't afraid of them or anything they'd do with her. Why couldn't they see that?

"Oh, am I supposed to tremble and beg for you to stop, please stop? Since you two can't make up your mind, I've decided for all of us." She tensed her muscles and lifted her arms off the wall.

They weren't really holding her with all their strength. They hadn't even come close to restraining her. Even this light grip and the fact that they let her raise her arms angered her. She twisted her wrists free of their grasps and slipped from between them.

"What have you decided?" Davik's brown eyes narrowed and a wicked smile curved his lips.

She suddenly wasn't sure that provoking them was a good idea but she wasn't going to back away. She rolled her shoulders and tilted her chin upward. It was the only way to get a real reaction from them. They were too controlled, too focused on not scaring her with their wicked ways.

"I'm going to find a man who actually wants me. You two—" She yelped and stumbled back as they exploded into motion.

Davik scooped her up and held her in spite of her wriggling to get free. Joy and excitement danced through her. Finally they were beginning to show their true feelings. She'd almost given up hope of breaking through their doubts.

He sat on the edge of the bed and in one swift move, she found herself draped across his thighs. Her black hair fell around her face, blocking her vision. One of his hands braced in the middle of her back, the other rested on her buttocks. She wondered if he'd suddenly begun to fear her reactions again.

He didn't leave her in doubt for long. His hand rose and landed with stinging emphasis on the rounded curve of her buttocks. Once. Twice. Each swat sent a

reverberating pulse through her, straight to her clit, enflaming her. Her breath hissed as heat rushed over that portion of her anatomy.

"Never threaten to go to another man again," Davik grated from between clenched teeth.

The sharp heat flaring over her ass might have kept her cautious if they hadn't been so stubborn over the last few days. She had to prove that she could take them at their worst and not run screaming. Before this little tussle was over, they wouldn't have any doubts about her.

She wasn't the type of woman who just gave in after a few sharp swats to the ass. If they wanted her to respect them, they'd have to prove that they could dominate her. Especially after being so hesitant with her for so long.

"Why? If you can't give me what I want, I'm sure there's someone who can." She put her hands on his thigh and tried to lever herself off his lap.

The growl that reached her ears didn't come from Davik. Camin strode forward and knelt beside her. He took her hands and pulled them away from Davik's leg just before she could sink her nails into the man's thigh. Transferring both wrists into one large hand, he tipped her face up and looked into her eyes.

"You're *our* woman. No other man will ever touch you again," he rasped in a strained voice.

Davik's hand landed in a hard swat. "You won't ever want anyone else. We'll give you everything you can handle and more."

"Let's get her out of those clothes. I want to feel her skin moving against me." Camin's thumb stroked along the inside of her wrist.

A thrill shot through her. Finally they were actually doing something instead of talking. She wriggled, eager to help in the undressing. She loved touching them and now she had male territory to explore.

"You're not going anywhere just yet. I want to hear you say it." Davik's hand pressed just a little more firmly against her back.

Denise frowned, confused. Say what? What did he need to hear? She'd already told them in no uncertain terms that she wanted them both. And the fact that she still wanted them when all they'd done was yell at her and spank her should tell them what she felt.

Davik's hand slipped between her thighs and found the damp heat over her pussy. He pressed and stroked through the fabric of her pants, his fingers finding her clit. He rubbed the hard nub through the cloth.

"Is this for us, or are you thinking about someone else?" Davik asked. His voice was soft and rough and she couldn't tell what he was thinking.

"Damn it, you know I want you." She gritted her teeth. Her hips rolled into those stroking fingers.

"Then you won't be looking for anyone else. I want your promise. Tell me that you'll never threaten to go to another man." His fingers circled the hard nub.

She drew in a shaking breath. She tightened her thighs around his hand, riding his fingers.

"No." Davik withdrew his hand. "You don't get your pleasure until we say."

"Your promise now," Camin ordered.

Denise felt a surge of desire roll through her at that hard, commanding tone. Distracted by the sensation, she didn't immediately obey the order. A large hand landed across her right butt cheek, leaving a flaring sting as it rose.

"This doesn't require thought." Camin's voice roughened. "All you have to say is yes."

She drew in a hissing breath. "Yes, I promise."

Camin released her hands. His warm fingers smoothed over her buttocks in a soothing caress. Davik's hand's gripped her waist and he lifted her. Putting her on her feet just in front him, he let his eyes rove over her body.

"You will remain absolutely still while we take off your clothes." Camin stepped forward to stand at Davik's side.

"Will I? Why should I? I'd much rather help you undress." She wouldn't make this easy on them.

Davik leaned down until they were face to face. "You will do it because you want us to touch you. If you can't follow rules, then we'll just keep you nicely heated and ready until you can."

She raised an eyebrow. They couldn't think that she wouldn't test them. Almost any time she'd said, "I need," they'd given her satisfaction. Would the words work now?

"That gleam in your eyes tells me you're not convinced we mean what we say. You're still trying to lead when we're in control. You'll just have to learn that on your own." Camin brushed his hand over her cheek.

She could see the relief and excitement in his eyes.

"I never was much good at following rules." Denise reached out and patted Camin's buttocks. Time to push, just to see how dominant they really were.

"You'll learn." He caught her hand. "And apparently, it'll be the hard way."

Moving behind her, Camin caught her other hand, pulling it behind her back. She wriggled, just to see if she could get free of his hold. It didn't feel that secure. His fingers tightened around her wrists, holding her still.

"Stand absolutely still. I'm going to take off your clothes." Davik's fingers trailed over her stomach. "You've already earned some punishment. If you disobey, you'll earn some more."

Her eyes met his. The intensity and need in his brown eyes nearly took her breath away. Satisfaction mixed with hunger. Predatory intent lined his face. Part of her relaxed, seeing that. This was what she'd needed.

Davik saw her eyes widen. Excitement pulsed through him. He couldn't see any sign of fear. Even when she'd been standing there with a mocking smirk, it had seemed like a gift and more than he'd expected so soon. The woman was testing them but he could handle that.

He hadn't wanted to repeat the mistake he'd made with Aeva. Pressing too hard too soon had cost them years of happiness. With Denise, he'd been prepared to wait as long as it took and to slowly introduce her to their needs. Even though he'd been with her nearly every day, he'd never guessed that she'd wanted more.

"Camin's going to release your hands. You won't move, won't try to touch us." Davik stared into her eyes.

Her head lowered submissively for a moment. She raised her head and her jaw tensed. He saw then that she wanted to submit. He also saw the determination in her eyes. For a moment, he wondered what had caused that look. Then he remembered her words. She wanted everything. No holding back. He couldn't blame her now that he saw things from her perspective. They had been keeping this side of themselves from her. Soon she wouldn't have any doubt about them. They wouldn't be backing away from her or the challenge she'd flung at them.

Now they just had to prove to her that they would and could dominate. She'd maneuvered and provoked every response so far but that ended now. The first step was stripping away her clothes and her doubts about their intentions.

He began working on her cream-colored shirt. Camin released her hands and stepped around her. She stood quietly in front of them but he could see her watching them, waiting. He knew she was prepared to do whatever it took to get their attention. She had it. Her provoking behavior would have to stop. He didn't want her to be able to think of anything but them and what they were doing to her.

"Have you ever given your control completely to someone?" Davik pushed the shirt over her shoulders and let it fall to the floor.

Camin reached out and gently tugged at a dark brown nipple. Denise gasped and licked her lips. The sweet scent of her desire increased. That didn't change her caution. Her eyes moved between them even as her arousal rose.

## Chapter Twelve

"You'll give control to us, all of it. You want all of us, everything we are. We'll have the same from you." Camin kissed the slightly darker stripe of skin at her collarbone.

She shivered, a soft moan escaping her lips as his feathered over that sensitive skin. By the moons, she wanted them to take control. She'd dreamed of it, ached for it. Now that it was right in front of her, she was almost afraid she was going to wake up and find it had only been a dream. She didn't know if she could accept just sex games if that was all that it was. Seeing the heat in their eyes, the predatory dominance in every line of their bodies only reinforced what she'd been missing.

She was all too aware of her desire as she stood in front of them. Her body was going wild. Her buttocks tingled. Those sharp swats had sent fiery arousal streaking through her. Camin's lips had felt like a sweet, searing brand and the heat had lanced straight to the tight knot low in her stomach.

Davik's hand's released the catch on her blue pants and pushed the soft fabric over her hips. He knelt as he slowly slid the cloth down her thighs. She resisted the urge to wriggle her hips and help him remove her clothes. She wanted to savor every touch. The smooth fabric pooled around her boots.

"You wear entirely too many clothes. When we're recalled, we'll definitely do something about that. I want to be able to taste and touch you whenever I want," Davik said, his voice a low, rumbling purr.

The image sent sensation spiraling through her. She felt the moist heat of his breath brushing over her thigh a moment before his fingers trailed up her calf. She could feel the hot, slick juices on her thighs. Their scent swirled around her, heightening her awareness and arousal. She wanted them but was half-afraid it was all wishful thinking. She couldn't be sure she wasn't imagining the dominant attitude. She wanted it so much and right now she was too caught up in what she was feeling to really think.

"Spread your legs. I'm going to lick that sweet cream until you're screaming." His tongue swirled over her thighs as his fingers tickled the back of her knees.

She spread her legs but looked over her shoulder toward the bed. That would be so much more comfortable and she wouldn't have to worry about ending up on the floor if her knees went weak at a crucial time.

Camin moved behind her. A light stinging smack landed on her buttocks. "This isn't your decision. You'll trust in our judgment and that we'll always take care of you," Camin ordered. She could feel the heat of his body as he leaned into her.

The forceful command in his voice thrilled her. She felt a rush of desire and a flow of her juices on her labia. She licked her lips and nodded. Camin moved behind her. He brushed the hair away from one side of her neck. His chest pressed against her back.

"Hook your thumbs into the waistband of my pants and keep them there." Camin's right hand flattened over her stomach.

His voice had dropped to a sexy rumble. She felt a tremor course through her. For a moment, she wondered if she should make them work for it a little more. Her own need decided the issue. She reached back and hooked her thumbs into his pants. Camin pulled her back against his chest. Davik's hands kept her hips exactly where he wanted them. The vulnerability of the position hit her but she wasn't afraid. It only spurred her desire, made her want them even more.

"Oh yes, you like that, don't you?" Davik's hand slid up her thigh and back down. He lifted her leg and hooked it over his shoulder.

"Waiting for you to be ready was torture and you're going to make it up to us. You should have told us that you needed more." Camin's fingers slid up her stomach and molded over her breasts.

Her head lifted and she tensed but she couldn't work up the anger she'd feel later for that remark. The ache pulsing low in her stomach took priority over their selective memories. "I tried."

Davik's lips lifted into a predatory smile as he looked up at her. "Not hard enough. Your only duty tonight is to focus on what you're feeling and what we're doing to you. Stop thinking."

His hands gripped her hips again. His tongue lapped at the swollen, slick lips of her labia. Denise drew in a gasping breath. Her heart slammed inside her chest.

Camin drew her back even more, until most of her weight rested against him. She couldn't help think that if he moved away quickly, she'd end up on the floor. She drew in a sharp breath. His arms tightened, keeping her back against his body. Instinctively she tensed, trying to stand up straight. Davik stopped, looking up at her as he softly stroked her thigh. Being completely off balance sent a spurt of adrenaline and desire through her.

"Shh... Relax. Would I let you fall?" Camin asked, a hint of laughter lurking in his voice.

She relaxed and slowly shook her head. He wouldn't let her fall. She'd trust him to hold her like this all day if necessary. Not that she could take their teasing nearly that long.

Davik smiled up at him. His fingers traced down her thigh. She angled her leg a little outward in invitation. Tension simmered inside her body as anticipation built to a higher peak.

"You want my mouth on you, don't you?" Davik asked. He nipped at her thigh.

A shiver shook her body as Camin's fingers rubbed across her hard nipples. She ached for more. She burned with arousal. They'd barely touched her in anything close to foreplay, yet she'd never been more excited.

"Yes, I want it." Denise answered.

Davik's tongue swirled across the plump lips. She drew in a sharp breath. Memories and anticipation sent desire flaring through her. Her clit throbbed, aching for the feel of his tongue. His fingers parted the folds, exposing her clit to his hungry gaze. She licked her lips and watched as he leaned closer. He inhaled slowly. She saw his eyes dilate and he looked even more intense and hungry.

His tongue flicked over her hard clit. She tensed as a bolt of heat slammed through her. His hands gripped her hips, pulling her closer. She gasped, rising onto her tiptoes. She wanted to move against him but his hands held her still. All she could do was watch and wonder what he was going to do next.

He licked and feasted. He seemed utterly focused on her pussy. Her back arched and she moaned. Raging arousal clawed through her. His tongue circled her clit one last time before his mouth moved down. He began lapping at the juices spilling from her pussy.

"Please..." Her body trembled, her head pressed against Camin's chest.

Exquisite sensation built and whirled inside her. Her body ached and she lost all ability to think. All that mattered was the sweet pleasure she knew was waiting for her.

"You want this?" Davik's tongue swirled around her sensitive nub.

Denise held her breath but his tongue never quite touched where she most needed it. Her muscles seemed stretched taut and hot need burned inside her. In a few moments, she'd be begging him, ready to promise anything.

His hand tapped her thigh. The slight sting shot through her but only pushed her arousal higher.

"You want this?" he repeated.

"Yes, please, I need..." She met his eyes. She could hear the husky plea in her voice.

He smiled, all satisfied male predator. "No. You disobeyed us, threatened to go to someone else. You were very, very bad and don't deserve to come."

A sharp disappointed sound burst from her lips as he pulled back from her. He slid her leg off his shoulder and stood in front of her. He held her steady as Camin gently urged her upright.

Camin stepped around her and moved to stand beside Davik. He looked very happy, confident and utterly dominant.

"Go lie on the bed," Camin said.

She glanced over at Davik. He was over at the small table doing something. She walked over to the bed and slid onto the soft mattress. Moving to the middle, she looked over at them as they moved around the room.

"Put your arms out. Palms up," Camin ordered as he ripped a shirt into strips.

Davik turned and she saw something in his hands. She frowned. Those were some of the tiny figures he'd been working on for the past few days. Camin tied two strips around her wrists, tying the ends to the legs of the bed. Davik put one of the detailed little statues on each of the ends, well out of her reach.

"We're going to take a shower. You won't move while we're gone and you will *not* come." Davik's eyes narrowed as he pointed a finger at her.

She blinked in surprise and disbelief. They were leaving her here? Like this? Fine tremors ran through her body, arousal raging over her. They wanted her to stay still when the only thing she wanted was to come?

The demanding tone and the hard looks on their faces assured her they were utterly serious. She licked her lips. She didn't know if she could remain still and keep from touching herself when her body practically begged for orgasm. *They can't do this!* Blinking, she wondered for a moment if she'd taken on more than she could handle. She'd wanted dominance and had expected the spanking and a little punishment but not this.

"If those hands move, if they touch that pretty pussy, you won't be a happy woman for a long while." Davik put a hand on his hip and a devilish smile curved his lips.

"Our desires and your control are your restraints tonight. Show us how much you want us. Remain as you are until we come back." Camin looked at the four figures on the ends of the fabric. "If you move, we'll know."

Denise turned her head. He was right. She could break the ties, but she couldn't put those little statues back on both ends of the ties just as they had them now. They'd know if she moved her arms.

They stared at her for a moment then turned and went to shower, seemingly unworried about any possible disobedience. She drew in a deep breath. While she might want to disobey their orders, she believed they'd keep her wanting if she didn't stay as they'd put her. She didn't know if she could take much more.

*Focus on something. Don't let the arousal rule you. Show them you have some control,* she silently coaxed herself.

It was hard to think about anything beyond the need. The room was comfortable if a little on the cool side but it did nothing to lessen her arousal. She hadn't thought they'd leave her but it could have been worse. They could have stayed and touched each other. She didn't know how long she could have held off her climax if she'd had to watch that sexy sight. Just thinking about them kissing had the muscles of her pussy clenching.

She moaned as her desire rose another notch. She could feel the hot, thick liquid on her thighs. She tilted her head to look over at the door to the bathroom. When were they going to come out of there? Even though she knew they'd only been in the room for a short time, it seemed like an eternity.

Denise knew she couldn't take any more delay. She held her upper body absolutely still. The cool air on her pussy only made her more aware of the hot juices on her thighs



and labia. Each throbbing beat of her heart only seemed to make the need hotter. Her senses centered on her body's reactions, heightening them.

Just when she thought she couldn't take another moment, the door to the bathroom opened. Camin walked out first. His blond hair was wet, slicked back. His eyes locked on her. Davik followed, carrying a jar of oil.

Her heart slammed in anticipation. They were back. She had to fight against the urge to bolt up from the bed and jump them. She stayed absolutely still. Tension sizzled through her muscles.

"Now let's see how our woman did," Camin said as he began striding to the bed.

Davik walked to the right side of the bed and Camin to the left. She waited, holding her breath, wanting them. Were they just going to stand there staring at those little carvings all night? She didn't know how much longer she could wait for them.

Davik knelt down and picked up one small statue. He ran his fingers along the carved surface. She watched his fingers move sensually over the detailed carving. Damn it, she needed him to touch *her*, not some piece of wood.

"Well, these ones are just as I left them. How about the two on your side? Did she follow orders?" Davik's thumb lovingly followed every line and curve of the wood.

Camin bent and tilted his head from one side to the other, appearing to check the figurines. She turned her head and caught the amusement flashing in his eyes. She couldn't think of anything funny about this torture. He untied and picked up the carvings and tossed them over to Davik.

"Exactly as they should be. You want us very badly, don't you?" He reached out and drew his finger across her palm.

She almost gaped at him when he asked that question. She hadn't been lying on the bed, her body trembling with desire, because she felt like resting. What did he think this was all about? It sure wasn't sex. Although it had been rather predictable, the sex had been great. She wanted the dominance, the possessiveness, the explosive passion as well as gentleness. No holding back, no keeping a part of themselves separate. She was willing to take the chance and grab for it.

"Yes..." she answered hoarsely. Her throat felt tight and her heart slammed inside her chest.

Davik's hand cupped her breast. The light touch of his palm scraping over her nipple sent a bolt slamming straight to her core. She arched, desperate for more. He smiled and his fingers trailed over the plump lips of her labia.

"She's wet and by the look in her eyes, ready to climax within moments." Davik's fingers just grazed her clit.

Denise gasped and her body jerked. Rioting sensations built and whirled but didn't fling her free.

Camin scooped her into his arms. Settling onto his back, he held her against him for a long moment. His cock pressed against her, hard and hot and too much temptation to

ignore. As soon as his grip relaxed, she rose over him, straddling his hips and lowering herself slowly. His hand slipped between them and held his cock in position until she'd taken him into her sheath. She shivered as her inner muscles rippled around his length. The sense of fullness was almost enough to send her over the edge.

"That's what I like—an eager woman burning for completion." Camin pressed quick kisses to her lips and cheeks. "You're not going to come until we're both inside you. Do you understand me?"

Her inner muscles clenched at the gruff order. She tightened her thighs around his. Need pulsed inside her and she ached for release.

A sharp, stinging swat landed on her right buttock and thigh. The sting did get her attention but it also made her more aware of the tight need pulsing over her body. The sting melded with the pleasure, taking it to another level.

"Do you understand?" Camin asked with a growl in his voice. His hands slipped over her thighs to her buttocks, parting them.

"I understand." She didn't know how she'd hold back. Just breathing took her precariously close to climax.

Another pair of warm, calloused hands smoothed over her back to her buttocks. Relief flowed through her. His slick fingers probed at the tight pucker, spreading lubricant and sending hot little tingles dancing through her.

"I've dreamed of fucking you with Camin for the first time. My dreams were never this hot." Davik leaned close and his breath brushed against her ear with every whispered word.

One of his fingers stroked into her rectum. It twisted and withdrew before two fingers pushed into her, stretching the tissues. She clutched at Camin's shoulders. Dragging in a ragged breath, she grabbed for control, trying to hold back her climax.

She moaned. "Please, I can't hold..."

Davik slowly pulled his fingers free of the clutching muscles. "So tight and hot. It's going to feel so good when I get inside you."

Every word sent the need flaring higher. She didn't know how much more she could take.

Davik's body brushed against hers as he rose over her. She felt the head of his cock brush against her buttock. She needed to move, to feel them both fucking her. The rounded head of his cock pressed against the tight pucker. The blunt tip parted the ring of muscle. Stinging sensations flared but they only seemed to add to the hot arousal rising inside her. Davik eased into her tight rectum slowly and the wait was torture.

She tried to push back onto his shaft but Camin held her hips. She groaned and locked eyes with him.

"No, you'll be still until he's all the way inside your tight ass," Camin ordered. "We want to fuck you as much as you want us but we won't hurt you. We're going to do this slowly."

She shivered, drawing in gasping breaths. Her head arched back. With her heart pounding, she waited because as much as she wanted that raging climax, she wanted to please them.

Finally she felt Davik's body press against hers. His shoulder brushed against her head as his shaft filled her. Her fingers clenched on Camin's shoulders, the nails marking his flesh.

Davik withdrew until just the rounded head remained inside her. She pressed back into him. As her hips rose, she lost the full, tight feeling of Camin's cock in her pussy. She wanted it back. She tried to lower herself back onto that thick rod but strong hands held her hips, guiding her movements.

Camin's hips drove upward as he pulled her down onto his cock. A groan tore from his throat as her inner muscles clenched around him. They moved her between them.

Denise could feel the climax rising. She strained to move but all she could do was rub her breasts against Camin's chest. Each thrust of their hips pushed her closer. She looked at Camin and saw his jaw clench.

Davik stroked into her, driving her hips down onto Camin's. Pleasure ripped through her, shattering the last of her control. She screamed, her body shaking with the force of the climax.

They drove into her faster and harder. She felt Camin tense, his hips driving up as he pulled her down. Hot semen spurted into her.

Davik thrust into her. He lasted a few more strokes. As jets of seed sprayed into her, a rumbling groan rolled through him.

For the first time, she felt complete. Davik's weight rested on her for a few moments and she absolutely loved the feeling of being pressed between them. Slowly he withdrew and gently pulled her off Camin. Denise felt so content that she could have easily gone to sleep. Settled between them, she snuggled into a comfortable position and threw an arm around Camin's waist.

"No going to sleep just yet." Davik pulled her into a sitting position when she again closed her eyes and tried to go to sleep.

"I'm tired. I've had a rough night," Denise grouched.

She wriggled in Davik's grip and then gave up the thought of getting free when his hand tightened. Stifling a yawn, she glared up at him. So much for basking in those rosy feelings. Irritation flared.

"You unleashed the demanding side of us. You're going to have to live with the results." Camin chuckled.

"I hate to break this to you but you already were demanding. You were just keeping part of yourselves locked away from me." She folded her arms across her chest and frowned at him.

"We kept this side of our sex life from you because we didn't want to scare you like we did..." Davik's voice trailed off and a red flush rose on his cheeks.

Denise knew exactly what they were talking about—the first and only time they’d tried to be with Aeva together. She had no idea how long they’d been together at that point but just from Aeva’s reaction to seeing them nude, Denise didn’t think it had been very long.

“The way Aeva had been scared. I’ve dreamed of that. You don’t even want to know what my first impression of that was. Sure she was a little scared at first. From what I gathered, she was relatively new to sex but both of you walking out on her without a word hurt her more than anything else.” She shook her head.

“It took the horror of that prison to bring us together. We wanted to do it right this time.” Davik’s hand stroked up her back.

“I told you I didn’t need coddling.” She smiled smugly.

“No you don’t. Now since you want all of us, you’ll get all of us. Starting now, when you’re in this room, you won’t wear a shirt, and if you’re not working, you’ll wear a skirt.” Camin drew his tongue over her shoulder.

She shivered as his tongue swirled across the darker stripe of skin on her collarbone. She drew in a deep breath and focused on their demands. What was behind it? They could be showing their dominance again but she doubted it. Since they hadn’t explained, she’d have to ask. As much as she loved submitting to them, they should know that it wouldn’t be happening in every part of their life.

“Why?” Denise tilted her head.

Camin smiled with predatory intent as his eyes traced down to her breasts. “We were going to introduce you slowly to *Norik* life, let you get to know us and our ways. That plan didn’t quite work. So you’ll start learning about them now.”

She didn’t know whether he was joking or as serious as he looked. “So *Norik* women don’t wear pants and in their private rooms they always go without a shirt?”

“Pants aren’t suitable clothing for a woman. As for the other, it’s not that simple. You’ll go without a shirt in these rooms so that you can get used to being without one.” Davik’s fingers trailed down her stomach.

“Exactly how often is a *Norik* woman without a shirt?” She folded her arms across her chest. A niggling suspicion slowly grew. They both seemed too eager. That and the words Davik had used did cause her to wonder the true meaning.

“As often as her mates can manage but at least at every meal.” Camin’s fingers plucked at her nipple.

“Every meal... Are they private like most of the meals here?” Denise licked her lips. Suddenly she wasn’t tired at all. She wanted to curl into their arms and savor what they made her feel.

“No, not usually. On the ships, we eat in one of the dining halls. But when we’re at home, we’ll be in private.” Camin’s fingers moved from side to side, just brushing the hard crests of her swollen breasts.

She bit her lips and looked at Camin through her lashes. Deciding she had to know exactly what he meant, she straightened. She wasn't taking anything for granted, not about this.

"The woman just goes without a top during the meal? Is there a reason for this custom?" she asked.

"Well, it makes it easier for her mate or mates to caress her, to love her." Davik's lips closed over hers. He drew her lower lip between his, sucking on it.

They certainly didn't make it easy to think. She leveled an accessing glance at his reddish-blond head. "Does any woman ever volunteer to join you? Or do all of them run for it as soon as they learn about you?"

"That's not nice. There aren't that many women among the *Norik* yet. Most of them don't know our customs before they join us." Camin shrugged.

"Are you bare-chested as well during the meals? Does the woman at least get to touch her man too?" Denise asked.

"No, why would men be bare-chested? They usually have to return to their duties after the meal. It's all about reinforcing the bond between male and female." Camin patted her thigh.

"The public display is about reinforcing a bond." She rolled her eyes. It might have that effect but she didn't believe that was why they did it at every meal. "Don't think I missed the fact that you didn't fully answer my question."

"No, the women don't touch and caress their man...men." Davik frowned. "You'll like being the focus of our attention as we show you how important you are to us."

"And baring my breasts in public and allowing you to fondle and grope would do that?" She didn't try to sweeten the sarcasm coating her voice. She couldn't believe they expected her to buy that story.

Davik's brows lowered and he frowned at her. "Oh, it does and it also allows us to give impudent mates a touch of punishment when she needs it. Now, before you earn a taste of it, come here and we'll go to sleep for a short time. We didn't get much sleep last night either."

He sprawled on the bed. His arms opened, inviting her into his embrace. The desire to argue warred with her exhaustion. Exhaustion won easily. She went into his arms with a sigh and cuddled against his side. She felt the bed shift and Camin's body pressed against her back. As much as she'd like to nap away the day with them, they would have to get up at some point. They all had duties.

## **Chapter Thirteen**

Denise smiled as she turned away from the bar. She felt Davik's eyes on her as she wove her way toward the tables. Tonight the bar was crowded with miners. The men and women had just been paid and the crowd always increased then. They got a little more rowdy then too.

She carried bottles and mugs over to a table, setting the drinks in front of each man. A hand slid up her thigh. Her stomach tightened and heaved. She stepped back hurriedly. As soon as contact broke, the tight pain and nausea began to fade.

She couldn't believe she'd forgotten to ask after the first time that had happened exactly what was happening to her. She definitely wouldn't be forgetting this time. Her body had tightened, rejecting that light touch as if it was a toxin. The question "why" reverberated in her head. If it were possible, she'd stalk over to the bar and demand an answer now. As packed as the bar was, they had no hope of even a moment's privacy for her to question the men.

Denise concentrated on her job and on not being touched by any male. On top of that, she knew she had to keep her eyes on the customers. Most of the customers were there to relax and have a good time, not cause trouble. But not all of them.

The threat of attacks still loomed. It kept her alert and aware. She didn't recognize any of the men or women present tonight but knew the assassins could be among the patrons. If they thought there was an opportunity to get to Nials, they'd take it. A crowded night like this could offer them a perfect opportunity.

The night stretched but finally the crowd began to thin. She looked around the bar and noticed three men leave a table. She recognized them from when she'd served them earlier. Part of a group of four. She'd had her eyes on them for a while. They'd ordered two rounds of drinks and both rounds had barely been touched. She could see the reflective surface of the dark liquor near the rim of the large mugs. They definitely hadn't come here to drink. They hadn't talked with anyone beyond their group, or danced.

The three men headed toward the bar. Continuing her duties, she knew she'd have to stay alert. They probably hadn't gone up to the bar to complain or talk to friends.

As she deposited drinks in front of a group of miners, she heard a distinct thump and the sound of breaking glass from the area near the bar. Before she could find the source of the disturbance, she saw the fourth man coming toward her. The slim, wiry man had shaggy brown hair and his blue eyes almost seemed to glow with hatred. Light glinted off a wickedly curved blade as his hand rose.

She gritted her teeth and slipped her own blade free of the sheath at her back. The guy stood between her and her men. She wanted to go help them but first she'd have to

get through the man who'd put himself in her way. Determination rushed through her. She took a step forward. He wouldn't stop her.

He lunged, the blade slashing up, going for her chest. The metal clashed as she blocked his knife to the side. She jerked back and took a more defensive stance. He didn't hesitate. The blade sliced through the air as he rushed forward. She danced back. For a few moments she just reacted, keeping away from the sharp blade. She hadn't expected such an aggressive attack.

Bumping into a table, she stumbled. The blade slashed her shirt but didn't get skin. She recovered quickly, moving out of reach. She kept her weapon up and ready.

"Denise!" She heard Davik easily in the bar that had suddenly gone silent. "Hold on!"

She cursed under her breath and swept her blade low toward her enemy's belly. Davik must have seen her retreating and thought she was in danger. Fear welled inside her. Not for her but for him. He'd be in more danger trying to get to her than if he let the men come to him.

That wasn't going to happen. He wouldn't be hurt because of her. She began advancing. Her blade sliced through the air in slow, short sweeps. Her muscles loosened and her body took on the slightly bent-kneed stance of a fighter.

The blade drove toward her stomach. She glided to the side, avoiding the sharp edge, and grabbed for his knife hand. She slashed the blade upward. The blade drove into his arm. He drew in a sharp breath and jerked back, trying to tear free himself from her hold. She held on to his wrist, squeezing. He wasn't getting away from her.

He kicked at her. She grunted as his boot smacked into her shin but kept her grip on his wrist. That knife would do more damage than his feet or fist could. She knew it would come down to either kill him or disable him. Killing him would draw too much attention. She slashed her knife up again. His arm rose to block it. This time, her knife sunk deep into his free arm. He yelped, his arm moving into his body. She twisted the wrist of the hand holding the knife. It clattered to the ground.

She kicked it out of reach. Sheathing her knife, she released his wrist.. She attacked. Her only thought was to end this fight but she knew it would be better to keep him alive. The last thing they needed was increased scrutiny by the guards. Her fist slammed into his jaw. He staggered but came back fighting.

His fist narrowly missed her chin. She jerked back and kicked him in the leg. One of his hands came up defensively. She hit him again. His fist connected with her shoulder. At that moment she barely felt anything. She only wanted to end this. Two quick strikes and the man fell.

She knelt beside him and took his belt. Using the strong leather band of the man's belt, she bound his hands. Looking up, she noticed the crowd had thinned. She wasn't surprised at all. Most of the men probably didn't want to be at the bar when the guards came. Just in case it was unclear who was fighting and who wasn't.

As her gaze swept the bar, she saw a flash of silver-white hair. Focusing on the moving man, she gasped and automatically took a step toward him. Her only thought was to get to the man and catch him. That was Drake, the leader of the mercs. Before she could take more than two steps, Drake had rushed out the front door.

She saw Philan come out the entrance to the private quarters. Her muscles loosened just a bit, relieved by the sight of extra help and the assurance that all was well inside the private quarters. She'd known that Nials and Sela would have been guarded once the alarm started ringing. All the levels would have been searched and secured.

Philan immediately moved to help Davik and Camin with the three men trying to get to the door to the private area. She kept back, not wanting to cause an even worse situation. Philan, Camin and Davik could handle the three men. In fact, she was a little surprised that Davik and Camin hadn't put at least one of the men down before Philan had arrived.

She saw Camin's fist slam into his opponent's cheek just as his other fist drove into the man's gut. Almost simultaneously the man's fist smacked into the side of Camin's face. Camin didn't even seem to feel it. He delivered a vicious uppercut to the man's chin. The man slammed back into the bar, crumpling to floor behind it. Camin disappeared as he knelt behind it, binding the man.

Turning her head, she saw Davik hurl his opponent into the wall once and then again. As Davik took the man down, Denise saw a tear in his shirt at his side. A red stain spread down the white fabric. He'd been hurt!

Before she could rush over to him, the screech of a chair being dragged across the floor ripped her attention away from Davik's wound. Her head whipped toward the noise. She saw the largest merc slam the chair across Philan's shoulders. He swung the chair again and bolted. He made it out the door before Philan could get to him.

Layla came into the bar. On the pretext of checking the men, she knelt, administering the drug. Denise waited until she'd dosed the merc at her feet before she went over to Davik. He smiled and held out his arms in invitation. She grabbed his left hand as she moved to his side. Lifting his shirt, she looked at the gash.

"How did you let this happen?" She probed gently at it. Fairly deep but not too long.

His body shook as he laughed. "Let it happen?"

She frowned and shook her head at him. This was no time for him to be laughing. He could have been killed. Fear and anger bubbled and swelled inside her. She'd never felt so trapped. The mercenaries wouldn't give up until they'd completed their mission or Nials and Sela were off the planet. Every message from the Tribunal was the same. "Hold on and wait for extraction."

"Drake's definitely here," she said quietly, keeping her hands on him. "I just saw him run out of the bar. There's no doubt that we're dealing with the worst situation here."



"We'll handle trouble as it comes to us. We're not going to be here forever. Do you think I'm going to let anything happen to you now that I've found you?" Davik's lips settled on her forehead in a comforting gesture.

She hated this. The waiting was enough to drive her insane. She wanted to do something, to take some action. Even if they'd managed to stop all but that last man, they would still have to be on guard. They had no idea how many mercs had come after Nials.

She knew her emotions were out of proportion to the injury. The only thought running through her mind was that there would probably be another attack. That image ricocheted through her. Damn it. She felt like going out and hunting down those mercs.

"I'm all right. It's just a minor cut." Davik turned and settled his hand on her shoulders.

She took a deep breath. It wasn't really the cut. By the moons of Dracia, she only now realized just what was behind all this gut-churning panic. She'd been so satisfied lately and before that focused on getting them to see her as more than a fragile female they needed to protect. She hadn't seen it. It wasn't just the sex, although that was great. Her feelings had grown so much. And that scared the hell out of her. She really didn't know much about them beyond the little they'd told her. She needed to know more. They talked about her being with them on their ship. She couldn't even think about going with them until she knew more about them and how they felt.

"I don't remember that excuse having much effect when I got cut. It needs to be cleaned. She let him pull her against his unhurt side.

"No, it didn't. I'll let you take me back to our room as soon as the guards get here." Davik dropped a kiss on her cheek.

Denise licked her lips. "You know you're still bleeding a little?"

"Don't worry. I've had worse." He gave her a reassuring squeeze. "If you want to hold a pad to it, I'd let you as long as you keep that delicious body next to mine."

His eyes sparkled with a mixture of lust and enjoyment as he looked down at her. The man was hurt and he was thinking about sex. A glance below his waist proved it wasn't just talk. The thick ridge of his cock was clearly outlined by the snug fabric of his pants.

She shook her head and grabbed a towel from a shelf beneath the bar and pressed it against the wound. His free arm pulled her against his side.

"You could at least act like you're hurt." She leaned into him.

He had to know how much seeing his injury effected her. Her voice shook and she could feel the tremor in her hands. She felt weak. She didn't want to let him out of her sight.

\* \* \* \* \*

Denise stretched and looked across the table at Jasi and Layla. She'd needed a little time alone so she'd told Davik and Camin she was going to talk to her friends. Her mind hadn't stopped working since Davik had been hurt. She needed to know more about them than the dreams of that past life. She needed to know what they felt and why.

The trouble was every time she asked them a question they seemed to go off on a tangent about how they looked forward to being with her on their ship. She wasn't even going to think about their ship or going with them until she knew exactly what they felt. Those two might be dominant but they should know by now they didn't rule every aspect of her life.

"If you're going to scowl, you'd better have a reason. Considering the attention those two give you, I don't think you have one." Layla's voice interrupted her brooding.

"Ah but it's those two men I'm thinking about." Denise met Layla's eyes.

"Then maybe they're doing something wrong." Layla raised her eyebrows and laughed. She leaned back in her chair, balancing it on two legs.

"I'm not having a problem with what they do. I just can't get them to talk." Denise bit her lip. And she needed to know the answers to the questions circling her mind.

"Talk about what? I sure wouldn't be thinking of talking if I had those hard-muscled men following me around." Jasi rubbed her hands together.

"Maybe that's what she needs to talk about. There are two of them. From what I've seen, dealing with one would be a trial. Two would probably be impossible," Layla offered. "And they all like to give orders."

Denise looked up at Layla and frowned. The fact that two men were focused on her didn't seem all that strange to her. She'd been dreaming of them for years and multi-partner relationships weren't that rare. Many worlds had some form of them.

"I'll admit I have moments when I wonder if I've taken on more than I can handle," she admitted. Sometimes she felt more than a little out of her depth, a little lost. They seemed to forget that she'd just met them and talked as if she knew something about a particular incident or person.

"You wouldn't know it by the way you act with them." Jasi tilted her head and idly tapped her fingernails on the table.

"What do you mean?" Denise frowned. She knew she hadn't had many public arguments since they'd come together but she hadn't been that agreeable.

"When you're with them, your body's always angled toward one of them. Your body brushes against theirs at every opportunity as if you can't resist touching them. You flirt and tease. I just don't see how you can be so at ease with two men. They're both so possessive but neither of them seems to want you for himself. I don't know if I could just be shared like a toy or a computer." Jasi shrugged.

Denise admitted that Jasi had a few points about her behavior. She was always aware of the men. Teasing them just felt right and she loved their reactions, the way they became aroused at her touch or the lightest innuendo.

"They've been together a long time, Jasi, and on top of that they're lovers. They probably had their troubles during the first years together. And personally, as long as there is a Davik and a Camin, there's no way I'd choose between them." Denise picked up her glass and took a long drink of the fruity wine.

"You mean if those two came to you and told you to choose between them, you'd walk away from *both* of them?" Layla asked.

Denise nodded. Just thinking about choosing between them tore at her heart. Davik and Camin had different personalities and different methods but she couldn't choose one over the other. They were both her men.

"So what is your problem? You've got two gorgeous men who almost never take their eyes off you. Our situation here almost guarantees you a chance to leave if that's what you want. The shuttles go to Tribunal worlds. They won't be able to make you go with them. All you have to do is get on another shuttle." Layla looked genuinely confused.

"I don't know enough about them. Getting them to really talk about who they are has been impossible." Denise traced little circles on the table with her fingertip.

"What do you want to know about them that's so important that you might walk because of it?" Jasi reached over and put her hand on top of Denise's.

"I need to know about how they live. I know about the men from the past and I know that even without their attitude, I might not have been able to deal with them." Denise sighed. That was an understatement. She knew she couldn't live with the restrictions Aeva had faced.

Her friends frowned, their confusion evident. She knew that had been such a broad statement but she didn't know enough to go into real specifics. They didn't ask about it.

"Is there anything else holding you back?" Jasi asked.

Denise grimaced. There *was* something else. Sometimes it was all too easy to lose sight of it when she was in their arms. She knew that if she did ignore it though, it could lead to unhappiness for herself and them.

"What?" Jasi caught her eyes and leaned forward. "I know there's something else worrying you. You've got that look and you've gone quiet and still."

"She's right. So give. You've given your body, what else keeps you from handing them the rest?" Layla leaned forward and the front legs of the chair hit the floor with a dull thud.

Denise saw her friends' eyes narrow. They knew her just as well as she did them. They wouldn't stop asking. She took a deep breath and tried to organize her thoughts. Talking about it felt great and she wanted to explain this as clearly as possible. Her thoughts felt like a confused jumble.

"Like I said, there's so much I don't know about them. How they really feel about me for one." She bit her lip but shook her head to clear it. She wasn't going to think too much about that one until she figured out what to do. "But what really worries me is that I don't know how they'd feel about me continuing to fight the companies."

Jasi frowned. "That worries you more than the first. As protective of you as they are now, I don't think they'll allow you to traipse off to fight wars."

"Those two men care for you, Denise. That should be obvious. They won't let you face danger alone." Layla nodded.

"I don't want to face it alone. I just need to help with the fight in some way. After seeing and doing what I have, I can't just walk away." Denise felt a deep responsibility to fight, to help end this.

"The only way you're going to be able to find out anything is to ask them." Jasi looked at Denise steadily. "You seem to have found something good. Are you going to walk away from it at the first sign of trouble?"

## Chapter Fourteen

Aeva left her room early in the morning. She didn't want to see either man right now. The night had been hard and long and she really wanted to start the day right. At this moment, any meeting with A'Camion or Davorik would start the day wrong. Her relationship with them was barely civil at the best of times.

Walking in the forest, she let the cool breeze off the mountains relax her. Soft grasses brushed against her legs with every step. The crisp, sharp scent of *sarlich* and the *cabura* trees drifted to her on the wind. The scent of the *cabura* almost made her turn around and go back. It reminded her of Davorik and she didn't want to think of him. She strode deeper into the trees. The soft, dappled light soothed some of the tension inside her.

She had no destination in mind. She just wanted time away from the men and the tension that had grown between her and them. Unfortunately she'd have to go back.

The idea of walking into the forest and not returning held too much appeal. It wouldn't work. At least one of the men would come after her but not because they really wanted her. They'd bring her back because it would reflect badly on them as warriors if their mate just disappeared. That's what it always came down to for them—appearances, what others would think of them. She didn't care anymore. She was tired of being an unwanted guest.

"You shouldn't be wandering the forest alone. There have been sightings of strangers in the area." A'Camion's voice sounded from close behind her.

Aeva stiffened but didn't turn around to face him. "Why should that make any difference to what I do?"

"They could hurt you, kill you or take you away." His hand gently brushed her arm.

The soft, deep rumble of his voice pulled at something deep in her belly, drew a response in spite of her anger. She shrugged, pulling away from his touch. With a few quick steps, she moved out of reach. She didn't want him touching her again. Turning to face him, she crossed her arms over her chest and kept a wary eye on him.

He watched her, a scowl curving his lips.

"I'm not concerned about any stranger hurting me. I'm safe here and I like the peace of a walk through the forest. So go somewhere else." She clenched her hands where they were resting on her arms. She didn't want him to see how angry he was making her.

"I *am* concerned about the strangers. They will not be allowed to hurt you." He put a hand on her arm again.

She snorted. "No, that's your prerogative, isn't it? Yours and Davorik's. Go back to him. I don't need a guard for a walk in the forest."

"Not without you. I understand that you're angry with both of us. Give it a little time," A'Camion said, his voice soft, coaxing.

"Give it a little time? We've been mated for a year and a half and do you know how many times I've been with you? Been allowed to be with my two mates?" she asked. She could feel the heat rising on her cheeks and knew more than her clenched fists were marking her anger.

"Um, no...but you have been with us." He looked a little chagrined.

"Sixteen times, A'Camion." She pulled out of his hold again, stalked a few paces away and whirled around to face him.

"That can't be right. You've been with us for too long." His head tilted and his brow furrowed as he seemed to be thinking about it.

"It's the exact number of times I've been in your bedroom and we certainly haven't had sex anywhere other than in that room. Davorik doesn't approach me much and you're too busy keeping him happy. Or maybe you just don't want me that much," Aeva ground out.

"I never realized..." His voice trailed off and he started shaking his head.

"That's just the way you two are about your relationship with me. You don't think about how separating your lives from mine makes me feel. You've made my life a misery and me a laughing stock! And the worst thing is, I've let it happen." She shook her head. This had gone on too long and it was past time that she did something about it.

"Someone's been laughing at you?" A'Camion straightened, his gaze sharpening.

"What do you expect? When Davorik's not ignoring me, he's snapping or growling at me. Then there's the fact that I have a completely different room from you two. I'm little above a guest here but far below the position of your Lady—and your people know it." She couldn't believe that she'd just accepted their behavior for so long. That was finished.

"You *are* our Lady. Any person who doesn't treat you as such will answer to me." A'Camion took a step forward.

"It doesn't matter anymore." She sighed. She was finished with worrying about what others thought and trying to make this relationship work. She knew it wouldn't ever be as it could have been, as she'd once dreamed. Good sex wasn't worth the pain and heartache she'd suffered.

"It matters. You'll sleep with us and we'll make sure everyone sees you as our Lady," A'Camion said decisively.

"Do you think Davorik would go along with that?" She chuckled mirthlessly. "I don't need your pity. In fact, I don't want anything from you anymore."

His eyes narrowed and he went utterly still. Aeva caught his curious, concerned look. She wasn't all that surprised. She'd never before acted like this with him. Then again, she'd always wanted to find a way to make the marriage work. She'd been willing to work and had tried over and over to make a connection. Davorik didn't want anything except occasional sex from her.

"What are you saying?" He watched her almost warily.

"I mean I'm finished trying here. I'm writing a letter to my father and I'm going home." She looked out into the trees. It was funny. She'd always thought that she'd feel defeated when she said that, like a failure. She didn't feel anything but relief.

"So you think you can just give up and go home?" He folded his arms across his chest and he gave her a considering look.

She had the distinct feeling that he wanted to grab her.

"Admitting that I can't make this relationship work isn't easy but it's become obvious I'm not even really wanted." She took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

She'd fought against admitting that. A part of her kept pointing out that the *Botisar* had matched her with them. The psychic wise man couldn't be wrong. Another part was more realistic. There were other people who'd left matchings. If she saw any hope of Davorik coming to accept her or A'Camion being more supportive toward her, maybe even helping her find a way through Davorik's shell, she'd stay.

A'Camion looked stunned but that was quickly replaced by fierce anger. "You will *not* leave us. There hasn't been nearly enough time for you decide that our relationship won't improve."

"Oh? How do you propose I make Davorik see me as more than a convenient breeder and servant? Should I wrestle him to the ground or beat him in combat? That's all he values. I'm not strong enough and I haven't been trained to do that." Her voice rose to nearly a yell and her hand sliced through the air.

"He doesn't—" he began, shaking his head.

"He *does* see me as just a female. He doesn't know anything about me. He doesn't care enough to take time to ask questions or find out. I'm just a body." She swiped angrily at the tears rolling over her cheek.

"He's different from the men you grew up with," A'Camion said, but it wasn't an explanation.

Aeva rolled her eyes. That was what he always did. He never offered more than empty words. No advice and certainly no help.

"Don't give me that. He's failed me almost since the moment I first saw him." She narrowed her eyes at him. She'd never thought she'd tell either of them how she felt. Now that she'd started, she couldn't seem to stop.

"Failed you? How?" Incredulity filled his voice.

Aeva shook her head. He really didn't see it. She hadn't thought he'd be that blind.

"When he joined with me, he promised to fulfill all my needs. Well, I need to be treated as more than just a body. I need to be part of this bond, not outside it. But that's where I'll always be," she said, trying to keep the emotion out of her voice. The lump in her throat didn't make it easy. The longing to feel as if she were really joined with them, to know they felt something more than desire, still burned inside her.

"I never thought about it that way. I know he hasn't. How was he supposed to know you felt that way?" He frowned.

She shook her head. She wasn't going to get into an argument about how he should have known. They'd made the same promises she had. If either of them had even looked or listened to her, they'd have known she needed something.

"You failed me too. What's *your* excuse?" She raised her chin.

"You mean because I didn't realize you needed more from Davorik?" A'Camion looked a bit confused.

"No, because you never gave me any help. I needed a man who didn't just stand there while Davorik ripped into me for walking into your room unannounced. I needed someone who didn't just step to the side when Davorik decided I wasn't even to eat with you," she hissed as her hands slammed onto her hips.

\* \* \* \* \*

Denise opened her eyes, fully alert and still feeling the anger racing through her from that dream. An arm at her waist tightened as if the man behind her could sense she was upset. More than likely she'd jerked a bit as she came awake. She relaxed back onto the soft mattress.

She wasn't going anywhere. In addition to the arm at her waist, a large foot hooked one of her ankles. Her other foot had somehow been sandwiched between two calves. A large palm cupped her breast.

Parts of that dream had really surprised her. She'd never have thought that meek little Aeva would have said even half of that. Aeva had always seemed so soft. It was kind of a relief to know that the woman had eventually taken a stand.

Like Aeva, Denise didn't want their pity. She wanted their true feelings and she wasn't going to settle for less. If they truly wanted her, she knew she could work around almost anything else.

She stared up at the dark ceiling. It was time to stop dithering. Even if she didn't like what they told her, she had to discover what they felt for her, more about them and just what her life with them would be like. The uncertainty was definitely affecting her. She'd been trying to get the truth without coming right out and asking. She'd thought she could get the answers with some subtle questions. That hadn't worked. Their replies had been too short and usually not what she needed. It had been frustrating the way they seemed to miss the point. At times, she'd wondered if they were deliberately misunderstanding her.



Subtle was definitely out. She'd have to find a time when they wouldn't be interrupted and press them for what she needed. Even that wouldn't be easy. She closed her eyes and tried to go back to sleep. It took a while but eventually she relaxed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Davik stood at one end of a darkened room. A golden light seemed to surround him. She saw him reach forward. A broad smile curved across his lips. She stepped forward, intent on walking into those strong arms. Camin appeared right in front of her. One of Davik's arms hooked around Camin's waist, pulling him closer in a decisive move. His lips slid across Camin's.

"You're all I need." His deep, slightly rough voice rumbled and seemed to echo in the nearly black room.

Her eyes widened and she felt hurt slash into her. The pain was so intense that she had to fight not to curl up into a ball. She took a step back.

The scene in front of her wavered. She knew she was dreaming but she couldn't stop the trickle of dread from flowing through her as another image solidified in front of her.

Camin stood with Davik just in front of the bed. Both men were nude and their skin seemed to gleam in the soft light. Their bodies were hard with arousal. Walking forward, their eyes locked on her. She stopped mid-step as she took in the cold, distant looks on their faces.

"What are you doing here?" Camin's voice was flat.

"I want to be with you," she said, taking a slow step forward. *A dream. This is only a dream.* She could change it.

"This is the bed I share with Camin. When we want you, we'll come to *your* bed." Davik's eyes bored into hers. "Now leave me with Camin."

\* \* \* \* \*

A hand gently shook her shoulder. She came out of the dream slowly. The images seemed burned into her mind and she could still hear those last words ringing in her ears. Pain flared and spread over her body in physical reaction. She knew it had been a dream but even the thought of hearing those words, having them treat her as nothing more than excess baggage, shook her. She couldn't take that from them. She felt too much for them. It would be better if she walked away rather than ever hear those words.

"Are you all right? You were having a nightmare." Camin's hand remained on her shoulder even after she opened her eyes.

The warmth and slight pressure felt reassuring and so welcome after the coldness of those dreams. The intense feelings still shook her and she didn't trust her voice to be

steady just yet. She knew her own fear and uncertainty fueled the dreams but she didn't know what to do about it.

"Is something bothering you?" Davik asked, rising on an elbow to look down at her.

"Nothing's wrong. It's just a stupid dream. I'll be fine." She forced a small smile and tried to relax her tight muscles. She wasn't ready to confront the feelings or questions behind them yet. She needed to think, especially after that dream.

They both gave her worried looks but settled back down beside her. Camin's hand rested on her stomach and Davik's palm cupped her hip. The weight seemed warm and comforting. It took her a long time to go back to sleep.

## Chapter Fifteen

Davik frowned as Denise swept the rag over the tables in a swift, practiced motion. His eyes seldom left her but hers seemed to skitter away every time he caught her glance. She'd been quiet, withdrawn for days, hardly saying a word to him. He could almost feel her pulling away from them. He wanted to find a way to stop it but she wasn't withdrawing physically, only emotionally, and she wouldn't talk about it. Whenever he asked, she always said nothing was wrong. Well, that nothing had a look of sheer panic in her eyes right now. He needed to find out what was putting that look there.

She came toward the bar and stowed the cleaning supplies in a cabinet. She washed her hands at the small sink, taking longer than usual. He saw her shoulders rise, heard her drawing in a deep breath. She squared her shoulders and turned to face him. Leaning back against the cabinet, she almost seemed to be bracing herself.

"I think we need to talk."

"You think... What do you think we need to talk about?" he asked.

When he saw her flinch, he knew his tone must have sounded hard and unfeeling. That was far from the truth. He was just nervous about what she had to say. She could be having second thoughts about being with them. His hands tightened at his sides. He couldn't give her up. She belonged with them and he'd do whatever it took to get her to see it.

"I need to know a few things about life with the two of you. Things I haven't asked before because I wasn't sure I wanted to hear the answers. Now I need to know. The uncertainty is eating at me." She closed her eyes briefly and drew in a shaky breath.

He could see that it had been. Her muscles were taut, the tension visible. He wanted to reach out and pull her into his arms but every line of her body seemed to reject any contact. For now he'd respect her space but that shell around her wasn't going to keep him away from her.

"Well, ask me. I'm not going to lie to you about it. You might not like some of the answers but I want you to know you will be with us. That decision has been made. It's not going to change." Davik folded his arms across his chest and gave her a long look. He was absolutely serious. He'd carry her off over his shoulder if necessary.

"Shouldn't Camin be here? This does concern both of you." She bit her lip.

He knew a stall tactic when he heard one. A small smile kicked up his mouth. She must really think that whatever she was going to ask was going to cause a problem. He could guarantee it wouldn't. It might make him angry but she would be staying with them.

"If you want Camin to be part of this, then we'll go find him and we'll talk in the room." Davik reached out and clasped her hand lightly.

She jumped and tried to jerk her hand out of his grasp. He held on to it and waited until she looked up at him. Her eyes widened as he let her see his determination. She licked her lips. He tugged her hand, dragging her out of the room and into the hallway of the private section.

They searched a temporary cold storage area where Camin had been, bringing up more liquor. Going down to the warehouse portion, they still didn't find him. Finally they checked the bedroom. Camin was there. His hair was wet and his blue shirt was draped across the chair. He looked up and the smile that automatically curved his expression froze and his eyes narrowed as he really looked at them.

"What's wrong?" Camin asked as he came forward, his long legs eating the distance between them.

"She needs to talk to us. Something's been bothering her." Davik turned and secured the door. He made sure it was locked. He didn't want any distractions now that she'd finally decided to talk.

"I thought we were going to let her come to us as long as she didn't take too long." Camin shot a significant frown his way.

Davik knew Camin thought he'd pressured her into talking, admitting something was wrong. He couldn't deny it had been a tempting thought but it hadn't come to that. Movement caught his eyes and he saw Denise walk around the table, putting it between them. Her hands flattened on its scarred surface.

"She wanted to talk. I didn't say anything about it." Davik held up his hands, explaining before Camin came to her defense. There hadn't been any real pressure on his part. Any pressure she felt had come from within.

"It was my decision but I can't say I was unaware of his feelings or yours. Your frowns and the looks on your faces at times told me everything I needed to know. You were more than aware something was wrong." She shrugged.

"What's been troubling you?" Camin asked. "What has made you so tense?"

"I've been thinking and I need some assurances on a few things. Being with you and Davik is great but I can't think about even a short-term relationship with you two beyond what we have here without knowing some answers." She took a deep breath and met their eyes.

Davik locked his muscles. He wanted to walk over there, grab her and inform her there was nothing even remotely short term about their relationship. But he knew she'd close off again, not tell them anything if he did that. They wanted her to *want* to be with them but there was no way they were leaving here without her. She might fight every step of the way to the shuttle, but she was going with them.

"What assurances do you need?" Camin's voice sounded tight and hard. Davik knew Camin must want to make her see the truth as much as he did.

She looked down at the table and seemed to be gathering her thoughts. "Okay, I didn't think we'd get this far yet. I thought I'd hear a lot of demands and possessive statements before you even wondered what I needed. I'm not sure if it's good or bad that you haven't said a word."

Oh she'd hear some demands and possessive claims if she didn't hurry. Davik didn't know how much longer he could just stand there. Acting as if he didn't care if she had doubts about them was straining his control. He wanted to go over to her and make sure she understood just what she was to them.

"I need to know I can make a contribution of some kind in the fight against our enemies. I've worked so hard helping others. I can't just go with you and do nothing." She smoothed her fingers over a small figurine he'd left on the table, picking it up and turning it, but her eyes never left them.

Davik drew in a deep breath, holding back the immediate rejection to her request. He'd known this subject would come up at some point but he'd hoped it would be much later. She didn't do safe work in a lab. The thought of her in any kind of danger sent chills through him but he held back. Just from her expression he knew how important this was to her.

"How involved? I don't think we'd be able to let you face any real danger. The idea goes against every instinct I have." Davik shook his head slowly. Part of him wanted to just tell her no. It wasn't what she should be doing. She should be safe.

"You can't be in danger. I won't lose you to them again," Camin vowed, taking a step toward her.

"You didn't lose me!" she shouted.

"You know what we mean," Davik growled as he took a step forward. His frustration grew with every passing moment.

"I'm not asking you to let me go into danger. All I want to do is help in some way, even if it's behind the scenes." She gently placed the carving back on the table. "I'm not going to say it'll be easy being stuck behind the scenes but as long as what I'm doing can help someone, I can be happy with that."

Davik stared into her eyes for a moment. He could almost see her pleading with him to try to make this work. She wanted this and she didn't want to have to fight with them to get it. He looked over at Camin, who looked a bit wary, but he slowly nodded.

"Okay, we'll find some way for you to help with the fight against the companies, a way that keeps you out of danger," Davik said. He could understand what drove her to want to help in the battle. The same urge rested in him but keeping her safe was also a priority. He smiled, trying to lighten the mood. "But you won't ever place yourself in danger. No racing off to rescue someone without us."

Camin's stance relaxed a bit. "Is there anything else you need to know? You said you needed assurances, more than one."

Davik braced himself for the worst. Her next request could be anything and he didn't want to ruin everything by letting his first response escape. With her, he needed

to think. She was trying to find a way to live happily with them. He couldn't do anything less for her. If that meant suppressing a few of his gut reactions, he'd do it.

"There's more than one thing." She rubbed her hands down her pants and closed her eyes briefly. "I need something more..."

Davik's pulse accelerated and his mind latched on to her words. He could only think of one way to finish that sentence. She needed more than what she had now. He'd hoped she'd finally begun to see this as more than just sex. But she still thought she could walk away from them at some point. So this had to be about something else.

"So what do you need?" Davik asked. He kept his tone carefully neutral, trying to think of other meanings for those words.

She bit her lip and lowered her head, looking at the table for a moment. "This is the tough one. You're going to have to let me stumble through this a little."

Camin took a step forward but stopped when she took a step back. Davik would love to go over there, wrap his arms around her and offer her a bit of comfort. First he needed to hear what she had to say. He didn't try to fool himself that his embrace would stay innocent for long. Once he got her in his arms, they wouldn't be talking any more.

"If that's what you need to do, then we'll wait. Talk it out until the idea is solid. If we get confused, we'll ask questions." Camin folded his arms across his chest and braced his feet apart.

Davik nodded when she looked at him for his agreement. She smiled and seemed to relax a little. The sight of her obvious relief gave him a little satisfaction. He'd feel better when she finished talking and he could get his arms around her.

"I want more between us than what you gave Aeva. I'm pretty sure you know that but I also need a few other assurances," she said in a voice so quiet that he had a little trouble hearing it.

Davik waited for her to continue. When she didn't, he asked, "What assurances? You know that we want you to be happy with us. We'll do almost anything to make sure you are."

"I know you and Camin mean a lot to each other and I don't want that to change," she said slowly, as if she were trying to think of the best words to use.

"You couldn't come between us." Camin's voice was soft, matter-of-fact.

Denise winced, her expression tightening for a moment. Davik saw the hurt in her eyes before she masked it. He knew she'd taken that the wrong way. She still hadn't realized that she was a part of them.

"I need to know more about you. You've told me a bit about your past and about what my life with you might be like but I need to know more about you, just as you do me. What you like to do. How you feel about things." She wrung her hands together and looked like she was thinking of running for the door.

"We'll talk about anything you want. We have no secrets to keep from you." Davik spread his hands. If she wanted, he'd sit down with her and talk all night long.

"I don't want to be relegated to another room. I want to be part of your life and I'm not afraid of your relationship with each other." She nearly stumbled over the words, she was in such a rush to get them out.

"We're not going to put you to the side. You belong with us. We came after you." Camin took another step toward her.

"We won't have separate rooms. You'll always sleep with us." Davik moved forward, wanting to take her into his arms. He had the urge to tell her that it wasn't so serious. Nothing was going to keep them apart but she still looked nervous, on the edge of panic.

"No separate rooms? You're sure I won't get in the way of your time with Camin, that you won't want private times?" She crossed her arms over her chest, seeming to draw in on herself.

"You're part of our relationship. Yes, you'll probably walk in on us making love sometimes but you're part of it. Think about walking in and seeing us with each other. How would it make you feel?" Camin eased around the table.

She raised her head and looked a little shocked. A slow smile curved her lips. "Maybe a little envious, but I'd love to see it again."

"Makes you horny, doesn't it? I love seeing Camin making love to you." Davik moved around the other side of the table.

"It makes me hungry," she admitted.

Davik took the final steps and moved up beside her, wrapping his arms around her. She leaned into him, her arms slipping around his waist. Camin's arms folded around her, securing her between them.

"Wait. There's one more thing I need to know." She eased back, looking up at them.

"What is it?" Davik asked a little warily. He didn't know what else she could need to know.

"Why do I feel really sick and in pain if a man other than you two touches me? Is there something wrong with me?" Her teeth worried her bottom lip.

Davik laughed softly, relieved that it was something simple. "There's nothing wrong with you. It's part of *Darsat* biology. After a woman has sex with her mate or mates, almost any skin-to-skin touch by another male will cause that reaction."

"You're joking?" Her eyes widened and she shook her head.

"No, it's always been that way for our people." Davik pulled her close again.

"Wrap those arms around me and let me feel that soft body," Camin urged. His voice held soft laughter.

Denise laughed, releasing Davik and turning to Camin. She hooked her arms around his waist, pressing her head against his chest. Camin's hand slipped down her back and cupped her buttocks.

"Is that all your questions, or do you have more?" Davik moved closer, wanting to be skin to skin with her.

"Nothing right now. I'll tell you if I have some more questions." She seemed more relaxed.

He still thought he saw a little hesitation in her eyes. She hadn't said anything about how *she* felt. She cared about them but was holding back for some reason. He didn't want her to feel she had to hide her feelings or protect herself from being hurt. He could understand her caution. She knew so much about the past and only a little about who they were now. Trust would take time to grow. He only hoped he could keep his temper under control until it happened. The urge to reach out, haul her close and demand a commitment grew with each day and with the emotional distance she tried to keep between them. He wasn't about to let her walk away from them but he wanted her to *want* to be with them.

"You know, this an interesting position but are we going to do more than stand?" she asked as she trailed a finger up Camin's ribs.

Davik caught Camin's eyes above her head. This might be the opportunity they needed. Maybe by showing her how much they trusted her, she would start to trust them. Camin nodded. He could still see some questions in his bond brother's eyes but they both trusted each other completely.

"What do you want to do? Would you like it if tonight is in your hands?" Davik asked, dropping a nibbling kiss on her shoulder.

"My hands? You mean I get to decide what we do tonight and how fast we'll go? Even if I want to tease and play?" She half turned in their arms to look him in the eye.

"You get to decide. As to teasing, we all have our limits and our hands will be free, so..." Camin flashed a predatory smile as his eyes ran down Denise's body.

Davik felt the shiver roll over her. The scent of her arousal filled his senses. He wanted to pull her against him and let her feel how much she affected him. But he waited for her decision.

"So what have you decided?" Camin asked. He kissed her cheek but didn't press for more.

"I think I'll take you up on the offer," she said slowly, her head tilting as she watched them, as if she half expected them to take back the offer suddenly.

"So what do you want us to do? Davik asked.

She bit her lip, looking from him to Camin and back again. "This isn't an easy thing, you know. You could give a little notice of a chance like this. So many ideas but half of them require ropes and we don't have those on hand."

Camin burst out laughing. "You can practice tying us up when we aren't under the threat of an attack. Until then, pick another idea. Time's wasting and I have ideas of my own."



Denise grinned and slipped out from between them and slowly walked a circle around them. Davik tensed as a warm hand cupped his ass. Her fingers tightened briefly and then fell away from him. She walked around to Camin. Davik saw her hand slip around Camin's waist and flatten on his stomach. It didn't stay there long. Sliding down, her fingers curled over the ridge of Camin's cock. Camin's breath hissed between his teeth.

"I want you to make me wild with your mouths and hands. I want to ride one of you until I come. After that, I want the other man to fuck me, hard." She put one hand on Davik's shoulder, the other on Camin's. "Can you handle that?"

"Are you sure? You don't want us at your mercy?" Davik asked. He'd never have thought she'd ask for that. He would have bet that she'd order them to undress and play with them until their control was pushed to the limit. In fact, he'd been looking forward to it.

## Chapter Sixteen

"Without some form of restraint, I'll barely get started before one of you touches me and once you start touching, you know kisses will follow. I start sucking on your cock, Camin will want my mouth on him and you both go wild." She shrugged. "Fun but not what I want right now."

"We could stay still and let you play," Camin insisted.

Denise raised a brow as she stood in front of them, doubt plainly written on her features. "You think? Let's see."

She dropped to her knees in front of Camin, unfastening his pants. His cock fell into her hands. She leaned forward, her tongue circling the head. Camin's fingers threaded into her hair.

"No touching." She didn't look up but drew back from the cock in her hand.

Davik wanted those fingers on him. His cock pressed against the suddenly too-tight confines of his pants. He fisted his hands to prove that he could control the urge to touch her, the need to feel her hot, wet mouth surrounding his shaft. It wasn't easy seeing and hearing her mouth working on Camin.

He shook his head, trying to tear his thoughts away from the image and the memories of her mouth closing over the head. *Think of something else.* He looked at her and saw her mouth take nearly all of Camin's cock. *Definitely don't look.* He stared at the wall.

That helped a little but Davik could still hear the wet slurp of her mouth as she drew back, and smell her arousal. It was pure torment. When her hand cupped his shaft through the fabric of his pants, he barely stifled a shout. He rocked his hips into her stroking fingers. Then she lifted her hand away from him. His body screamed for more. His hands popped open. He looked down at her and locked his eyes with hers. He saw the smirk on her face before her lips once again closed around Camin's shaft. Her mouth moved lower on Camin's cock before she lifted her head, releasing the hard member. She leaned back, her head tilted to one side. She just knelt there and seemed to be thinking.

"What are you doing, Denise?" Camin's voice sounded a little like it did when he first woke, rough and a little slow as if he were having trouble forming words. His eyes looked a little glazed and red tinged his skin as he drew in quick, rasping breaths.

*Camin obviously feels a little worse than I do,* Davik noted. He couldn't feel much sympathy. At least Camin had gotten to feel her mouth. Davik frowned. He wanted that mouth on his cock – soon.

"I'm thinking about what I want to do next. Since you two can obviously control yourselves, I need to think about what I want to do to you." She licked her lips.

Davik swore that his cock swelled even more. He closed his eyes. No matter what he'd stupidly boasted earlier, there was no way he could watch her suck Camin and let her hands roam at will over his body. He needed to taste, to touch and fuck her until she was screaming for release.

"Denise..." Davik almost didn't recognize the sound of his voice. It sounded as if he'd tried to swallow jagged rocks.

"Hmm..." She didn't glance up as she trailed her hands up Camin's thighs.

"Get out of those clothes and get on the bed," he ordered, watching as her thumbs swept up the inside of Camin's thighs, tracing the seam of his pants.

She looked over at him, seemingly curious. "What's wrong? You've both told me you could let me play."

"If you want those clothes to still be wearable, take them off." Camin stepped away from her exploring hands. "Playtime is over for you. Now we get to play."

Denise sighed. "Now see, this is exactly what I was talking about. I hadn't even gotten to any serious play and you've already stopped me."

"Move, *be'rai*, the floor and the table are looking too attractive. I want you comfortable." Davik clenched his hands and kept them tensed at his side. If he touched her, he knew he wouldn't stop until she was writhing and begging for him.

She took a deep breath, a soft smile curving her lips. Rising to her feet, she slowly made her way to the bed. Her hands worked slowly on the fastening of her shirt. Too damn slowly. It seemed to take an eternity for the material to part, revealing the gorgeous creamy-brown skin beneath. Then she had the temerity to start folding the thing. That was it. A rough noise escaped his throat. Her head turned and he saw her eyes widen. Finally she realized his patience had come to an end. He took a step toward her and she drew in a shaky breath.

Denise gasped. She hadn't realized that he was that close to the edge. Dropping the shirt, she slowly lowered her hands to the fastening of her pants. As much as she loved teasing him, she didn't want her pants ripped. Once Davik moved, Camin began closing the distance between them.

She'd known they were aroused. She could smell their heightened scent just as they could hers. Touching them, teasing them had excited her so much that she was surprised there wasn't a wet spot at the crotch of her pants.

"We'll go with your first plan but we get to touch you now. Since you took so long, we also get to undress you," Davik said, his voice low with a delicious growl rumbling in it.

Each prowling stride brought him a step closer, such a predator that a part of her insisted she shouldn't be just standing there. She should be running for the nearest

door. A look at Camin as he stalked around the bed didn't offer any reassurance. The stark, hungry look in his eyes reminded her too much of a hunter who'd just sighted easy prey. As nervous as those intense stares made her, she wasn't about to dash for the door. She wanted them, had incited this. She knew watching excited them and that touching Davik as she sucked Camin would push their control.

"But neither of you is undressed." She pushed her pants down a little, trying to do her best to get the clothing as loose and undone as possible. She really didn't think that their clothing was going to slow them down. It might very well be their clothing that got ripped off their bodies.

"We'll take care of our clothes after we get you naked and onto that bed." Camin stopped in front of her. "Those red lips looked absolutely fabulous wrapped around my cock."

Davik's hands gripped her hips as he stepped up beside her. His body pressed against her. She could feel the hard ridge of his cock. He rolled his hips.

"Do you see how excited you've made me?" he whispered, his mouth just a breath away from her ears.

"I can feel how much you want me." She laughed softly, slipping her hand around to cup his butt.

"No touching." Camin's hand gripped her wrist, pulling it away from Davik's taut ass. "You've had your chance to play."

"And I barely got started before you two decided you couldn't stand any more." She sighed, trying for a put-upon air. She loved being the focus of their attention.

"Then maybe you need to plan better." He grabbed the edge of her loosened pants, pushing them down as far as he could but Davik's body pressing tightly against Denise's stopped him. "You're not helping, Davik."

Davik's smile turned wicked as his finger circled the darkened tip of her breast. "It depends on what you call helping. Judging by that hard nipple and the sweet smell of arousal, I'd say I'm helping."

"Help get her out of these clothes and then we can both start on that part." Camin slipped his hand into her loosened pants.

Denise drew in a shaky breath. Unconsciously she widened her stance, giving his hand more room as it moved lower. Anticipation raced through her. She needed him to touch her but his hand barely seemed to move. Her hips moved restlessly. Just a little farther and his hand would touch her pussy. She knew just how good those fingers felt. Both men seemed to know just how to touch her.

"You want it, don't you?" Camin's fingers brushed over the slick labia, pushing between and just grazing her clit.

Sharp and sweet, the sensation pierced her but after that brief touch, his hand withdrew. She moaned. Teasing man. She reached out and grabbed his hand.

"No playing," she said. If she couldn't tease and play, they couldn't either.

"We're going to play. You have a long way to go before you're as excited as we are." Davik stepped back and worked her tight pants down to her knees. "Lift your right foot."

The commanding tone of his voice sent a shiver through her. She absolutely loved it. Just to push, she slowly lifted her left foot.

A hand smacked the curve of her bare buttocks. She gasped and wriggled. He put her left foot back on the ground without removing her clothes.

"I said your right foot. Now obey me." Davik looked up at her and narrowed his eyes warningly.

She lifted her right foot. He pulled off her shoe and tossed it away before pulling the right leg of her pants off. Placing her foot back on the floor, he tapped her left calf lightly. Denise rolled her eyes and lifted her foot. Moments later he had her left shoe and her pants completely off.

"On the bed, and wait for us." Camin stepped back, his hands already going to his pants.

"Oh you mean you don't want me starting without you? That sounds a little boring to me." She got onto the bed, moving to the middle. Her hands slid down her stomach. "I could make this go so much faster."

"No touching. We'll make sure you're hot. Don't push us on this," Davik warned in a very serious tone.

"What? Are you going to deny yourselves just to punish me?" She laughed softly at the thought.

"We wouldn't have to deny ourselves. I'd be happy to make love with Davik before I make love with you tonight." Camin stripped out of the last of his clothing. His voice sounded deep and smooth and the look he shot Davik said he'd be more than ready to do just that.

"You'd leave me unsatisfied, just because I touched myself." She raised an eyebrow, not knowing if she should believe him.

"We'd leave you unsatisfied because you didn't obey us but that wouldn't be all of your punishment. We'd warm that beautiful ass and make sure your body is screaming with need. You'd remember the lesson." He moved onto the bed.

"But that won't be necessary, will it? You'll wait for us," Davik said. He seemed completely confident.

She moved her hands to her side. Maybe she would test them. Some other time. She wanted tonight too much to see if they'd go through with that promise. Especially since she was fairly sure they would keep their word.

Davik crawled onto the bed, muscles rippling beneath his golden skin. She licked her lips. Heat curled through her. He lifted her hand and kissed her fingers. Smiling, he placed it on the sheet beside her.

"Relax. We'll take care of everything." Davik leaned over and nipped her shoulder.

Relax. That was impossible. Not when every bit of her skin tingled with anticipation. Her mind raced with the thought of where and how they'd touch her.

"Spread your legs. Let me see your pretty pussy." Camin smoothed a hand down her thigh.

She widened her thighs, the air cool against her wet lips. She wriggled. He moved between her thighs and flicked his finger over the hard bead of her clit. He drew his finger down to the slick entrance, his fingers circling, pressing on the sensitive outer tissue, before two thick digits pressed into her. Her muscles clenched and a shiver rolled down her spine. Her breath hitched as the heat low in her belly built to a higher level. Her fingers flexed, gripping the sheets as her hips rose into those stroking fingers.

"Beautiful. I love seeing you start to burn. Let's see if I can't help fan the flames." Davik's breath puffed over her belly.

She moaned. It wasn't necessary. Her body already raged with desire. She wanted them now. She could feel the desire building, tightening. Davik's lips feathered over her ribs. His tongue traced the curve of her breast. He flicked at the dark, hard nipple. She caught the curve of his lips. Her back arched, lifting her breasts closer to those lips.

He laughed softly, drawing back. "What do you want, Denise?"

"Put your mouth on my breast." Her hands clutched at his hair.

He drew her nipple between his lips but didn't take it into his mouth. Not the way she wanted. Hot breath rushed over her nipples, sending tingles slamming through her body. She tried to pull him closer. His tongue lapped at the tip of the taut bead.

She drew in a shuddering breath, on the point of begging him to really take her breast into his mouth. The man was pushing her to the brink of insanity with his playing. His mouth opened wider and he sucked greedily as his fingers plucked at the other tight bud.

Her hips arched up, pushing into Camin's stroking digits. The pulling tug of Davik's lips drove her wild. She writhed desperately as the sensation built, threatening to explode. Then it was all gone, the fingers withdrew and Davik's lips lifted away from her aching breasts. Shaking on the edge of orgasm, she wanted to scream.

Camin lay on the bed beside her and drew her over him. She straddled his thighs and sank down onto his hard cock. A ripple of pleasure rolled over her body. Her muscles tightened around his cock and she couldn't resist rocking her hips. It felt so good. Camin's hands fastened on her hips, urging her to move. She readily complied, eager, hungry. Her hips rose and fell with increasing speed and force as the sensations tightened.

Camin groaned, hips driving his shaft deeper into her channel. She moaned and gripped his shoulders, her nails sinking into the skin. She closed her eyes, biting her lip. The sensation of his cock pushing deep into her one more time shoved her over the edge.

She trembled, grinding her hips into his. Her clit pressed against him as sensation arced over her body. Pleasure sizzled through her. She felt Camin's hand guiding her

hips against his. He moaned, sweat beading his forehead. His hips lifted and he tensed. She felt his semen spurting into her as his hands tightened. She dropped onto Camin's chest, cuddling against him. His arms wrapped around her, holding her close. She felt his mouth nuzzling her neck, hot breath filtering through her hair.

"Did you like that? All satisfied and relaxed now?" Camin asked, nibbling on her earlobe.

"Mmm... Yes, that was wonderful," Denise said, turning her head to give him better access to her neck.

"I think you've forgotten something." Camin sucked on her earlobe. "You've got one hungry man almost looming over you and there's still half of your wish to fulfill."

"Something about me riding you hard." Davik's hands gripped her hips, pulling her up to her knees. "But before we do, you need to be excited again."

"Think you can handle it?" She looked back over her shoulder. He did look intense. She smiled, her body already heating with desire.

"He doesn't have to handle it alone. Between us, I'm sure we can keep the situation in hand." Camin's fingers slid down her belly to her pussy. His fingers slid between the lips and he stroked her clit. She shivered.

"It seems you do. This isn't quite the position I envisioned." She lowered her head and pushed into his hand.

"This is just to heat you up." Davik drew his finger down the cleft in her buttocks. "Besides, I'd say that this position has some definite possibilities."

His fingers traced the tight ring. By the moons, she loved that. Desire flared even hotter. She moaned, unable to focus on anything but the sensations ripping through her. Talking was absolutely out of the question. Especially when Camin's fingers pushed into her pussy. Her inner muscles clenched and she gasped, licking her lips.

"You like that? I think you'll like this." Davik's fingers slipped down, gliding in her juices to gather the slick liquid. His fingers withdrew and moved back to the tight pucker of her rear entrance. Slowly his fingers spread the liquid over the tissue. Gathering more, his finger pressed slowly into the tight grip of her ass. She pushed back, taking more of the thick digit. He laughed and she heard the satisfaction in his voice. His finger slowly withdrew as Camin's fingers slowly pushed into her pussy. Her body drew taut and she trembled. Gasping, she tried for control. She didn't want to come without Davik. She wanted him inside her when she found her pleasure.

"Davik..." She forced the words out. Her voice sounded like a ragged croak to her.

He gripped her hips. "You're going to get just what you asked for, a hard ride. Your heat is practically burning me and I have to get inside you soon."

Denise couldn't think of anything she wanted more. He lifted her, turning and pressing her back to the soft sheets. She arched, reaching for him. He hooked one of her legs over his shoulder. Fitting his cock to her slick opening, he pressed slowly forward,

allowing her body a little time to adjust to his length. She smiled softly, recognizing the caring gesture.

He withdrew and drove into her. She gasped at the thrill of pleasure from each forceful thrust. Her hips lifted into each surging roll of his pelvis. Pleasure built and her body tightened. Her hands stroked up his ribs. A shudder ripped down his back and his hips ground into hers.

He pulled her hips to his.

"Come for me, *taneen*," he said through clenched teeth as his cock withdrew then filled her again.

She panted, desperate. Her inner muscles rippled, clenching around the thick shaft pushing into her. She grabbed at his arms, her nails scoring his skin. Prickling heat raced over her and the coiling tension tightened.

Hot breath puffed over the slope of her left breast just before teeth closed over the hard, sensitive tip. The sensation arced through her body. She gasped, a small sound of surprise tearing from her throat. The hot pleasure flared, exploding. She shivered, her body arched. Blinding pleasure slammed into her. Davik's hips surged against hers. His hands tightened, pulling her hips up to meet each thrust. She could feel his muscles bunching against her thighs. She felt the hot spurt of his semen splash into her. He groaned harshly, his muscles trembling. He let her foot drop to the mattress just as his body covered hers.

She slowly stroked her hands over his damp, hot back. His lips brushed across her cheeks and lips. His arms slipped under her shoulders, pulling her closer to him.

"So did we give you what you wanted?" Davik asked.

She smiled, sated, a little tired. "Oh yes, you both gave me a wonderful night."



## **Chapter Seventeen**

Denise lifted the crate, carrying it to the bottom of the stairway. She went back for more of the ale. The most common drink ordered. They had to keep a good supply in the stock room on the upper floor. That stock room was chilled so if more was needed during the night's business, and it usually was, it wouldn't be hot.

She carried another case toward the stairs. The blaring ring of the alarm pulsed through the room. Startled, she dropped the case, didn't even stop to look at it. She charged up the stairs, pushing open the door just before she crashed into it.

On the second level, she saw Camin first. He was wrestling with a man in the hallway. Davik burst out of the doorway to the other stairway. His eyes locked on Denise and even from this distance she saw the concern on his face.

"Get into the room with Nials and lock the door. Wait for us," Davik ordered.

She opened her mouth to insist she could help but one look at his face had her turning and running around the corner for the door. If she was out here, he was going to be focused on keeping her safe. Skidding to a stop on the smooth floor, she almost ran into the door. She had to bang and yell to get the door opened.

Davik sighed, relieved that she'd gone into the room. He wanted her safe and now she was out of the main fight. More importantly, he knew that if anyone got past them she'd be able to take care of herself.

He turned and ran back up the stairs to the first floor. Davik had come down the stairs because he'd seen the door to the stairs close just after he'd come out of the first-floor storeroom when the alarm sounded. He stepped out of the stairway and saw a man in stained, faded blue clothing rushing down the hallway. Beyond the man coming toward him, he saw at least three other strangers but they were already engaged.

The dark-haired man's scraggly beard hid most of his face. The man raised his hand, bringing up a long metal pole. Davik didn't wait for the merc to make a move. He rushed forward to meet the attack. His hand rose, grabbing for the gray shaft as it slashed toward him. The bar hit his lower arm as he barreled into his opponent. Pain flared but Davik's entire focus was on the merc's scruffy-looking clothing.

As the man stumbled back, Davik tried to get a grip on the merc's hand before that pipe made more damaging contact. The rank smell of stale sweat and liquor hit Davik. They slammed into the hard floor, Davik landing heavily on the smaller man. Davik gripped the man's hand, slamming it into the hard tile floor. The pipe skittered across the tiles. The jarring noise seemed to echo in the hallway, drawing Davik's nerves tighter.

The man's fisted free hand swung toward Davik's face. Davik didn't have time or the space to jerk out of the way. He launched a punch even as the man's fist collided with his cheek. Davik's fist slammed into his opponent's face but the man didn't even seem to feel it. Davik wondered if the man was something more than human, or if he was taking some kind of drug. The bearded man's hand struck out even as his body heaved and writhed. Davik growled low in his throat. His opponent was halfway out from under him. Davik grappled, getting a grip on the man's head and slamming it onto the tile. Anger and frustration ripped at him.

The man wouldn't give up. The merc's hand gripped Davik's hair, trying to pull him off. Davik again drove the man's head against the floor. The man's body went limp beneath him. Davik moved off him and quickly flipped the man onto his stomach. Ripping the man's shirt, Davik tied his wrists tightly and then his feet. Standing, he looked down the hallway. Philan and Rael each were working on the bindings of a man. Brace slammed the man he was fighting into the wall. Brace looked like he'd just come out of the shower. His dark blond hair was wet and he didn't have on a shirt. He wrestled the man to the ground, holding him as Rael tied the man's hands.

"Philan, go get the women and that drug so we can put these men out for a while. These are four more people who we won't have to worry about after they've been drugged," Davik ordered.

The door to the bar looked to be intact. They'd have to go out and check to see how the men got into the building and search for any remaining mercs. He wanted the threat removed as fast as possible but leaving these men before they'd been dosed would be careless. He wasn't about to take chances like that.

Davik could easily hear the pounding of Philan's feet on the stairs. Thoughts whirled in his head. He felt trapped here and he hated it. Four men and this probably wasn't the last of the mercs. Davik clenched his fist. Camin came up the stairs, carrying a limp man. Denise followed behind him carrying the injector with the drug. Davik shot Camin a hard look. He should have kept Denise inside the room. Camin shrugged.

"Stop glaring at him. If it was safe enough for one of the other women to come out of the room, it's safe enough for me. Stop being overprotective and keep your mind on what needs to be done." Denise glared at him and jabbed the man on the floor beside him with the injector.

"We haven't cleared the bar yet," Davik warned. The woman didn't seem to have any idea about how important she was to him.

"Then I won't go out there and start dancing." She rolled her eyes. "Now untie him. before the guard gets here."

Davik smiled at her snippy tone and watched her stalk down the hall to inject the other mercs. When she finished, she stepped back and looked at him with raised brows as if waiting for him. The woman knew how to push him. He might just have to show her that there were consequences for it.

"You stay here. We're going to go search the bar for any other intruders." Camin walked over and cupped Denise's chin so that she had to look at him.

Judging by her mutinous expression, she wasn't appreciating the orders. She pulled his hand away from her face, stepped back and glared at Camin. He loved that she didn't back away from a challenge but that same trait could push his limits. Sometimes the woman seemed to have too much courage.

Putting one hand on her hip, she faced him squarely. Her jaw firmed. If anything, her chin angled higher. "Then go out there and do it but don't get hurt. As much as you worry about me, I worry about you. I don't want to lose you."

A thrill of pleasure rushed through Davik. That was one of the few times she'd verbally acknowledged that she felt something for them. He wanted to get her to somewhere private and press for more immediately but there wasn't time. They had things to do.

"We'll be careful. You just stay in here. We're not about to lose this chance with you now," Davik said as he brushed his thumb over her cheekbone.

"You know I never had that much trouble taking care of myself before I met you." She shook her head but leaned back against the wall and settled in to wait.

"I don't doubt that you took very good care of yourself but now you have Davik and me to watch over you." Camin gave her one of his smug smiles and turned toward the door.

Davik laughed softly when he saw the anger sweep over Denise's face. She muttered something he didn't quite catch and glared. Davik dropped a kiss on her lips before turning to go check the bar for other intruders.

Davik opened the door and stepped out into the bar. His eyes locked with the icy blue eyes of a silver-haired man, standing near a table. The man's eyes widened but that was the only sign of surprise from him. The silver-haired merc ran for the door. Davik sprang forward, hurrying to catch him. As he did, he saw two other men heading for the door. The first man ran into the door, stumbling back as it fell outward and landed on the ground, just before the second ran into him. Davik's hand gripped the back of the silver-haired merc's shirt just as he reached the gaping exit where the door had been. The man didn't spin and try to fight his way free. He ripped the front of the shirt open and came out of it before Davik could get a better grip. The merc sprinted down the street, disappearing around the corner. Davik threw the shirt to the ground.

"Fuck," Davik cursed, looking down the street, wishing he could chase after the man. It wouldn't be smart. They didn't know how many mercs were left to fight them. It could be just the three men who'd escaped. But there could easily be six or twelve others.

Davik looked at the lock mechanism while the bathrooms were searched. The lock was destroyed, as were the hinges. He sent a man to get the guard. They'd have to be even more watchful now. They couldn't relax even a little. Until they were off this planet, they'd have to be extremely careful of what they did. He wished he had some

idea when the *Mocant* would arrive or at least be able to contact them. Every message went through the Tribunal and they already knew there was someone leaking information there. He wasn't going to give their enemies any information about how they planned to leave Mayoon.

"How bad is the door?" Camin asked

"How bad is the door?" Camin asked.

"The lock is destroyed. It's just a good thing that there are extra supplies in the storeroom. We're going to need that lock." Davik cast a look at the door on the ground.

Booted feet stepped into his sight. A young male guard stood looking at the door and then glanced at the gouges on the frame. He shook his head and rolled his eyes.

"Let me guess. They broke in after the liquor. Stupid miners," The guard grouched. "It's not enough that they trash buildings and each other when they're drunk."

Davik knew a good idea when he heard it. "Yeah, they made inroads into what we had out here and then broke into the inner stockroom after more of it. Two of them got belligerent and violent when we found them."

"Luckily the other three had passed out by that time." Camin shook his head. "We just finished cleaning up out here except for that door."

The guard nodded and Camin led him away to the "drunks". Davik smiled. That had been easier to explain than he'd thought it would be. Camin returned with tools, a lock and extra hinges. It was going to be a long time before they went to sleep tonight.

\* \* \* \* \*

Camin woke suddenly, his senses snapping into focus with a jolt. He reached under his pillow. His hand searched for the knife he'd put there last night. For a moment, he searched frantically. He couldn't find it. He felt a hand on his right arm and then the knife was pressed into his fingers. There was little light in the room. The slight illumination came from the hallway. He could see the outline of a man in that space. The opening of the door had had woken him and Denise also.

"*Jatohn*?" The quiet voice came from the doorway.

Camin sat up straight, relief flowing through him. Finally. He'd begun to wonder what was keeping the ship. It had taken much longer than anyone had expected for the *Mocant* to arrive. He turned on the light and smiled at the soldier standing in the doorway. Wearing a camouflage uniform with a stunner strapped to his hip, he looked very out of place.

It didn't surprise Camin that they'd managed to get past the locks without sounding the alarm. Not with the advanced technology his men had brought with them.

"Is everyone else awake yet?" Davik asked.

"No, most of them are just getting woken, *Jatohn*." Brandis' shoulder-length honey blond hair looked windblown.

"How far away is the shuttle? We might have some resistance when we leave here. The assassins have been determined." Camin stood and began pulling on his clothing.

"It's outside the town and over a hill. We couldn't get it any closer to your location without drawing too much attention," Brandis said.

Camin's jaw tightened but he kept the curse words silent with effort. The risk and uncontrolled situation angered him. He knew that keeping both official attention and that of the miners off the unauthorized shuttle landing was necessary. The Tribunal only expected them to watch over Nials, not take him off the planet. The Tribunal would find out the truth when they came to get Nials. In spite of the officials' beliefs, Nials and his sister would be safer with the *Norik*. The Tribunal hadn't been able to keep him safe for even this short time. Even their exit would still be dangerous. He didn't like it.

"Who's this? Why are you getting dressed and what is a *Jatohn*?" Denise rose to an elbow, the white blanket pulled up and tucked under her arms. She looked as if she was getting comfortable for a long discussion.

She looked absolutely beautiful. Her creamy-brown skin contrasted with the snowy blanket covering her. He could see the confusion in her eyes as well as a touch of fear. He could understand the confusion. They'd never told her just what they'd planned for this mission and how they expected it to end except for the fact that she'd be coming with them.

"This is Brandis, one of our men." Davik looked up from fastening his black shirt. "We're getting dressed because it's almost time to leave."

"Leave? The Tribunal hasn't arranged for Nials to be transferred to a safe house yet. We can't leave." Denise shook her head.

"We're still a little bit asleep, aren't we?" Camin asked. He couldn't hide the humor in his voice and didn't try. She made him smile. "The Tribunal hasn't arranged our departure. We did before we came here. Nials will be safer with us than he would be on some obscure planet he can never leave for fear of being recognized."

"Now get up and get dressed. Even half-asleep, you can't seriously think we're going to leave you behind. You're coming with us." Davik pulled a shirt off one of the shelves and tossed it to her.

She pulled the blue shirt over her head but made no move to get out of the bed and put on her pants and boots. Camin thought she might be a little shy about getting up while Brandis stood in the doorway. He motioned for the other man to leave. With a nod, the man backed out and closed the door. When the door shut firmly, Camin turned and found her glaring at him. Her arms were folded across her chest, pushing up the luscious, firm mounds. He licked his lips, wanting to get his mouth on her breasts now. Irritation welled because he knew he couldn't.

"Come on and get dressed. I want to be off this planet before dawn," Davik said as he grabbed his carving knife and attached it to his belt. He patted the sheath before turning his full attention to Denise.

Camin also focused on the recalcitrant woman in the bed. His eyes narrowed and slow anger rose. He had no idea what was behind this challenge or why she was throwing it now but he knew he wasn't going to let it stand in his way. The woman was leaving with them. Before he could think of an answer that wouldn't come out as a shout or a growled order, Davik acted.

Davik's fast, long strides carried him to the bed. He grasped her arms and pulled her out from under the blanket and off the bed. Denise's feet dangled above the floor and Camin got the distinct impression that Davik was only a breath away from shaking her. Camin didn't exactly feel calm about her sudden decision to question everything and be obstructive. They had to get off this planet. Now.

"You are coming with us. Your only choices are over my shoulder or on your feet. I won't lose you now that I've found you again. Even if we'd had to wait, you'd be coming with us." Davik's teeth bared in a fierce growl.

"Davik, calm down. She knows now." Camin stepped forward and put a hand on Davik's shoulder. He didn't want Davik to scare her into pulling away from them. "I know we haven't talked about this and we will later, but leaving now will keep Nials much safer than a Tribunal safehouse."

Camin saw a small smile cross Denise's lips. He had no idea what that was about or what she was pulling. Her hands fastened onto Davik's forearms but her grip was more of a caress than it was a struggle against Davik's hold on her. She didn't say a word, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with Davik's pronouncement.

"She knows we always intended her to go with us. We told her about our life and even agreed to find a way for her to help fight the companies. Now she turns stubborn," Davik growled.

Camin could barely believe that Davik hadn't noticed how relaxed she was. Denise wasn't fighting or yelling. She'd had a clear shot at Davik's balls for some time and hadn't even attempted it. She just waited. Camin had the uneasy feeling that she had just wanted their full attention for a few moments.

"What did you want, Denise?" Camin asked.

In his current mood, it was no use trying to get through to Davik. His attention had focused on Denise and her apparent resistance to leave with them. He had only keeping her safe and with them on his mind. Camin recognized that she wanted a bit more information before fully cooperating. He could see that he'd have to ask the obvious questions. Hopefully she wasn't going to draw this out into a battle on some unknown principle.

"Now why would I want something?" She smiled sweetly but he saw the determination in her eyes.

"Because you're being a little obstructive. And one of us isn't in the mood for delays right now. Davik doesn't play when it comes to you." Camin folded his arms and ran his eyes from her tousled hair to her bare toes. He lingered over her long, bare legs and the curve of her ripe buttocks.

Her smile grew wicked. Oh yes, she'd wanted their attention. Now he could see the anger in her gaze.

"Do I look like I'm playing?" she asked, tossing her hair back over her shoulder.

"What's wrong? Why are you trying to delay when you know you belong with us?" Camin reached over and cupped her chin, turning her head until she faced him.

"When were you going to tell me? I know you weren't expecting them tonight. Maybe you didn't even know when they'd get here. When were you going to tell me that you had another way off this damn planet? Why the secrecy? All of us want to survive this situation." She brought the edge of her hand down across the bend of Davik's elbow.

Davik's arms bent and she dropped to the floor but he didn't release her. She wriggled, trying to slip free of his hold. His hands remained firm on her. She glared at him and tapped her foot impatiently.

Camin grabbed a pair of pants for her. If she wanted to continue this argument, she could do it while getting dressed. He tossed them to her and she caught them.

"Oh we weren't afraid that you'd let our plans slip to anyone who might want to hurt us. The only reason we kept it from you was because we didn't want you telling your friends or Nials and Sela." Davik pulled her close in a brief, tight hug. His hand slipped down and his palm tapped her ass. "Now get dressed. We're wasting time."

She braced her feet apart and her eyes locked with his. "You are not going to force my friends to go with you."

"Those mercs will be killing angry when they discover Nials escaped them. We can't leave them here even if we wanted to." Camin shook his head. He could understand her loyalty to them and wanting to give her friends a chance to make their own choices but this time it was too dangerous. He saw her hands fist and her jaw tighten.

"You're right about the mercs. I don't like it, but the mercs would kill anyone left here." She shook her head and looked at the wall.

"Don't worry about your friends." Davik threaded his fingers through her hair. "Clothes now. I'm going to go check on the others. Be dressed when I get back."

Denise sighed and ran a hand through her hair, straightening it. She put on the dark blue pants and went for her boots. Camin walked over to her and hugged her again. She looked so torn, so nervous, he couldn't help it. He wanted to pick her up and cuddle her but Davik was right. They needed to leave as soon as possible.

"If there's anything you want to take with you, you'd better get it now. As soon as Davik gets here, we'll probably leave," Camin advised.

She went over to the shelf and got a small bag. She stuffed some clothing into it and began gathering bits and pieces of her belongings that had found their way into this room.

"So neither of you ever said what *Jatohn* meant." She picked up a brush and walked to the table. Lounging in one of the chairs, she crossed her booted feet at the ankles and slowly pulled the brush through her hair.

"*Jatohn* is a title equivalent to commander or captain of a ship." Camin felt a bit of relief at how she'd reacted to the news that they'd be leaving. For a moment he'd wondered if he'd have to chase her and carry her with them. He knew she wanted to be a part of their life but sometimes, it seemed as if she pulled away from any overt commitment.

"Is that both of you or just one of you?" She put her arm on the table and seemed to be genuinely curious and calm.

"It's held by both of us. Come on. Let's go see how much longer it will be before we leave. I'm looking forward to getting you on the ship with all its conveniences." He walked over and took her hand, pulling her to her feet.

"What? Was this a little too much work for you? Are you so used to stunners and lifts that this was a bad experience?" she asked with a light laugh.

"It was too dangerous." Camin urged her out into the hallway. If there had been a way, he'd have gotten her off the planet long ago.



## Chapter Eighteen

Denise saw Layla and Jasi standing out in the hallway. They looked a little stunned but they didn't look upset or angry. If they were half as calm as they seemed, they were doing better than her. She felt as if she'd been smacked in the face. This rescue seemed to have come from nowhere and she just wasn't ready for it. It was too soon. She hadn't made any decision and now there wasn't even a decision to be made. Part of her couldn't believe that they hadn't even told her that someone might be coming for them before the Tribunal sent a shuttle.

Denise stepped forward to talk with her friends. A hand on her shoulder stopped her from going even a step more. She turned and shot Camin a narrow-eyed look. He should know she wasn't going to just run into the night. She might feel confused and be practically quaking in her boots at the enormity of this change but she hadn't lost her mind.

"Where do you think I'd run? I'm just going to talk to my friends. It's not like everyone's here and we're ready to go. Nials and Sela are still in their rooms," she said and looked pointedly at the hand on her shoulder.

Her raised his eyebrows but released her. "Sometimes I'm almost half sure finding you was just a dream."

"After what we've been through lately, nightmare might fit better than dream but I'm real and I'm going with you." She turned and put her hand on his forearm, squeezing firmly. Sometimes she wondered almost the same thing. Their relationship seemed too good at times.

She walked over to Jasi and Layla. Their clothes were rumpled and they'd obviously dressed in a hurry. The two women just kept staring at the men as if they couldn't quite believe they were really here. Layla's shirt was red, her pants yellow. Jasi wore a black shirt and a black skirt but the shirt was inside-out and the skirt fastened wrongly.

"Did you know about this?" Jasi asked.

"I had no idea they were expecting someone to come for them; that it would even be possible for someone to get onto the planet without permission." Denise shook her head and leaned a shoulder against the wall. She felt more astonished than they seemed. She knew she was awake but it didn't seem real.

"I can't think of a way they got onto the planet either. Space traffic in this system is restricted and patrolled." Jasi's voice lowered.

"Determination," one of the men offered as he walked past them.

Denise snickered as Jasi blushed.

"Do you know where we're going?" Layla stepped up beside her but her eyes followed the men moving down the hallway.

"No idea. Are Sela and Nials refusing to leave?" Denise looked toward the two rooms at the end of the hallway where Sela and Nials' rooms were located.

"Sela's having one of her moments. She doesn't like it here, but she wants to wait for the Tribunal to move them to a safehouse. Nials is trying to help the men talk her into cooperating," Jasi said. "I wish them luck."

"Are they trying to coax her out of the room? I got threatened. Over a shoulder or on my feet." Denise shot a pointed look over at Davik, who'd just returned, and Camin, knowing they could hear every word.

"Don't be angry that we know how to get you moving, *be'rai*." Camin smiled as he walked down the hall toward her. "They'll have Sela out of the room in a moment."

Just as he said the last word, Sela flung open the door to her room and stomped into the hallway. She wore a pair of pants and what was obviously a nightshirt, the filmy fabric almost see-through. She shot a furious glance at anyone who came close to her. Nials and the other men came out of the room a moment later.

"We're ready to go now," Davik said. His eyes turned to Denise and he pointed a finger at her. His face became stern. "You stay in the middle of the group and keep up. It's going to be a long trek to the shuttles."

Denise rolled her eyes. She wasn't the one who'd be giving them trouble and they knew it. Davik was just being overprotective. Sela was the one who should be watched. She was inclined to run at the slightest opportunity – and there would be one after they left bar.

Davik's hand settled on the small of her back, urging her down the hallway. Denise didn't hesitate, turning toward the stairs to the upper level. Davik stayed right behind her.

"Look, I'm going with you. I said I would. I'm not going to take off running if you're not within reach." She spoke in a soft tone even though the way he was acting was beginning to anger her.

"I know you're not going to run from us. A few of the other men and I will be staying close. Keep safe. It's all too possible that those mercs have been keeping a watch on the building. If they have, they'll know something's happening tonight." Davik kept his eyes forward as they reached the top of the stairs and moved into the hallway. He did seem to relax a little though.

She brushed her hand over his arm as he moved up beside her but didn't try to distract him. She was concerned about that herself. She knew the mercs wouldn't stop trying to get to Nials. Out on the street, there would be dark shadows to conceal them. Nials would be vulnerable.

"You need to keep watch on Nials. He's the main target, and Sela, they'll go for her. The rest of us are just in the way," Denise told him. The mission hadn't changed just because it was coming to an unexpected end.

"Nials will be kept safe. Don't worry about anything but keeping yourself safe." Davik looked over at her and smiled.

They went out into the barroom. After a quick check to make sure everyone was with them, they left the bar. The men formed a rough circle around the women and Nials. They jogged at a fairly fast pace through the streets, toward the mines.

Denise kept moving, her eyes scanning the darkened streets, looking for signs of danger. The air seemed heavy and even for nighttime it was quiet. Not even the chirp of the *gamin* beetle broke the silence.

Denise saw a shadow move at the side of the street, next to one of the buildings. She stopped, trying to focus on the shape. A hand in the middle of her back gave her a quick push forward. She stumbled and moved forward again but she didn't take her eyes off the shadowy building until she'd passed it.

She saw a shadow lengthen and change from the corner of her eyes. It drew her head around to the other side of the street. She saw a dark-haired man rush forward, a long knife flashing as it slashed toward the stomach of one of the men guarding the women.

The sound of breath exploding from someone to her left drew her attention. She saw one of the *Norik* flying through the air. The *Norik* was on his feet almost as soon as he hit the ground. She recognized the muscular man with short white-blond hair lunging toward Nials. Drake again. Without thinking, Denise stepped forward between the man and Nials. Icy blue eyes shone, filled with hatred. His fist flew toward her face.

A flash of light slashed through the night, hitting the white-haired man in the side. The momentum carried him forward even as he crumpled. His shoulder bumped into her shins. She stepped away from the man.

A hand landed on her shoulder, turning her. Camin stood there, his face a stony mask but his blue eyes flamed with anger. After turning her, his hand dropped to his side. She took a step back at the sight of his hard look. She had the feeling he wanted to do more than yell at her. He was furious.

"You..." He drew in a deep breath. His voice was tight, strained and every muscle in his body seemed tense. "Get up here beside me and don't even think of throwing yourself in front of anyone else."

"I was doing my job. I protect him, remember?" Her finger poked against his chest. She didn't say another word to him. She stepped forward and walked at his side at the front of the group.

Without another word, the group began moving at a quicker pace again. She was tense and a look around her proved that everyone else was just as uneasy. Two men moved ahead of them, scouting the area, but no one relaxed. Their eyes were constantly scanning the area as they passed through the streets. They reached the rough mine path flanked by tree-covered hills. Leading the way up the hill on the left side of the road, the first man showed no hesitation at going into the dark trees. When she stepped into the darkness, she saw the bobbing beam of light ahead of her. Another light came on

just behind her and one to her right. Denise tripped on a root. She wasn't the only one having trouble with her footing and the pace slowed. No one said a word. The only sound was the hurried rush of breath and the crunch of vegetation beneath their feet.

Denise was just wondering if they'd still be hiking to the shuttles at sunrise when they reached the top of yet another hill. The trees thinned and through the gaps she thought she saw the gleam of metal. Anticipation and relief surged through her. She was half afraid that more mercs would jump out of the trees and attack before they could get to safety. Even with the attack on the way through the streets, it all felt too easy, too fast. Part of her was waiting for the next danger to appear.

Two shuttles waited on an expanse of tall, yellow grasses beyond the trees. As they ran closer, the hatches lifted and the interior lights shone, a bright beacon in the darkness. Camin guided her toward one of the shuttles.

Denise moved forward to the front row of seats. She edged toward the seat near the wall. Camin's hand stopped her and he stepped in front of her, taking that seat. She took the seat next to him. What was that about?

"What difference does it make where I sit?" She folded her arms across her chest.

"Well, leaning across Camin to kiss you would make things more difficult." Davik dropped into the seat next to her.

"If you wanted to kiss me. Aren't you angry like he is?" she asked, shooting a glance at Camin.

"He's not so angry. You scared him. Just give him a little time. He'll relax. The only reason I'm not in a similar mood is because I saw Tyrell draw his weapon before you stepped into the man's path." Davik lifted her hand and moved it onto his thigh.

"So you knew I wasn't in any danger. Otherwise I'd be dealing with two angry men." She shook her head. They had absolutely no idea of what she'd done on a regular basis. "I don't know how I survived without your help."

"I suspect that you got yourself into quite a few dangerous situations. Your life isn't going to be that way any longer." Davik squeezed her hand. His narrow-eyed look assured her he'd heard the sarcasm in her voice.

The slight whirr of a door closing drew her attention away from baiting Davik. She looked back and saw that all the seats were filled but she didn't see Jasi or Layla. She wasn't so worried about that. One thing she knew was that the men wouldn't have left them. They must be on the other shuttle.

"Time to go home now, Denise." Davik's arm came around her shoulder and his fingers trailed over her upper arm.

"Are you talking about a house on a planet or about your ship?" she asked with a smile. The thought of living on a space ship was an interesting idea. One she didn't mind at all but she'd had the impression that they had a more permanent home.

"Well, for the most part it is but we do have a home on a planet we go to between trade and rescue runs." Davik's fingers stroked along her neck.

Camin's fingers circled her wrist and then slid down and laced with hers as he lifted her hand. She glanced over at him, searching his face as she watched him through her lashes. He lifted her hand and nipped at the back of her knuckles.

"Are you feeling a little more relaxed now that we're off that planet?" She smiled. He seemed a little friendlier now, a small smile curving his lips.

"If by feeling better now, you mean that you're out of danger? Yes." He raised a brow and looked as if he expected an argument.

"We were all in danger. You're just a little overprotective." She didn't really mind that. It wasn't as if he didn't have reason for it. If there hadn't been a real danger, she would have definitely objected.

"I'm protective and I always will be. We lost you once. It's not going to happen again." He looked down at her and his eyes were hard and determination was plain in the tight line of his jaw.

Her lips tightened and she stifled a growl. "You didn't lose me. You lost Aeva. Two people. Try to grasp the concept."

Camin blinked as if he weren't quite sure he knew what she meant. "We know you're not Aeva."

"Sometimes it doesn't sound like it. You lost Aeva. You haven't lost me. You just met me." She wriggled her fingers, trying to free her hand.

"Getting a little picky, aren't you?" Davik asked. He sounded a little amused and his arm tightened around her shoulders when she stiffened. "You're Aeva's clone. In most of the ways that count, you are her."

"I wasn't born on the same planet as you. I didn't grow up with a large, happy family, protected, loved. Not Aeva." She tightened her hand on Camin's, getting angry now.

Davik laughed softly. "I'm just teasing you, *be'rai*. When we say we lost you, it's the captivity and Aeva's death we're referring to. We don't want to lose *you* like we did Aeva. It's going to take a little time for the fear to fade."

"It's nowhere near the same situation. Especially not now. I won't be going into any kind of dangerous situation. We've already talked about that." She shook her head.

"We've agreed but nothing is ever guaranteed. Even visiting a planet isn't always safe," Camin offered.

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Denise lifted the garment she'd taken from the closet. The thin violet material of the top was damn near see-through. She looked over her shoulder at Camin and Davik. They were standing near the bed, watching her. They couldn't expect her to actually wear this. The thing was nothing more than man-bait slinky lingerie. But they didn't look like they were kidding.

"This can't be the clothes you expect me to wear." She turned around and tapped her foot. Lifting the dress by the strap, she gave it a little shake. "This is the kind of clothing a woman wears to tempt a man. She doesn't wear it for everyday wear. Certainly not to work."

"It's what our women wear." Camin settled on the dark blue and gold blanket covering the bed.

"I think we need to talk. While I wouldn't mind wearing this sometimes and I'm not really shy about showing my body off, there are limits." She tossed the piece of fabric to Davik because he was closer to her than Camin was.

He caught it and stroked his fingers over the soft fabric before draping it over the back of the blue couch. The man couldn't look more relaxed if he tried. Denise looked beyond him and tried to relax. The room was huge for a bedroom on a spaceship. The couch and chairs formed a conversation area. A glossy black, stringed instrument rested on the table at the center of that area. She knew that must be the instrument Camin played.

"You think there's something wrong with your clothing?" Davik asked as he stepped away from the couch.

She shook her head at the provoking question. He knew exactly what she found wrong with the clothing. Even with the longest outfit in that closet, she'd be showing more skin than the cloth covered. If she hadn't known it before, she'd have known just by looking at the clothes that they'd been chosen by a man.

"The clothes are designed to tempt and arouse. There are going to be times when I don't want to tempt or arouse you. That's not even taking into consideration the fact that those clothes just aren't practical workwear. We're not going to get into the fact that I've been choosing my own clothes for years." Denise began pacing across the cream-carpeted floor.

Davik opened his mouth, looked down at the top and then back at her. "What other type of clothing would you like?"

She blinked. The question took her by surprise. She'd expected to have to argue for days before she made any progress. If he was already asking questions, maybe she wouldn't have so much trouble making him see her side of the situation. The clothing was beautiful but she'd like to have the occasional option that wasn't lust inciting.

"Well, I know you have some aversion to women in pants. It's probably something to do with the fact that you're from a very male-oriented society. Some normal skirts and shirts would be great as long as the skirts cover more than just the curve of my ass." She looked back at the closet at one of the shorter skirts.

"I don't know about your theory but pants are definitely out. Is this just on principle or do you really hate the clothes?" Camin rose from the bed and walked over to stand in front of her.

Denise let her eyes linger on his body for a moment. She loved the way he moved, the controlled, muscled grace. Both of the men had that same lithe predatory flow when they walked and when they made love. She smiled at the thought.

"It's not a principle and I don't hate them. Just some variety to break up the come-get-me clothes you've chosen. It can still be low-cut and tempting, you know." She bit her lip, trying to explain.

"We've told you that we want you to be happy with us. As long as the shirts have a front opening, we'll leave the choice of style in your hands. We're not going to give up the opportunity to touch you," Davik said.

"About that totally male-oriented custom of a woman dining without a top, what if I really don't like it?" she asked, not even trying to hide the grin on her face.

Davik's fingers slipped beneath the fall of her hair. Trailing the slightly rough fingertips across the sensitive skin, he leaned close. "Don't push your luck, little tease."

"We need to take you down to med-bay now." Camin's fingers tangled with hers.

"I'm not sick." Denise shook her head.

"I know you're not sick. There are things we have to do in med-bay." He tugged at her hand.

She frowned. What could they have to do in med-bay? She assumed it had something to do with her but her mind was still a little overloaded from the sudden escape from the mining planet.

"What are we going to do there?" she asked, taking a step forward to accompany them.

"You'll be injected with our *nano-cytes* and a tracker will also be implanted." Davik curled an arm around her and urged her out into the hallway.

She stopped cold and pulled out of Davik's arm. Putting a hand on her hip, she whirled to face him. "Are you saying you don't trust me to stay with you? I've told you I want to be with you."

"We trust you to stay with us. The tracker will be put there in case of an emergency. If anything happens and you're taken from us, we'll be able to find you." Camin put a hand on her shoulder. His blue eyes never wavered and she could see the sincerity and the determination there.

"What about the *nano-cytes*?" She lifted her chin. Their reason did make sense but the idea of having an actual tracker made her feel a little strange.

"It will happen eventually. If it hasn't already started, it would certainly begin during the blood exchange during the joining ceremony. The change would just be slower. We want you safe and if you're hurt, it will be easier to help you if you have the First Gen *nano-cytes*," Davik explained.

"I'm not likely to get hurt on this ship. Since, as you say, it will happen on its own, where's the need for the rush?" She worried her lower lip with her teeth. Even if she'd tried she couldn't have hidden the sign of nervousness. It wasn't that she really didn't

want to have their *nano-cytes* inside her. It was just a little too much change too quickly at the moment.

"Our peace of mind." Davik scowled. "That's the need for the rush. We'll know you're safe as you undoubtedly push your limits and ours."

"All right," she whispered before she could change her mind. She could tell that this was really important to them and they were right. Their *nano-cytes* would eventually overcome hers even if there were no injections. They'd been reasonable and listened to her when she'd told them about her concerns. This was something she could give to them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Denise walked down the hallway, the short skirt swishing around her thighs. The violet shirt dipped low and she feared that if she moved too fast she'd show more than cleavage. She liked the soft, silky material but had never worn anything quite like it. It had been designed so that it exposed her breasts with just the flick of a few fastenings. And they hadn't been joking about exactly how they'd be eating. Going shirtless was definitely going to take some adjustment.

That wasn't the only area where she needed some time. She felt a little confined right now. Unlike Davik and Camin, she wasn't used to being on a ship for extended periods. Spaceships were usually just a means of transport for her. In the past, she'd spent most of her time on a planet. She missed being able to go outside into the sunshine and fresh air or even the rain.

Overall, she thought she was adjusting to the change. More would be changing soon. Layla was still on the ship but Denise knew that wouldn't last forever. Layla's mate wasn't a member of the *Mocant's* crew. She'd be leaving as soon as they met up with her mate's ship. Layla was nervous about meeting him. Denise knew that she wouldn't see Layla very often in person after she left the *Mocant*. She was going to miss her friend and just the thought of it right now depressed her. She didn't know how she was going to react when Layla actually left. Luckily, Jasi's mate was a member of the *Mocant's* crew, although he wasn't here at the moment. He'd been sent on a mission before Davik and Camin had agreed to help the Protectorate. At least she'd have someone she knew on this big ship. Nials and Sela even seemed to be finding a place here. Denise wasn't sure how she felt about that.

She hadn't screamed or taken a swing at anybody yet. Considering how unstable her emotions had been at times, she considered that a success. Judging by Davik and Camin's fierce frowns at times, she hadn't been doing as well as she'd thought. She had no idea what was behind their frowns but she'd seen them more and more as time passed.

Abruptly pulling her attention back to the present, she noticed Davik striding toward her down the hallway. She quickened her pace and wrapped her arms around him. He put his arms around her, hugging her back.



"You've been busy. I thought I'd find you in the room." Davik dropped a kiss on her forehead.

"I just decided to go a little early." She smiled and rose to brush her lips over his.

"Have you thought about what we said?" Davik stepped to the side and curled an arm around her shoulders.

Denise blinked. For a moment, she wondered what he was asking. The last time she'd seen them was this morning and they'd all been focused on the pleasure they gave each other. They hadn't asked her anything. In fact, she'd been slipping into a light doze when they left. The very serious look in his eyes reminded her of the question that had been asked almost every day since they'd arrived on the ship.

He was asking about the marriage ceremony he and Camin wanted.

"I thought about it but I don't understand why you want it. We're together and you know I'm not going to any other man." She shrugged. That much was true. She didn't see any need to change anything. What they had together was wonderful.

"Don't you know we want everything with you?" Davik asked. "The commitment, your love and the ceremony that binds us together for life."

Denise swallowed. They wanted her love. She didn't know if she could give it to them. She didn't have any idea what she felt for them beyond the obvious sexual hunger.

"For now, can we just enjoy what we have? I'm still trying to find my way here." Denise licked her lips. She didn't want to hurt them but she wasn't ready for that kind of commitment.

He looked at her and she saw something in his eyes but it didn't look like pain. She'd almost swear that it was anger or determination but his face seemed carved of stone.

"We'll wait but we won't stop asking or wanting it." Davik's arm tightened and he dropped a kiss on her forehead.

She'd never have thought he or Camin would stop asking for it. When they wanted something, they didn't give up just because they encountered a little resistance. She knew that trait could lead to some problems later if they became frustrated with her lack of progress in coming to a decision. She didn't want to mess things up. She loved the way things were now.

## Chapter Nineteen

Stalking down the hallway, Davik barely even noticed the men he passed. The gray walls were practically a blur. He felt like turning Denise over his knee. For three weeks she'd been giving them the "let's enjoy what we have" line. He wanted to show her just what they had and make her see the truth. Nothing was going to change if they went through the marriage ceremony. The only thing that held him back was the panic he'd seen in her eyes every time they talked about it.

He had to find out what was behind that fear and get rid of it. He needed the commitment from her. Judging by his shortening temper and the tension in his body, Camin was also getting closer to his breaking point. The woman belonged to them and seemed to fear only the final commitment. He had no idea why. She hadn't given them even a clue. She reveled in being with them and had found a place in the intel operations easily. In fact, she seemed to have adjusted completely in such a short time.

The situation was making him insane. He had to push even though it could drive her further away from accepting them. This couldn't go on for much longer. Somehow he had to get her to tell them why she wouldn't accept them. He wanted all of her and wasn't going to accept less. She seemed intent on holding back, hiding a part of herself from them. Every time she hesitated or pulled back emotionally, he wanted to grab her and make her tell him what was wrong.

He walked into the room and found Camin lounging on the couch. His shoes had been dropped carelessly on the cream carpet. His feet were crossed on the couch. Camin's head whipped around at the sound of the door.

"Hi, you're here early." Camin didn't sound very welcoming.

Davik could see the disappointment on Camin's face. He'd clearly been expecting Denise. Davik wasn't offended. He knew just how Camin felt.

"It's nice to see you too, Camin." Davik smiled. He walked around the couch and dropped into a chair. "I wanted to talk to Denise."

"I wanted to talk to her too." Camin swung his legs off the couch, turning to face him.

"She's holding something back." Davik laced his fingers together behind his neck. "And she doesn't seem willing to talk about it."

"Davik, this isn't something you can pressure her into revealing. She could decide to stop talking about it completely. This has to be done with subtleness. We have to lead her to talk to us since she's not comfortable enough to bring it up on her own." Camin thrust a hand through his hair.

"Lead her? She's had every opportunity, Camin. We've asked her if there's a problem. We've given her time to 'adjust'. She needs to see that we're not going to let her hide from the truth." Davik rose from the chair and began pacing. He hated feeling as if things were unsettled, unfinished, especially when it came to Denise. The uncertainty reminded him too much of the past.

"I don't think she sees this as a problem, Davik. I think it's fear that's holding her back. When she's ready, she'll tell us about it," Camin said.

"Afraid of what? She knows she doesn't have to fear us physically. She has no reason for fear." Davik whipped around to face Camin. That was the thing he'd never been able to understand when he saw the fear in her eyes. What was it that she feared? She knew them now.

"We'll have to find out what's behind her fear but I don't think just demanding answers is going to work with her." Camin's jaw firmed and his blue eyes hardened.

"She's ours and one way or another she will see that she's committed to us." Davik wanted to go hunt her down and drag her back to the room. The wait was pulling his nerves tight. Much more of this and any hope of subtle would disappear before she even stepped into the room.

"Calm, Davik. Think about the objective. Focus on the future and having Denise as our true wife." Camin came over and put his hand on Davik's shoulder.

Davik couldn't forget about the goal. Getting Denise to agree to the ceremony sometimes seemed like an impossible goal. She didn't even want to talk about it.

The door swished open, startling them. Denise strolled through the door, a soft smile on her lips. Her light green top molded to her breasts and the skirt fluttered around her thighs. She stopped just inside the room, her mouth slightly agape. The door slid closed behind her. She clearly hadn't expected to see them.

"Is something wrong? Are you hurt? I thought both of you were on duty today?" She walked over to them, a frown on her face and suspicion in her eyes.

"We were but we both took off early because we wanted to talk to you," Camin said easily, his voice smooth and low.

"Uh-oh." She shook her head and walked over to one of the large black chairs and dropped into it.

Davik couldn't resist a smile at her aggrieved tone. "What's 'uh-oh' about?"

"Lately whenever you want to talk to me, it's about that ceremony and you never like my answer." She drew her legs up and curled them under her. She seemed to be settling in for a long discussion.

"Maybe because we can't understand it. You revel in every part of our relationship but you don't want to take it to the next obvious step." Camin settled on the couch next to Davik. Only the tense lines of his body and his tightened fists told of the issue's importance to him. His voice was smooth, almost too light.

"I love what we have together. We shouldn't rush things. You know we really just met," she said, her voice strained.

The woman didn't know what rushed was. He'd wanted a permanent commitment from her the moment he'd met her. Davik resisted the urge to get up, walk over to her and pick her up out of that chair. He hated that she didn't seem to trust them anymore.

He didn't like the distance she was trying to put between them, the way she fought the idea of marriage. He stayed in his seat only through sheer willpower. He couldn't make her agree to the ceremony.

"You've already admitted that you love being with us. Why don't you want everything just as we do?" Camin shot Davik a hard look.

Davik almost laughed. He wasn't surprised that his bond-brother realized just how close he was to losing control. His hands tingled with the urge to go to her and hold her until he knew what was wrong. Her fear was obvious. He could smell it, see it. He just didn't know what caused it.

"I am with you in every way that counts. Why does this have to be an all-or-nothing thing with you two?" Her hand came down on the arm of the chair but the soft fabric and cushion dulled the sound. "Do I look like I'm going anywhere?"

"As if we'd let you leave us," Davik said firmly. He gripped the cushions. The thought of her leaving nearly had him on his feet.

"See. Even you know I'm staying with you. I don't want to leave, haven't tried to leave even when you expect me to just accept the most outrageous things. Why do you want to change things?" She threw up her hands in frustration and shook her head.

That got his attention. She really didn't seem to understand their reasons but something she said did catch his attention. It wasn't the first time she'd made a reference to change. The emotion behind the words this time told him there was more than coincidence behind the word selection.

"What's going to change if we go through the ceremony? What are you afraid is going to happen?" Davik stood. His hands rested on his hips. Now that they were finally talking he wanted some answers.

"I'm not afraid of anything." Her voice tightened and she pressed back into the chair.

"You're so afraid that you're almost shaking." Davik brushed away her denial. He didn't have to watch her eyes to know she was lying now. "You know we love you and that we wouldn't hurt you deliberately. What scares you?"

Her mouth opened and then closed. She shook her head, her eyes wide as she stared at him. She looked almost shocked.

"You didn't know that we love you? It should have been as obvious to you as your feelings are to us." Camin rose and stepped up beside Davik. He had a brow arched, a smile on his lips.

She blinked and shook her head. "How am I supposed to know what you feel when I have no idea what I feel?" Her voice rose.

"You don't know what you feel? You must really be worried about something to miss it. We can see how you feel even though you try to keep a lot of your feelings inside." Davik took a step toward her and another when she stayed in the chair, her hands gripping the arms. He wanted to be closer to her. As long as she wasn't running away from them, he was going to take the chance.

"What's bothering you? What are you afraid of?" Camin asked as he too moved closer.

"What could be bothering me? You know how I feel." She shrugged and her eyes widened as she seemed to suddenly notice that they'd gotten closer to her.

"You know you love us, Denise. You wouldn't be so worried about the ceremony if all you felt was desire. This wouldn't be so important if you didn't feel something very strong for us." Davik leaned down and picked her up, cradling her in his arms. She tensed, her hands clutching at his shoulders.

"Bed or couch?" Camin asked.

"More room on the bed." Davik turned and carried her to the bed. He knelt and held her against him as he settled on the large bed. She stirred and tried to pull out of his arms. Davik's hands tightened for a moment. She looked up at him and pressed her hands against his shoulders but she didn't try to lunge out of his arms. That gave him hope.

"Give me some space, Davik. I need to think. You don't seem to understand that I need time and space. You just keep pressing and pushing." She frowned at him.

"You don't need space. You want room to retreat, hide. No more hiding. Why don't you want to go through the ceremony?" Camin moved onto the other side of the bed. His hands were already working on the fastenings of his red shirt.

Davik placed her on the bed between them. She tried to crawl down the bed. Camin pulled her back and curled an arm around her shoulders. She wriggled her shoulders once. When she couldn't get free, she relaxed back against the headboard with a huff and a glare that encompassed both of the men. Davik almost laughed at the mutinous expression but kept his lips schooled into a frown. Infuriating her wouldn't help the situation. They needed that answer.

"Now since you're not cooperating, this turns into an interrogation." Davik took her hand and stroked his fingers down the center of her palm. "We can do this the easy way or you can try to make this difficult. I think I'm going to like it if you choose to be difficult."

"Why can't you two just let me have time and do things my own way? We're happy the way we are—at least I am. Why do you need this ceremony? It can't make me feel more for you than I already do." She sounded a bit desperate. Her free hand clenched into a tight fist in her lap.

"We're happy to finally have you with us, Denise, but we want everything, every part of you. You're holding back because of whatever it is you fear. We want that fear gone and we'll do whatever it takes to get rid of it." Davik cupped her chin and looked into her deep brown eyes. He wouldn't settle for less than all of her. He didn't think she'd be happy with it for long either.

"Is it how much you feel for us? Are you afraid of the strength of your emotions?" Camin asked. He moved, turning so that he was facing her. He lifted one of her hands and clasped it between both of his.

She grimaced and looked down and to the side. Her voice cracked. "I could say yes and you'd probably be satisfied with that for a while at least, but I'd be lying to you. I don't want to lie to you about this."

"Then what are you afraid of?" Davik asked. His arm slipped behind her shoulders and tightened briefly in a comforting gesture.

She bit her lip and drew in a long breath. "It's... I... Aeva."

"Aeva. What does Aeva have to do with this?" Davik frowned. Aeva's name was the last thing he'd expected to hear from Denise. She always emphasized that she wasn't Aeva. At times it seemed as if every action she took was meant to illustrate her difference from the other woman.

"I don't want our relationship to be like the one you had with Aeva," she said. Her hands clenched.

Davik saw a tear trail down her cheek. Reaching over, he gently brushed his thumb across her cheek, gathering the salty bead on his fingertip. He angled his body closer, wanting to comfort her. His focus narrowed to only her. His other arm slid around her waist. Only when his hand brushed against another arm did he realize Camin had his arms wrapped around her too.

"We're not about to let the same thing happen again. We're not going to push you away like we did her," Camin whispered. He dropped kisses on Denise's cheek.

"It's not that. She would have done almost anything to please you...and so would I. She was so weak and didn't try to fight for what she wanted." Denise shook her head sharply.

Davik felt her arm slip around his waist. Now he was beginning to see what had her so scared. She was afraid the past was going to repeat itself. He knew exactly how she was feeling. He'd had some fears about the past himself.

"Your feelings don't make you weak, Denise." Camin moved closer, lifting one of her thighs onto his legs. "We'd do anything for you too. We would have gone as slowly as you needed to adjust to being with us. If we had to, we would have carried you off that world and out of danger over a shoulder, screaming."

"Everything's different this time. You may take some time coming to a decision but when you do, you go after what you want. Aeva needed a few more years to reach maturity and I needed a major attitude adjustment," Davik said evenly. That last was an understatement and she'd know it, but it was undeniably true. At the time, he hadn't

even thought there might be room for another person in the relationship he had with Camin. He'd been wrong about so many things.

"It's easy to say that and I've told myself that so many times. I want too much. I want everything with you. All the dreams I never thought I had seem possible. A real home, love," she whispered, her voice cracking with emotion. "The fear that something has to go wrong because everything is too good has been growing since before we left that planet."

"We want everything just as much as you do. And do you know what?" Camin asked. His voice had roughened and his fingers tipped her chin.

Her hand lifted and cupped his cheek before she responded softly, "What?"

"We're going to get everything we want because you're going to give it to us. We won't accept anything less." Camin began to unfasten the silky material of her top.

Denise felt a rush of amusement and a kind of relief sweep through her. Talking had helped but it certainly hadn't taken away all her fears. They were still there but she was going to take the chance. Between Camin and Davik's determination and her own, they could make this work. She relaxed in their arms.

Her lips twitched and then curved into a smile. "I kind of got that impression. A little bit arrogant, aren't you?"

Davik's hand slid over her hip to the soft curve of her stomach. A shiver swirled over her body. A relatively innocent gesture could send a flood of desire through her. She loved the way he touched her, that firm, sure touch. She even admired his attitude even though it could infuriate her sometimes.

"We know you, *be'rai*. You're going to give us what we need, aren't you? I'll bet you're already wet and hot for us." Davik leaned in and traced his tongue over the curl of her earlobe. He slid his hand down, lifting the loose fabric of the short blue skirt. Her legs shifted, widening, making a place for him.

His fingers touched the soft lips between her thighs, finding them wet, slick. She drew in a shuddering breath. He traced his fingers around the lips, not deepening the touch, seeming to deliberately tease her. Her arm tightened around his waist and a moan rolled from her lips.

"If you're going to play, have fun with him. I need both my mates," she whispered and nipped at his lips.

"And we need you. First though, I want to hear the words." Camin's fingers circled her nipple.

She swallowed loudly and just kept the curse behind her lips. She wanted more than that light touch. She wanted their lips on her, their bodies against hers.

"What words?" Her voice was breathy.

"Yes to the ceremony." Camin plucked at the hard, pebbled nipple.

Her head tipped back and she heard a low, rich chuckle. She knew that it was Davik's. He seemed to love seeing her reactions. Her eyes slowly closed and she shivered. He drew his finger up the center of the two lips, just flicking her clit to push her to the next level. She grabbed his hand, trying to pull it away from her pussy.

"No more teasing," she gasped. At least not from them. Without a doubt, she'd love to give them a taste of it and decided to do just that. She held back from giving them the words she knew they were waiting to hear. Drawing in shallow, panting breaths, she reached for their hands. "How can you expect me to think when you're touching me like that?"

"There's no thinking required. Just say, 'Yes, I'll go through with the ceremony'. Everything will be perfect then." Davik nipped at her neck.

"Come on. You know you want it just as much as we do." Camin's warm palm covered her breast.

"I want it. You know I do." She closed her eyes. Trembling with desire, she wanted much more than the ceremony. She arched into Camin's touch.

"Then say 'yes', Denise," Davik whispered. His hand molded over her pussy. "We'll lay you back on the bed and love you until you're screaming."

Denise felt her inner muscles clench at the sensual growl in his voice. She wanted that so much even though they were pushy, arrogant men. Teasing them had lost all of its appeal. She wanted to feel their naked bodies moving against hers. She couldn't resist one more remark.

"Not above a little coercion, are you?" She reached for Camin, trying to pull him a little closer. If she could get just one of them involved, she knew they wouldn't be able to draw this torture out much longer.

"Anything to get what we need." Camin resisted the tugging of her hands, laughing softly. "Now give us those words and stop tormenting us all."

"I'll go through the ceremony." She tightened her legs around Davik's hand, desperate to feel more than his fingers on her. The heat of his palm was driving her insane.

"That wasn't difficult, was it? And now we get our reward for our patience." Camin's hands fastened on the fabric of her thin shirt, tugging it up, pulling it over her shoulders.

She wriggled, eager to get her hands on him. Her fingers smoothed over the soft red fabric of his shirt, feeling the heat of his body through it. His muscles shifted as her hands ran over the hard planes of his chest. Camin grasped her hands before she could get her fingers to the bottom of his shirt as she wanted. She moaned in disappointment.

"No, you're not going to push me to the edge. We're going to love you long, sweet and slow." Camin leaned in close until he was almost nose to nose with her.

"What if I want it fast and intense?" Denise asked with a smile. She twisted her wrists experimentally. He let her wrists move in his grip but didn't release her.



"We're going to do this our way and you're going to love it," Davik promised.

Denise felt the bed shift and looked back over her shoulder. Davik took off his shirt, tossing it away before his attention turned to his shoes and pants. She licked her lips as more and more of his gorgeous body was displayed. In a moment he was naked and his body pressed against hers.

"Give me those hands." Davik reached around her and took her hands from Camin.

He drew her hands back behind her and clasped them in one of his own. She twisted and tugged against his hold, just to see if he'd release her. His grip tightened. A thrill speared through her as he held her securely, so easily. He was so strong. Trailing over her ribs, his fingers traced a spiral pattern on her side and around to her belly. She looked down and watched his palm skim over her stomach before cupping her breast. His thumb pressed lightly as he traced the edge of her areola. She bit her lip. Even now he was teasing her.

"Let's see if you're ready for us." He cupped her breast and tugged at the hard peak.

"You know I'm ready. You've gotten me so hot that I want to pin you to the bed," she whispered on a shaky breath. Her back arched into the light touch as his hand drifted down her stomach, stopping just above her pussy.

"I don't think you could manage it but I know the feeling," Camin offered.

His suntanned body gleamed in the bright light. She watched him hungrily. He carried a small container with him. As he moved closer, he put the jar on the bed.

"No chance of it right now, *be'rai*. I'm going to fuck you slowly just like you need." Davik's fingers trailed over her mound, between the lips. He flicked at the swollen clit.

She tensed as a piercing sensation spread upward, tightening and strengthening. She lifted her leg, wanting his touch. Her hands tightened into fists and she strained to get free. Her body burned.

Davik's fingers moved downward. One pressed at her slick entrance. She quivered, waiting, as for moment it seemed that his finger wasn't going to move any deeper. Her muscles tightened around his fingertip. He slowly pushed his finger deeper.

"She's ready, maybe too ready for a long, slow fuck." Davik withdrew his finger and looked over at Camin.

"If she comes too soon, we'll just have to excite her again. I want this to be so intense that she remembers it for the rest of her life." Camin cupped Denise's face in both of his hands as he spoke.

Just by the look in his eyes she couldn't miss that he meant every word. That was so sweet and she loved the sentiment but her body screamed with desire and she didn't think she'd live through long and slow. Her body hummed and pulsed with desire.

"Come to me. Be with me." She leaned into Camin's touch. "I want you, any way, any time. You always make things so good for me."

Davik released her arms. Camin urged her down onto the bed. She was confused for a moment. She knew they'd said they both wanted to make love to her at the same time. They didn't seem in any hurry. Then Camin's hands guided her onto her side. He moved close, hooking one of her legs over his as he slowly joined them.

Sharp currents pulsed and her muscles clenched and pulled at Camin's thick cock. Her breath hitched. She clutched at his shoulders. Desperate, her eyes locked with his intense blue gaze.

"So hot and wet. Hold on, Denise. Don't come yet. Wait for us." Camin nipped at her lips.

She gulped and nodded, trying to give him what he wanted. Her skin seemed extraordinarily sensitive. The air felt cool against her sweat-damp skin. The brush of his warm, hard chest pressing against her breasts caused a wave of stinging prickles to run through her. Trying to keep control only seemed to enhance the intensity. She felt Davik move behind her, his legs brushing against hers. His hands parted her butt cheeks and she leaned into Camin. Davik spread the slick, slightly cool cream along the ring of her anus.

She drew in a quick breath, felt her muscles tighten, tremors low in her stomach. Yes, she wanted this. Camin's hand stroked over her shoulder and he whispered a soothing litany of words. She felt more than heard them.

"Hold on. We're going to make you feel so good." He brushed a kiss over her lips.

She could see how much it meant to him, how much he wanted it. His hands smoothed down to her hip, holding her still as Davik's cock pressed against the tight ring. She wanted to give them what they wanted just as much as they wanted to please her. Davik's shaft slowly pushed into her.

She drew in a desperate breath, trying for control. Davik's teeth grazed her shoulder. His hand flattened on her stomach. She bit her lip. Pressed between their hard bodies, she waited for them to move, trembling on the edge of ecstasy. Her thigh tightened on Camin's, trying to draw him deeper. She felt them both, thick and hard and it seemed so right, the way it should be. The way it always should have been.

"Hold it back, *be'rai*. Make the pleasure last. Let it build even higher. You'll see how good this is going to be," Davik whispered as his hips slowly pulled back.

Denise drew in a ragged breath and did as he asked. She held back but she needed to touch them. Her mouth found Camin's and she kissed him. She drove her tongue into his mouth but his hand cupped her jaw as he deepened and changed the kiss. A long, slow joining of their mouths, it mimicked the slow, rocking pace of the two cocks inside her.

She fought the urge to drive her hips forward and grind her clit against him. The pressure would throw her over the edge into orgasm but she wanted to come with them. Her hands flexed on Camin's shoulders. Davik's cock pushed inside her while Camin withdrew. Her nails dug into his skin. She was almost sobbing with the pleasure

sizzling over her body. With a gasping moan she arched her hips, trying to increase the pace. They held her firmly between them.

"So wet, hot. Every stroke I can feel your muscles tightening on my cock." Camin's lips brushed over her cheek as his hands tightened, pulling her closer. His cock sank deep into her.

Quivering, she brushed her breasts against his chest, desperate for more but it wasn't enough. Her leg tightened as Camin's hips rolled forward, forcing her clit against his pelvis.

"Please..." She forced the word past tingling lips. Her body burned and ached with the need for release that seemed out of reach. She'd waited too long. Her breath caught and her eyes locked with Camin's.

"Yes, *be'rai*, that's exactly what we want. You're going to come long and hard, Denise." Davik's hand stroked down her thigh as his shaft moved into her.

Her body jerked and she whimpered. They might just kill her if they didn't give her an orgasm soon. Waves of heated sensation throbbed through her.

They pumped into her. So gentle, it stretched every nerve taut. The pleasure was so intense that she wanted to scream for more. It wasn't enough. She needed more than the slow strokes. Her head tipped back, resting against Davik's chest.

"Tell us how you feel, *be'rai*." Davik's hand trailed back up her thigh and onto her stomach.

"I need..." She panted, her heart hammering against her chest. They knew. She was burning just as they'd intended.

Camin's hands tightened as he pushed into her. A laugh trailed across her lips. He shook his head at her. She wanted to scream when he drew back without kissing her.

"No, Denise, we'll give you what you need when you tell us." Camin's hips rocked forward, pushing his thick cock deep again.

"You know. You said you knew," she sobbed, her voice cracking. Every muscle roared with the need for release. Release they were denying her now.

"We know but you haven't said it. We want the words. We need them just as much as you need to come." Davik's growled words seemed to vibrate through her. His hand slid down her belly and cupped her mound.

She trembled as they kept moving inside her with even thrusts. The heat of his palm seemed to sear her sensitive skin but the light contact didn't push her into release. She could see the tight clench of Camin's jaw and knew he felt the stress of keeping a slow pace. She knew they wouldn't back away from their demand. They needed to come just as much as she did but they sought more. She didn't even want to deny them.

"I love you," she groaned.

Davik's fingers parted the slick lips, finding her hard clit. He stroked the swollen bead in a slow rhythm as his pace quickened. The two men surged against her with

building urgency. Camin tensed. With his head thrown back, he shouted her name as he came. His hips drove forward and his body shook beneath her hands.

Davik's fingers plucked at her clit. Her body arched as a roaring wall of pleasure slammed into her. Her body tightened and she felt the sensation all the way down to her toes. His hands tightened as he rocked into her. A moment later she heard his harsh groan and felt the hot splash of his seed inside her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Denise lounged in a chair in the dining hall on the ship, watching as, on the other side of the room, Camin and Davik talked with two of their men and a black-haired man she hadn't met yet. She took a sip of blue wine. As busy as they were, she knew they were aware of her. Savoring the warmed liquor, she tilted her head, studying the unknown man and the almost respectful way the Camin and Davik were talking to him.

"They're at it again, aren't they?" Jasi dropped into the chair next to her.

Denise looked over and smiled at her friend. "It's more like still. They want the ceremony to be perfect. Right now they're trying to find a way to get some *seni* flowers for the ritual."

Jasi brushed at the short skirt of her soft blue dress. "You know, usually it's the females who obsess about marriage details and go wild over the wedding. You don't even seem excited. Just happy."

"They want everything, all the trappings, every possible commitment made. And they're not going to stop until they get it." Denise looked back over at the two men.

Davik was gesturing at a wall. She had no idea what he wanted or meant by that. From what she'd seen just today, she wouldn't put it past him to have it removed if it interfered in his plans. She did love watching them go crazy with their ideas.

"And what about you?" Jasi asked.

"Honestly, nothing can tie us together more than we already are. The ceremony is just extra but I'm more than happy to go through it. Since I agreed, they've been so appreciative." Denise smiled and her eyes traced Camin's taut backside.

Jasi laughed wickedly.

Denise's eyes locked on Camin and Davik as they turned and started across the dining hall. Apparently they'd finished their discussion. Their eyes fastened on her. The intensity of their feelings, their love shown in their eyes. At times she felt like she was the only woman they saw. They made her feel so special. She tried to show them how much she loved them but she didn't know if they really knew how much they meant to her.

She'd never have believed she'd be looking forward to marrying the two men from her dreams just a few months ago. It would have been a nightmare then. She'd never have imagined that they'd be able to make a life together. Somehow they'd been given another chance and luckily this time they were all ready to love and be loved.

Camin strode over and tugged her out of the chair. His hand clasped hers loosely and he moved closer to her side.

"Time to go back to our room. We have plans for you." Davik took the final step and curled an arm around her waist.

Denise shivered as she heard the sensual edge in his voice and saw the hunger in his eyes. Camin's hand tightened around hers. His fingers traced slow patterns over her palm.

"You've been tempting us the entire time we were making the arrangements," Camin whispered as he leaned close. "You should have come over there and joined us."

She laughed softly. "You're both so easy to tempt. You think crossing my legs is a provocative action. Let's get you two back to the room and we'll take care of your problem. I'll see you later, Jasi."

She walked slowly down the hallway between them. Her thoughts turned to just what she'd gained in such a short time. With Camin and Davik at her side, she could see more than a never-ending struggle. The future stretched before her filled with love and hope. She didn't know what was going to happen but she knew they'd be together. Certainty flooded through her. She wasn't going to lose them or their love again.

## About the Author

Rebecca Airies has always loved to read. Futuristic, the classics, mystery or horror, the genre doesn't matter as long as the stories capture her interest and take her on an adventure. She soon discovered a love for writing and characters just waiting to tell their stories. Since that time, writing has become an obsession.

Rebecca lives in the heart of Texas. She loves the outdoors, growing things and working on crafts when she's not lost in the worlds of her characters. Please feel free to write and tell her what you think; she'd love to hear from you.

Rebecca welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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