

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

JOANNA WYLDE

DRAGON'S
Mistress

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Dragon's Mistress

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DRAGON'S MISTRESS

Joanna Wylde

Chapter One

"You've got to be kidding," Dani said with a laugh to the man on the view screen.

He smiled blankly at her. "No, Miss," he replied in a neutral tone of voice.

He was a young man, in his early twenties at most, wearing the livery of the Von'hot household. The Von'hots ruled the system, but Dani wasn't intimidated by their power. She could tell he was uncomfortable with his assignment, but he tried to cover that unease with professionalism. "His Grace has specifically requested your services for the evening. We'll be sending a car for you shortly before sundown. Please be prompt, as His Grace appreciates timeliness in all his people."

"I'm not one of his people," Dani replied with a tight smile, trying to hide her annoyance at his attitude. "I'm a representative of the Pleasure Guild here on a diplomatic passport. And besides that, I'm retired. I no longer entertain clients."

The messenger's mouth gaped. Clearly, he had never heard anyone say "no" to his master before.

"But—"

"Please let Lord Von'hot know that I am flattered by his invitation, but that if he would like professional entertainment for the evening he should consider contacting *local* representatives of the Pleasure Guild. I've met the Guildmistress here in the capital, and I've found her to be a competent and professional woman. I'm sure that she'll be able to find someone to take care of His Grace's needs. After all, it would be unpardonably rude of me to simply step in and take a contract in her city. Goodbye."

Dani reached over and turned off the screen with a decisive click, enjoying the look on the young man's face as she did so. She had no idea why Lord Von'hot had sent her such an invitation, and she didn't care. She was on vacation, and no man—even one who owned his own planet—was going to mess up *her* plans.

She stood and walked over to the balcony. Stepping out, she shook out her long, blond hair and gazed at the city before her. The view was stunning—her hotel room was on the seven-hundredth floor of the building, high enough that the atmosphere was thin and the air cold. Of course, none of that bothered her, as her balcony was enclosed in a force field that kept it comfortable. She leaned against the railing, somewhat amused by its presence. It was strange, but even after hundreds of years of technological development, humans still liked their balconies to have solid, visible railings no matter how unnecessary they were for safety reasons. After all, the shield would catch her if she fell.

Around her balcony, the spires of a thousand buildings reached up into the sky. More than a one-hundred-million people lived there, according to the tour she'd taken the day before. It was a wonderful place for a vacation, even better for a vacation paid in full by the Guild. A small satisfied smile crept across her face at the thought. Serving as a diplomatic courier had its perks.

A chiming noise sounded softly through the air. Another call, she realized with a sigh. She walked back into her room toward the view screen terminal.

"Yes?" she answered politely as a face shimmered into focus.

"Dani, darling!" her caller trilled. The Guildmistress' perfect features smiled at her from the small screen.

"Hello, Guildmistress Karya," Dani said, her pleasure at this call genuine. "So good to hear from you again. I had a wonderful time at the reception last night. I can't tell you how long it's been since I've enjoyed a party that much."

Karya smiled back. She was a middle-aged woman, probably in her late fifties, yet she was still stunningly beautiful. Dani had heard stories of Karya's youthful conquests during her younger days. At the time they had seemed impossible to believe—she had been mistress to the old emperor himself, or so they said. But having met her, all the stories made sense. She was both beautiful and intelligent. No wonder the Guild's high

council had been after her for years to take a leadership role. But she refused to move, saying she loved her home on Von'hotten too much to leave.

"Dani, my dear," Karya said. "You made quite an impression on our guests last night! I understand that Lord Von'hot's people have been in touch with you?"

"Oh, that," Dani sighed, making a disgusted face. "Don't worry, I got rid of them. I know better than to poach on your turf, Guildmistress Karya."

Karya looked startled, then burst into laughter.

"You'll never get far in the Guild hierarchy with a blunt attitude like that, child," she said, wiping tears of mirth from her eyes. "I've heard you were straight-forward, but my goodness!"

Dani laughed with her.

"Well, that may be, but I've never had much interest in administration anyway," she replied lightly. "Besides, I've decided to retire, as you well know. I'm just running a few errands and traveling right now. When I find someplace I like, I plan to settle down, perhaps buy a little house and live off my pension."

Karya raised one eyebrow questioningly.

"I have trouble seeing you settled in 'a little house' as you call it," she said with a smile. "You seem to like going where the action is. I heard you broke hearts all over Saurellian space before you returned to the Empire. Don't tell me you'd be content for more than a week in some boring backwater, because I simply won't believe it."

"Well, believe what you like," Dani said, still smiling. "I'm ready to relax and enjoy life. Too much work makes me a dull girl, you know."

"That's what I wanted to speak to you about, actually," Karya said, her smile fading. "I realize that you've stopped entertaining clients, something I completely understand because I've been retired myself for nearly twenty years. But our Lord Von'hot is apparently rather taken with you. It would be helpful to me if you would reconsider your decision to meet with him."

"Why is that?" Dani asked, startled. "It's totally against Guild protocol for me to meet with a client in your district, especially one like Lord Von'hot. Even if I wasn't retired, I know Guildmistresses who would have me thrown off planet for even considering it."

Karya chewed her lower lip gently, seemingly lost in thought for a second.

"May I come to your room, child?" she finally asked. "I'd feel more comfortable if we could discuss this in person. Do you mind?"

"Not at all," Dani said, truly confused. "Please, I would be happy to visit with you."

"Thank you," Karya said, smiling kindly. "I'll be there in about half an hour."

Dani nodded, then switched off the terminal.

* * * * *

Karya swept into Dani's suite of rooms in a haze of perfume. A small, timid looking woman followed her, carrying a large package.

"Calanna, wait in here," Karya said to her assistant, waving toward the couch. "Dani, can we speak on your balcony? We're far less likely to be overheard out there," she added giving Dani a confidential smile. They walked together out on to the balcony. Karya turned to her, her expression grave.

"It's difficult to explain all of this, Dani," she said with a sigh. "Normally I wouldn't share this information at all, but under the circumstances it seems necessary. You'll need to keep this to yourself, of course. It isn't exactly public knowledge within the Guild," she added with a meaningful stare. There was power in that look and Dani had to stop herself from squirming like a chastened youngster. No wonder so many movers and shakers in the Guild feared this woman, she thought. She'd met Imperial commanders with less authoritative gazes.

"For some reason, Lord Von'hot has been less than cooperative toward the Guild since he inherited the title last year. He allows us to continue our work here, but he hasn't been very forthcoming about policing the unauthorized pleasure houses and

brothels that are always springing up in the city. He's also cut off several other sources of revenue, and we've recently discovered his people have been working against us on a number of business ventures. To be quite honest, it's undermined our position here considerably. We've been keeping the situation quiet, of course. The last thing we want is for every Lord and ruler throughout the Empire to follow suit."

Dani gasped. The implications for the Guild were too horrible to imagine—for centuries the Guild had maintained a monopoly on the pleasure industry, protecting their members and keeping them safe from exploitation. How many thousands, hundreds of thousands of women, would find themselves without protection if the Guild faltered? They had always been completely independent of local politics...

"How have you managed to keep this a secret?" she whispered, stricken. "I've never even heard rumors about this."

"We've been extremely cautious," Karya said, suddenly looking her age for the first time. "It's why I've been stationed here, to keep an eye on things. Lord Von'hot is a very dangerous man, and he has peculiar ideas on how his people should live. His entire family has always been that way. I'm sure you've noticed the lack of slaves here?"

"Yes," Dani said, thinking quickly. "It's actually one of the things I've liked best about this planet."

"Yes, we all like it," Karya said absently. "After all, the Guild has never allowed members to keep slaves. In fact, we've always felt a certain natural alliance with the Von'hots, a shared sense of values because of it. After all, they outlawed slavery five hundred years ago. I suppose it's part of what led us to lower our defenses here..."

Her voice trailed off, and she seemed lost in thought, almost sad. Dani coughed uncomfortably. She realized she was getting a glimpse of Karya that few people saw. The older woman blinked several times, then turned back to her.

"Drake Von'hot is very subtle, far more subtle than his older brother ever was," Karya continued. "In the time since he's inherited, Drake has eroded our power here to

the point that we no longer have access to intelligence about his troop movements. We haven't been able to manipulate the financial markets for months, and he's even managed to have considerable assets confiscated or frozen. All of this has been done behind the safety of dummy corporations, of course. We can't prove anything.

"The worst, though, is our loss of control over the pleasure houses," she said, her face grim. "More than two hundred Guild-owned pleasure houses have been shut down or gone out of business in the past year. Independent contractors have taken over. And you know what that means."

Dani nodded, her stomach twisting in knots at the thought. Independent pleasure workers, without the power of the Pleasure Guild behind them, were open to exploitation. Often all their money went to pimps, and they rarely had any future or retirement. Even the most foolish of Guild workers had a solid future following retirement. She had seen first-hand what could happen to women in that situation in the mining belts and space stations of the disputed territories. It wasn't pretty.

"What is he thinking?" she asked, genuinely confused. Usually rulers were welcoming to Guild workers. They paid their taxes and helped keep crime under control. Lord Von'hot's attitude simply didn't make any sense.

"I have no idea," Karya said, holding her hands out in a gesture of helplessness. "I've been to any number of events with him since he came into power following his brother's death, and he's hardly acknowledged me. He's never been willing to meet with Guild representatives in a formal capacity at all. That's why I was so surprised to hear he had an interest in you. Have you even met him?"

"No," Dani replied, deeply confused. Aside from her fellow Guild members and the people at the diplomatic reception last night, she hadn't met anyone on Von'hotten.

"Well, it would be a great service to the Guild, and to me personally, if you would meet with him," Karya said with a sigh. "I realize you've retired, but this is the best chance we've had to get close to him since we realized what was happening. We can't afford to let it slip through our fingers."

"Yes, of course," Dani said, a feeling of helplessness coming over her. During her time with the Guild she'd entertained hundreds of clients, but always men of her own choosing. She didn't care for Lord Von'hot's attitude, simply ordering her to appear at a given time. But the Guild needed her; there was no escaping that fact. She owed her Guild sisters everything. She wouldn't fail them now.

"How shall I make the arrangements?" she asked, looking up at Karya with confusion. "I have no idea how to contact him," she added with an uneasy laugh. "I suspect he's not listed in the city directory..."

"I'll take care of that," Karya said, giving her a relieved smile. "You'll be well-compensated for your time and effort. Simply try to find out as much about him as possible. I don't have a specific assignment for you, just to get close to him. Anything you can tell us is helpful."

"I'll do my best," Dani said, looking at Karya earnestly. "I know my duty."

"Thank you, child," Karya said. "I knew I could count on you. Now, let's go back inside. I've brought you a special outfit to wear, and some jewelry. I thought you deserved something new and lovely, seeing as you're willing to do this favor for me."

"Thank you, Guildmistress," Dani said, startled.

"Call me Karya, child," the older woman said with a graceful smile. "The Guild is fortunate to have you among its members."

Chapter Two

She was stunning, Drake thought as he watched her step gracefully out of the air transport he'd sent to collect her. She was so beautiful it was unreal. Tall and slim, her white-blond hair cascading down her back like a curtain—just the sight of her was enough to make his breath catch.

When he'd first seen her at the reception last night, he hadn't thought she could possibly be as lovely in person as she'd been on the screen. Ostensibly, he'd been overseeing parts of his spymaster's surveillance of the reception last night because they suspected the Kelmorian ambassador would be meeting a key contact from the Imperial court that night, a contact Drake might recognize. Only Drake knew the real reason he'd been watching. He was looking for her; she was the key to his plans. The work of the past three years, all his plans and those laid by his brother, depended on her.

What he hadn't counted on was her affect on him. He'd wanted her, wanted her naked and spread under him. Wanted her in his bed, on his desk, against the walls of his palace. He wanted to fuck her long and hard, until she screamed in pleasure.

He wanted her so badly that he hadn't slept the night before. When it came time to summon her, he hadn't needed to feign his desire to his spymaster or guardsmen. It radiated from him, visible to all around him. In a way this was a stroke of good luck as it made the stories he intended to tell them all the more plausible. But it could complicate things as well.

He strode off his private balcony and across his bedroom. His guards snapped to attention as he walked past them and out the main doors of his suite. She was coming up the stairs, escorted by his assistant. His throat tightened and his cock stiffened as she came closer.

She was wearing a garment formed from filmy black scarves. With each step, they outlined her exquisite form, revealing and enveloping her charms all at once. He was filled with a burning desire to rip them off her body, exposing her for what she was. Her eyes met his, then, and he stopped breathing all together. A brilliant blue, they sparkled with the force of her personality. She was curious, intelligent. Powerful. He could see it all in a glance. He recognized her look. It was the same look he saw in his own eyes. With a quiver of anticipation, he realized that he had finally met the woman who might be his equal.

The thought sent a surge of lust so strong through his body that he almost gasped. He hardened as she approached, fighting the desire to cover his arousal like a teenage boy. What would it be like to touch her? He thought he might explode into flames at the mere thought...

"Lord Von'hot?" she said lightly, looking him up and down with a measuring glance. "I don't believe I've had the pleasure of meeting you before now."

"No," he said in a rasping voice, taking her outstretched hand and gently turning it over to kiss it. Her skin was smooth and supple under his lips, and he allowed his tongue to ever so lightly graze her palm. He felt a shiver go through her, and a surge of pure, masculine triumph welled within him. This woman might have the power to stun him with her presence, but he had power over her, too. "But I saw you at the reception last night, and was quite taken with your beauty."

"I wasn't aware you were at the reception last night?" she asked, her face registering polite surprise. He was willing to bet she was well aware he hadn't been present at the reception. He smiled at her smoothly.

"I was spying on the guests," he said, watching her reaction carefully. If she thought anything of his admission, she didn't betray it in her face. Good. She could dissemble, regardless of her feelings.

"How charming," she said, maintaining her polite smile.

"Thank you," he replied, drawing her hand into the crook of his arm. He started strolling slowly down the hall, guiding her. "My name is Drake, by the way. It could be rather awkward if you call me 'Lord Von'hot' all evening."

"I'm Daniella," she replied without looking at him. "Dare I ask where we're going?"

"Of course," he murmured, glancing over at the smooth perfection of her face. "I've arranged dinner and some private entertainment for us. I hope you'll enjoy it."

"I'm sure I will," she said, a chill in her voice. She didn't like his attitude, he realized. She probably thought he was rude. The thought amused him. "Thank you so much for inviting me," she added.

"The pleasure is all mine," he replied, drawing his breath in deeply. She smelled like flowers, light and fragrant. He wondered what she tasted like, and the thought nearly unmanned him.

Regardless of his long-term plans for her, she was his to enjoy for the night, he thought with satisfaction. He planned to use her well.

Chapter Three

She had never seen anything like Lord Von'hot's palace. It took every bit of Dani's willpower to keep her eyes focused directly ahead, rather than staring around with her mouth gaping. The walls were made of some crystalline rock that seemed to have been grown, rather than fashioned. There were guardsmen everywhere, dressed in dark uniforms and carrying frightening weapons of a kind she'd never seen before. The walls were hung with portraits, formally dressed men and women whose visages reeked of power and privilege.

How had she ended up here? She simply hadn't understood just how wealthy a man like Lord Von'hot must be when she'd originally turned down his invitation. He owned an entire star system and a confidant of the emperor, her mind whispered in panic.

And she was just a single pleasure worker, sent to spy on him.

She stole a glance up at him from beneath her lashes. He was tall, with hair so black it seemed almost bluish in the light. His skin was alabaster white, his cheekbones high and sculpted. His eyes were turned to the corridor ahead of them, but she couldn't forget the dark intensity of his black gaze. He'd stared right through her, as if he could strip her naked with his vision alone. She'd felt helpless before him, a small and frightened animal caught in the glare of the predator's sight.

But with that fear was longing. His fingers were slender and strong; the touch of his lips against her hand had made her quiver with desire. She'd seen the bulge of his erection, something he hadn't bothered to try and hide from her. The thought of that thick, hard mass plunging into her body made her wet with longing. She'd never felt so instantly attracted to a man, and she had known hundreds of men in her time. She was in way over her head.

"This way," he said, guiding her through a magnificent doorway held open by two of his men. The room they entered was far smaller and more intimate than the broad hallway in which they'd met. In the center was a sunken stage, surrounded by a series of couches and low tables. An array of exquisite foods had been spread out, and she realized they would be dining in the Imperial style, lounging on the couches while they were entertained.

"Please, make yourself comfortable," he said, leaning down to speak directly in her ear with a soft voice. The hot wind of his breath made her shiver, tingles running down her spine. His hand touched her back, guiding her toward a low couch broad enough for several guests. She knew without asking that he would be joining her there.

She lowered herself, trying to appear polished rather than awkward. She rolled on to her stomach, leaning against the bolster that had been placed there for just such a purpose. He lowered himself next to her, bracing himself on one side, then reaching over to trail a finger down her cheek.

"Your skin is very soft," he murmured, his eyes mesmerizing her with their focused power. "May I kiss you?"

She nodded wordlessly, surprised he would ask. He leaned toward her, touching his lips to her with infinite slowness. His scent was all around her, she wanted to press herself forward into the kiss, but by then he had already withdrawn.

"When enjoying something as exquisite as this, it's best to move slowly," he whispered. Then he turned to face the stage, reaching out to ring a little bell.

Music filled the room, a strange type of composition she had never heard before. It was sibilant and rich, the instruments a strange mix that was new to her. A single flute wailed a plaintive melody, rising and falling against a background of other sounds.

"This is our own style of music," he murmured. "Von'hotten has always been a haven for artists and musicians, and I strive to support our unique heritage by commissioning works from local composers. This is something new. I hope you like it."

She nodded, captivated. She had no idea where the musicians were hiding, but they had to be close. Across the room, behind the screen? It was hard to tell. A woman dressed in a thin, filmy gown came and knelt before them, pouring some kind of drink into crystal goblets.

"Would you care for some wine?" Drake asked, lifting a glass to his lips. He took a sip, smiling in appreciation. "It's another local specialty. This vintage was grown and pressed on one of my own estates."

She nodded, and lifted her own glass. The flavor was rich and sensual, light but with a hint of spiciness that she couldn't quite place. She rolled it on her tongue with appreciation, then gasped as a tingle seemed to run from her mouth down her spine, pooling in the center of her being.

"It's also a light hallucinogen," he murmured, taking another sip. "Not enough to impair your judgment, of course. But we find its effects to be...stimulating."

The music rose around them, building in tempo and pitch. She looked down at the sunken stage with surprise to see several dancers moving in time. A woman and two men moved with lissome grace, wearing only the slightest of coverings draped around their hips. She took another sip of the wine, shivering from the sensation it sent down her spine. Drake reached over and held a small bite of fruit to her lips. She opened her mouth, gently sucking it in and reaching out with her tongue to lick his finger. He slid a little closer to her, leaning over to brush his lips against hers again.

The dancers were moving closer and closer together, their wisps of clothing falling to the floor. They moved with athletic grace, each step causing muscles in their arms and legs to tense and release in time with the music.

"They are well-known group," Drake whispered. She shivered as his breath danced across her earlobe. "Several of my nobles have had them perform on their estates. I thought you might appreciate seeing their art."

She nodded wordlessly, mesmerized by their gyrations. Though not Guild-trained, they truly were talented. The woman, a brunette with short curls bunched around her

head and dark skin, had moved closer to the man in front of her. The other man faded into the background as the couple swayed together, their bodies brushing lightly. As Dani watched, the woman's brown nipples puckered in arousal, and she rubbed them sensuously against the man's chest. He responded by arching his back, proudly displaying a growing erection that jutted out toward his partner.

Drake's hand was rubbing the back of her neck, his movements following the same tempo as that of the dancers. She stretched, all but purring from the sensation. His touch seemed to reach deeply inside her, but she wanted more. She turned toward him, but his gaze was fixed on the dancers.

"Anticipation makes a meal more pleasurable," he said, his voice smooth as silk. "Watch the dancers."

She nodded, and turned her attention back to the show before them. The man and woman were kissing now, his light skin forming a stark and beautiful contrast with hers. A detached part of Dani's mind absently noted that the choreographer had taken exquisite care in selecting and pairing the dancers. Both were slim and athletic, but she was far smaller overall. She rubbed against her partner a moment longer, then started to slowly lower her body toward the ground, kissing him as she moved. The music started to slow, and a low-toned throbbing wound its way into the melody.

The woman was on her knees now, and her tongue darted out to kiss the tip of his cock. It twitched, and his head dropped back. She opened her mouth, slowly sucking the head of his erection into her mouth, then pulling back against it with deliberate motion. Her cheeks hollowed from the suction, she repeated the motion, reaching her hand around to cup his buttocks from behind. Bracing herself against his body, she started to bob her head back and forth on his hard length, deliberately, each thrust of her head punctuated by the music.

The other man slipped out of the shadows, coming to kneel behind her. He was much darker than either of the other two, his skin so dark he seemed like a shadow. Once again Dani gave a sigh of appreciation for the choreographer's skill. Seeing the

three of them together was more than sexually stimulating. They were beautiful, each a slightly different shade of smooth skin, ranging from pale to darkest black. Exquisite.

The woman was still fully engaged in sucking her partner's cock as the second man reached his hands around her body to cup her breasts. His fingers grasped and pulled at her nipples, then one of his hands drifted to the cleft between her legs. He stroked her there for a while until her hips twisted and squirmed again his touch. He grasped her shoulders and pulled her away from the first man, his cock coming out of her mouth with one smooth motion.

The man gently pushed her down onto her hands and knees. Kneeling behind her, he slowly stuffed his own long, hard cock into her cunt even as the first man dropped to the floor before her. She leaned over and slowly sucked his erection back into her mouth, and the three squirmed against each other as they established a rhythm that had her impaled first on one end, then the other, over and over again.

Drake's hand against the back of Dani's neck had slipped lower, rubbing against the small of her back, and then her butt. As the threesome before them started writhing in the new position, he allowed his fingers to drop down between her legs, worming their way between the scarves that formed her outfit. She tensed as he moved, sensation spiraling through her body. She was already hot and wet for him, she had been since she'd first seen him, and the anticipation of his touch was killing her. She wanted his hand to find her center, to thrust against it and fill her. She wanted to be fucked, just like the dancer was being fucked. He was moving too slowly.

She squirmed against him, shifting her legs so they were further apart. He paused for a second, and then his fingers found their target. He grazed her clit, back and forth several times before pressing harder against it. Several fingers made their way into her hot slit, and she pushed her hips down against them, wanting more. She tried to turn to him again, but his casually draped arm held her in place. He wasn't ready for her to do any more than watch, she realized. Watch and feel, as his fingers explored her secrets.

The group before them was still moving in their graceful ménage, but once again they were shifting. The man on the ground reached up to grasp the woman, pulling her up his body. The man behind her sat back, and watched as his partner gently guided the woman's cunt down onto his waiting cock. The man on the floor leaned back on his elbows as she started riding him, his head thrown back in pleasure. Their efforts were starting to wear on them, and a thin sheen of sweat covered their bodies as they moved. Back and forth she went, his cock impaling her again and again.

Drake's hand was moving more quickly now, and Dani realized he was starting to breathe heavily beside her. She was glad to hear it—she hated the thought of him being unaffected by the performance while she was so aroused.

Abruptly, Drake pulled his hand away from her and sat up. She started to push herself up to join him, but he pressed a hand against her back and whispered, "Just watch. I'll take care of it."

She let herself fall back down, eyes fixed on the display before her. The second man had crept up behind the woman, placing his hands firmly against her back and pushing her down. She collapsed on the man below her readily, pressing kisses against his chest and neck. The man behind her was rubbing her back sensuously, massaging her tight little ass and rubbing his own cock thoughtfully.

Dani could feel Drake's hand on her own hips, lifting her and pushing up the scarves around her lower body. He slid one of the bolsters under her taut stomach, then slowly spread her legs wide. His fingers came down to rub her clit again, and she twisted as sensation pooled in her lower body. She felt open and swollen; she wanted him to fill her. His fingers slipped in and out, pressing within her cunt, but they weren't enough. Against her will, a small, mewling noise came out of her throat. Drake's mocking laughter danced across her spine, and he kept her held down before him with one hand pressed firmly against the small of her back.

On the stage before them, the woman had stopped kissing the man on the floor, holding herself straight and tense as the man behind slipped one finger back and forth

across her back entrance. He pressed against her lightly, then placed the head of his erection against the tiny hole. She threw her head back in apparent strain as he started pushing into her slowly but surely, pinning her body against that of the man below her. Her face was clenched in a combination of pleasure and pain as his length sunk through her, until he hit bottom and all three were gasping. He reached one hand around her body, finding her clit and rubbing it hard. Then he pulled out and pushed back into her with a short, hard stroke. She gave out a little scream, and the man behind her moaned in answer.

Dani gasped as Drake's hand pulled away from her aching clit. Then she felt the round, smooth head of his cock pressed against her cunt and she shivered with anticipation. He moved into her steadily, the broad width of his erection stretching her moist opening as he pressed down. Wider and wider, deeper and deeper he moved, and she realized that she had seriously underestimated his size during her earlier appraisal. She'd assumed, from the bulge she'd seen earlier, that he'd been fully erect, but now she realized that he had still been at least partially soft. The monster that was entering her now was completely solid, a pillar of granite that would stretch her until she screamed from the pleasure of it.

A wave of hot lust hit her, smoothing the way for his penetration. She moaned, pressing back against him until he hit bottom, fully embedded within her flesh. She quivered in anticipation, knowing climax would be incredible when it finally arrived. He slipped back, then pushed forward again, this time hitting home with greater force. The motion pushed her forward on the couch and she gasped.

"Goddess," she whispered. "That's fantastic."

He gave a low, throaty laugh and moved faster. She could hardly pay attention to the dancers in front of her now. She was vaguely aware that they were writhing together with more urgency, but every bit of her ability to feel was taken up with the sensations that filled her with each of his thrusts. Then his hand stole back down around her body, rubbing and pressing her clit in time to his thrusts.

The pressure inside her was too intense to ignore, and she closed her eyes, reveling in the feel of him in and on her body. His fingers moved in time with his cock, and the coils of tension within her built to the point where she felt like screaming. Instead, she let her head drop down against the bolster and bit into it, completely taken over by raw need.

Then her orgasm hit, and her entire body stiffened and spasmed around his cock. He stopped moving, his body still hard with need.

"I love the way you feel right now," he gasped, lowering himself until he was draped across her back. He spoke directly into her ear, his voice urgent and compelling. "Every tremor, every breath is squeezing me. I'll come soon if we don't take a break."

She didn't reply. Instead, she simply turned her head against her shoulder and captured his lips in a deep kiss. Their tongues touched, flirting with each other, and she felt his massive length twitch within her. They were fully joined, two parts of the same being at that moment. She had never felt anything as exquisitely painful and pleasurable as this before.

He pulled his mouth away from hers, resting his chin on her shoulder. He should have been heavier, but he was balancing the bulk of his weight on his arms, careful of her comfort.

"We're missing the rest of their performance," he whispered. Dani giggled, having forgotten the dancers who were working so hard to entertain them. She turned her attention back to the stage below them. The woman's head was thrown back and sweat ran down her body. Every part of her body was tense, and her face twisted in pleasure. She convulsed between the men again and again. The man behind her thrust harder, each motion bringing her down on her other partner with a force that rocked all three of them.

Dani could feel herself growing hot and wet again, and when Drake started moving his hard length slowly back and forth within her moist opening, she sighed in satisfaction. He thrust steadily, each motion causing delicious friction against her skin.

The twists of desire sprang into life, sending tingles of pleasure through her. She could tell that it was getting harder and harder for Drake to control himself. His breathing grew harsh as he moved, then he was on his knees again, bracing himself against her shoulders as he pushed into her hard enough to rock the couch that cushioned them.

The entertainers were coming close to their own end. The woman had come one more time, her gasps ringing through the room. As her body tensed, the man behind her threw his head back and shouted as he came, his butt pumping into her spasmodically. This was too much for the man beneath them, who came with a moan. All three collapsed into a gasping pile of silky arms and legs, a tangle of satiated and exhausted flesh.

Watching them achieve their orgasm seemed to spur Drake on, and he moved more quickly. Again the sensations were climbing up through her body, dancing along her spine until she stiffened and twitched from the intensity of her feelings. The orgasm washed over her like a tidal wave, slamming her against the cushions with a force she'd never dreamed was possible. Drake gave a low, harsh groan, and then he was coming too. She could feel his hot seed pouring into her, filling her with his essence and pummeling her internally. He fell down onto her, crushing her down into the cushions, and struggled for breath.

She lay there, completely unaware of her surroundings for several moments. Then she felt him rolling off to the side. He turned her toward him, pulling her up onto his chest as easily as he might move a lifeless doll.

His pale skin was flushed, but his eyes were cool and dark. Assessing, even. He looked at her without expression, and a chill came over her. He seemed to be unaffected by what had just happened between them, as if this was no more than any other tumble between the sheets. She was dazed by the experience, the power of her climaxes. Sex had been her business since she'd become a woman. How was it that things would be so different with this man?

"Kiss me," he whispered.

She dropped her lips to his with unfeigned enthusiasm. His lips were soft against hers, and where before he'd been the ravisher, the seducer, this time it was her turn. She nipped at them, allowing her tongue to dart out and slip between his lips, then playfully retreat. She kissed him along his jaw line, down his neck and against his powerful chest.

What had happened to his clothing? she wondered. He was naked now, yet she couldn't remember him taking the time to undress. She was still wearing her gown, although it had been pushed to her waist. She was naked beneath. His clothing was unimportant, though. All she cared about was touching him.

She kissed along his chest, visiting each nipple and laving them with her tongue until they stood in stiff peaks. One of his arms was draped casually over his head, and his eyes were closed. His breathing was slow and regular now, and his look had softened into one of contentment.

She felt a stirring against her hip, and realized he was becoming aroused again. She dropped her kisses lower, drifting across his stomach towards his manhood below, just starting to awaken again. He stopped her, pulling her back up his body for another long kiss.

"Let's go to my chamber," he said, pulling her to her feet. He seemed to be completely comfortable with his nudity, something she appreciated. She liked a man who was self-confident and unashamed of his sexuality. The musicians and dancers had disappeared, leaving them alone in the dining room.

"I'm afraid I didn't take the time to enjoy the meal," she said, smiling at him and feeling almost shy. The sensation caught her off guard. When was the last time she'd felt shy? Yet with this man it felt as if she were embarking on something new and wonderful. It was hardly the usual client encounter.

"Are you hungry?" he asked, gesturing toward the table. "We can stay and finish if you like."

"I'd rather go with you now," she replied, allowing some of the longing he inspired in her to touch her face.

He nodded, then took her hand and pulled her across the room. A door opened before them. More guards, clad in black, carefully avoided watching them as they strode down the hallway. Another set of doors opened before them, and they entered a room that was large and formal. He pulled her across to another set of doors, leading her through a series of rooms that became smaller and more informal the further they retreated.

Finally, they entered what had to be his chamber, a large, airy space decorated in simple yet lush furnishing. Against one wall was a bed. One entire side of the room was taken up in windows overlooking the city. She hadn't realized how much time had passed, but it was full night out, and the buildings spread out before them sparkled like thousands of gems.

"These are my people," he said simply, gesturing toward the city with a sweep of his arm. "My family has ruled this system for a thousand years. Our family has been in power longer than the current imperial dynasty."

What could she say to that? Dani wondered. She was a courtesan, trained to deal with men of power. But somehow, spouting out one of the light-hearted remarks she usually affected, seemed so inappropriate to the moment. They were alone in his room, she realized, the most private place in his palace. Yet not a single personal item seemed to be kept here. It was lovely, but completely devoid of personality.

There were no other people around, either. No guards and no sign of a spouse or children. She hadn't heard of any other family members, she realized with a start. Usually ruling families were surrounded by courtiers, hangers-on and distant relatives. This palace seemed all but empty.

"Where is your family?" she asked before she had time to think better of the question.

"I don't have any family," he said, looking at her with amusement. "Didn't Guildmistress Karya give you any background on me before sending you to spy on me?"

Her breath caught.

"You were monitoring our conversation?" she asked tightly, fear filling her. What would he do to a woman he'd caught spying?

"Of course," he said, his tone mocking. "I have to be very careful, you know. I find myself in a delicate position dynastically. My brother is dead, killed in the war against the Saurellians. I was his only heir, and now I'm alone. He served on the front, at the Emperor's personal request." He paused for a moment, allowing his words to sink in.

"If I were killed now, this entire system would be forfeit to the Emperor," he added.

She had no idea what to say in response to this revelation. Surely Karya had known that, but they hadn't had time to discuss the situation in depth. After all, she was a courier and courtesan, not a spy. Her only experience was bringing pleasure to others she thought frantically.

"I see," she said, stalling for time. He turned away from her again, and her eyes flew around the chamber, looking for an escape route, or something to use as a weapon.

"I doubt very much that you do see," he said, his face dimly lit by the lights of the city. There was bleakness in his voice that made her heart twinge. He looked so alone, standing there above his home.

"These people are utterly dependent on me," he said quietly. "There are more than forty billion of them living in my territory, between the various planets, moons and stations. It's not a large system, but we've always enjoyed a high quality of life. There's no slavery here. My people are happy and healthy—hardly any choose to emigrate to other worlds. We were even spared the worst of the war. My brother and his men paid a high price to keep our young men out of the hands of Imperial recruiters."

She nodded, starting to understand.

"You're afraid that if something happens to you, your people will suffer," she said softly.

"Afraid?" he asked, laughing with a harsh, barking sound. "Afraid doesn't begin to express how I feel about the Emperor taking control of this system. If I die, it passes into his hands directly. Then he can start slowly milking my people of everything we've worked so hard to accomplish. Of course, if he decides I've committed treason, things will get far worse. He has the option of liquidating the entire population, you know."

"No," she whispered a wave of nausea washing over her. "He wouldn't do that."

"Oh really?" Drake turned back to her, and for the first time that night she could see some real emotion in his face. "You don't know what he's capable of doing. I am. I was raised with him, attended school with him in the Imperial Capital, Tyre. He counts me as a friend, at least for now. That's why I'm still alive. But he won't tolerate my refusal to cooperate with him much longer. I've refused to go along with his plans; I'm the only one of his nobles with the courage to stand up to him. He'll kill me just as easily as he had my brother killed."

"What plans?" she asked, afraid of the answer.

"Well, he feels that the Saurellians have gotten too much power. He wants to start fighting them again, to end the truce," he said. "That would be a disaster for our people. We don't have the strength, or the right, to continue fighting. Do you know how the war started?"

"I'd heard the Saurellians attacked several systems in the disputed region," she replied. "That they were seeking new territory."

"No, that's just imperial propaganda," he replied quietly. "I think you know better than to believe that. Didn't you hear another story while you were in Saurellian space?"

"Yes," she said quietly, looking out over the city. "I'd heard that the Emperor had liquidated an entire planet because their assembly refused to pay a new tax, and that the systems in the disputed regions asked the Saurellians to protect them. I didn't

believe it, though, at least not the whole story. The Saurellians are very aggressive, and I had trouble believing the Emperor would kill billions of people over taxes."

"The Saurellians are aggressive, but they aren't greedy," he said quietly. "They started fighting the Empire because those people came to them, pleading for their lives. They knew they'd be next if the Emperor had his way. He'll do it to Von'hotten, too, if he feels we're defying him. I have to stop that from happening."

"And how do you plan to do that?" she asked, turning to look at him directly. There was a sorrow there, and deep compassion in his face. Compassion for her, she realized. A new wave of horror and nausea swept over her, and she fell to her knees. She suddenly realized that the only way he could afford to tell her this much was if he planned to kill her.

"Oh, no, I don't want to know," she whispered. He came and knelt before her, tilting her chin up with one finger. He leaned forward and gently kissed her, then sat back on his heels.

"It's too late, Dani," he said quietly. "I think you already know that."

"Why did you tell me?" she asked. To her surprise, the horror was passing. In its place was a new emotion, anger that he would drag her into this. Her voice grew stronger. "Is it because I dared to come here and spy on you? Are you out to destroy the Guild, in addition to committing treason against the Emperor? We're not part of your Empire, we don't want anything to do with this. Take care of your own problems."

"Oh, it's a Guild problem, too," he said.

"How do you figure that?" she asked, her voice cold with disgust. "We're neutral. We don't need your crap."

"No, you *were* neutral," he replied. "Until twenty-five-thousand licensed Pleasure Guild workers were killed when the Emperor liquidated the planet of Kelvani. The action took place without warning, and they weren't given the option of using their diplomatic immunity to escape."

She gasped, shaking her head in disbelief.

"I didn't hear anything about that," she said. "If that was true, I would have known. The Guild takes care of their own. Our Council wouldn't just let the Emperor get away with killing our people."

"They don't intend to," he said, his expression growing fierce. "Don't you realize that even the Guild isn't strong enough to confront the Emperor directly? Neither are the nobles of the Empire. Do you think we like seeing him do things like this? Our civilization has flourished for a thousand years, and now one crazed idiot is going to bring it crashing down around us. The Saurellians aren't going to stop him. They don't want to break the truce. It's up to us."

"Who is 'us'?" she asked suspiciously.

"The nobles and the Guild," he said. "Why do you think you're here?"

"I thought I was here to pleasure you," she said quietly. He gave her a mocking look. "Well, to spy on you then."

"Karya sent you because she believes we can trust you," he said quietly. "You're uniquely qualified to help us. You've been in Saurellian space, and you have contacts there. We know you've already helped at least one Imperial slave escape. Don't bother to deny it," he said, holding up one hand when she started to protest. "Dani, you've been very careful, but we know you're smart and you're loyal to the Guild. You're also the perfect go-between for the Saurellians and us because no one will suspect you. You aren't a Guild functionary, you hold no office and you have no power. In short, you're not important enough for the Emperor to suspect you."

Dani snorted at his description.

"No, don't be offended," he continued. "That's what makes you perfect for this role. Karya has had her eye on you for a long time. She trusts you, and I trust her."

"That's not what she says," Dani said, her anger growing. Who the hell did he think he was?

"Well, that's what she says when she's being spied on by the Imperial intelligence service," Drake said. He reached forward, clutching her shoulders in his hands and

pulling her toward him. He stared into her face, as if he could make her believe him by sheer force of will. "This whole evening is a set-up. Karya and I have been building toward this moment for a year. We've carefully created a rift between me and Guild so that no one would suspect us of collaborating."

"What is the point of all this plotting?" she asked harshly. "What are you going to do, overthrow the Emperor?" she asked, laughing at the idea. As if anyone could topple a sitting emperor. The thought was ridiculous.

"I can't tell you that," he said, dropping his hands from her shoulder and sitting back. "I'll only tell you what you need to know. It's safer for everyone that way."

"Oh, Goddess," she whispered, searching his face as the realization hit her. They were planning to do that very thing. "You'll have to kill him."

"Yes."

"Oh, Goddess," she whispered again, and sat back heavily on the floor. Life had suddenly gotten far more complex than she could ever have dreamed. "I'm supposed to be on vacation, you know."

"Yes, I know," he replied. "I'm sorry, Dani, but it's already too late for you. You're part of this whether you like it or not. You're the only one who can help us."

"Why me?" she asked quietly. "Why did you have to pick me? There are thousands of other pleasure workers who've been in Saurellian space. Why couldn't you pick of them for this? I don't want this!"

"Because to carry out our plans, we'll need to work with the Saurellians," he said. "And you're the only pleasure worker with the connections we need. That slave you helped escape, her name was Calla? She's more than an escaped slave. She's become the daughter-in-law of the Saurellian Federation Council's President. She's going to be in Tyre over the next six months with her husband on a diplomatic mission, and you're the one woman in Imperial space she'll trust."

Chapter Four

He stared earnestly into her face, willing her to believe him. They were almost out of time. He'd managed to arrange a temporary power failure that would keep the Emperor's spies from listening in on them, but they would suspect something if the power didn't come back on soon.

She bit her lip, staring up at him with those stunning, unreal blue eyes. Despite the seriousness of their situation, he felt a twinge of desire for her. It filled him with dark amusement. Here he was, plotting to overthrow an emperor, and still all he could think about was bedding this incredible woman.

He was so caught up in his thoughts that it never occurred to him she would hit him.

The blow took him in the jaw, and he hit the ground with a thump. He gasped for breath as it had knocked the wind out of him. She stood over him, hands braced on her hips and glaring in anger.

"I may be a pleasure worker, but I will not let myself be used," she said with bitter venom. "I have no reason to believe you. You may kill me for this, but I'd rather be dead than betray my friends and my Guild. I have no reason to believe a thing you say."

"I can prove it to you," he said, fingering his jaw.

"How?"

He stood, watching her carefully. He wouldn't make the same mistake again, he thought.

"Take off your earrings."

"What?"

"Take off your earrings," he repeated. "Karya gave them to you earlier today, didn't she? For tonight."

She nodded, reaching up to take out the delicate silver baubles.

He reached out to take them from her. She handed them to him, and he turned them over in his hands. They appeared to be a random twist of silver wires and pearls, but he knew there was a pattern. There it was...he found the right spot and allowed them to interlock with each other. Then he held them up for Daniella to see. They had formed the delicate outline of a dragon, the mythological beast which was part of the Von'hot family crest.

"Where did Karya say she got these?" he asked quietly, handing them back to her.

"From her son," Dani whispered, looking up into his face.

"I gave her the earrings," he said quietly. She opened her mouth, but he cut her off. "I'm not going to tell you the whole story. There's no need for you to know any more, and too many people could suffer if anyone found out. But Karya is my mother, and we have been working together for years. Before he was killed, she planned all of this with my brother. Come over here."

He strode across the room to a small table. He picked up a small, hand-held illuminator, one with varying light frequencies. It was something that could be found in almost every home in the Empire. He turned to her.

"This is only visible with a specific frequency of light," he said quietly, punching a six-digit number into the wand. "It was tattooed into my upper arm as a child, to help them identify me if I was ever kidnapped."

He switched on the light, holding it up to his arm. Within the purplish light, the glowing outline of a dragon came into view beneath his skin.

"Hold up the earrings next to it," he said. She did, gasping. He watched her face, but he already knew what she was seeing. The delicate tracery of the wires and beads, held at exactly the right angle, matched his tattoo exactly. There could be no mistaking it.

"Do you believe me now?" he asked.

"You could have had those given to Karya," she said, shaking her head.

"Yes, I could have," he replied. "But how would have I arranged for her to give them to you? You know I'm telling the truth."

She was silent, a single tear welling up.

"I wish you weren't," she said. "How could all those people be dead, and none of us know about it?"

"He's not sane," Drake replied, filled with compassion for her. He remembered when he'd first heard the news, and realized that he no longer had a choice in fighting the Emperor. "Will you help us?"

"Yes," she whispered, reaching one hand up to wipe away the tears. "Yes, I will," she added, her voice stronger. He detected a note of steel in her tone, and he sighed with relief. Karya hadn't underestimated her.

"It's going to be very difficult for you," he said. "You're going to become my mistress. The Guild is going to expel you for turning against them, and you'll be publicly humiliated."

"I understand," she said, nodding her head with quiet dignity.

"When we go to Tyre, you'll be an outcast among the Guild members. And you'll be an outsider among the nobles. They won't look upon you as an equal, you know."

"I can handle that."

"There's one more thing," he said, "and this may be the hardest part of all. Within a day or two I can guarantee that the Emperor's people will contact you, try to recruit you to spy on me. You'll have to agree with them, and you'll have to keep up a convincing front that you're working against me."

"How will you know I'm not working against you?" she asked, looking at him coolly. All traces of tears were gone now.

"Because twenty-five-thousand of your Guild sisters will be counting on you to bring some kind of meaning to their deaths," he said. "Even if you betrayed me, I know you wouldn't betray them. Do we have a deal?"

"Yes," she replied. "We have a deal."

"Good," he said. He pressed a small button against the wall, and spoke with a commanding voice, "Please send us a tray of fruits, cheeses and wines."

"Yes, Your Grace," a disembodied voice replied. Drake turned back to her.

"In order for us to speak privately, I had to arrange for a 'random' power failure that cut off Imperial surveillance of this room. Ordering the food was the signal to restore the power, so they won't get suspicious and realize I know about their bugs. We have about three minutes until the power disruption ends," he added. "I'd like for them to think we've been doing things other than talking this entire time."

He gestured toward the bed, and she nodded, walking toward it quickly while shrugging out of her gown. She jumped up the three steps surrounding the high, canopied platform seemingly without a thought for her nudity, but Drake was struck silent by the sight of her. She was exquisite, perfect. Her soft, round butt swayed as she walked away from him. Her long, blonde hair hung to her waist in perfect ringlets. How did she do that, keep it so perfect even after all they'd done earlier?

"Drake, are you coming?" she asked, looking back to him with concern on her face. "We don't have much time."

He couldn't help it, he burst out laughing. The most beautiful woman he'd ever met was on his bed, demanding that he join her, and there wasn't even a hint of sexuality in her movements. It was just too funny.

She stared at him, confused. "What?" she asked.

"Nothing," he replied, shaking his head. "It's not important."

He walked slowly toward her. She had turned around on the bed, and he could just see her pink nipples peeking out through the curtain of her hair. He could feel himself

hardening as he moved closer, his erect cock swaying and his balls tightening up in anticipation.

She was smiling now, leaning back on her elbows and her legs spread out wide before her. Her cunt was open and waiting for him.

"Come here," she whispered. "You know, before I never even got the chance to touch you, Drake, but if you're going to be taking me on as your mistress than I think you should probably get a taste of what I bring to the table. I may be retired, but I was very good at my job."

He climbed up onto the bed, looming over her. She reached down with one hand and firmly grabbed his erection, holding it just a little too tightly for comfort.

"I'm in this now," she whispered, her face all innocence. "But don't forget that you're in it with me. Screw me or my Guild over and I'll take you with me." She twisted him ever so lightly, for emphasis.

He froze, startled.

"I won't," he whispered, his mouth coming down over hers in a gentle kiss. She kept her hold on him, but loosened her fingers, sliding them up and down his hard length. He shuddered, sensation running from his center up his spine. She pulled her mouth away from his, and looked up at him.

"We're out of time," he said. "We've got to make this look good."

"That won't be a hardship," she replied softly. "Now, get on your back. I plan to charge you a great deal of money to be your mistress. I'd better start earning it."

He rolled onto his back, watching her as she moved to straddle him. She slowly lowered herself until he could feel her hot, moist cunt brush against him. His hips pushed up against her, trying to get in, but she pulled away.

"Oh, no," she said. "That's far too easy, Drake. Like I said, I want to earn my money."

She leaned over him, rubbing her breasts against his chest sensuously. Her nipples were tight, hard pebbles against him, and he groaned in pleasure. Then she kissed him, her lips light and moist against his. She teased him, nipping and lapping at him, then dropping little kisses along his jaw and neck. Her mouth worked its way lower, trailing fire along his chest. Lower and lower she moved, and then one hand was gripping the length of his cock. Her lips were almost there, and she felt his stomach muscles clench in anticipation.

She looked up at him through her veil of hair, her eyes filled with a look of power that said he might be ruler of the world, but for that moment she was his ruler. He closed his eyes and let his head fall back, content to be under her control for now.

Her tongue slipped out, tracing the little ridge that ringed the head of his cock. He shivered, quivering at her touch. She grasped him firmly in her hand, then pulled down on his skin. He felt sensitive, exposed. Then her tongue touched him again, this time right above her hand. She trailed it up along the underside of his erection and wiggled it against him as she reached the little notch below the head. His hips thrust up at her once, involuntarily. She laughed throatily, then her mouth engulfed him fully, sucking him into its warm depths.

She slipped down on him, sucking him in hard and then pulling back, her lips trailing over him. Her head moved down again, hot against him. She moaned, unable to control herself. Up and down she went, moving faster and faster.

The sensations built in him. He was so sensitive that the motions of her lips and tongue against him were almost painful. He was getting closer, his breath came faster and his heart pounded in his chest.

Her mouth pulled away from him, and she was sitting up, giving him that smile again. Then she was scooting up his body, her hair sending shivers through him as it trailed along his skin. She raised her hips and slid down over him; he grunted in reaction to her movement. She was a hot, tight glove enclosing him, squeezing him. Her hands were braced against his chest as she twisted her body against his, massaging him

with her interior muscles. Then she froze, and he heard an embarrassed cough. She sat up, still impaled on his length.

Drake leaned up on his elbows and looked to see who had entered.

His spymaster was standing there, wearing the uniform of a servant and holding a heavily laden tray. The man looked up and down her body with interest.

"You requested food, Your Grace," the man said in dulcet tones. "Shall I put the tray on the table?"

"Yes," Drake said, his voice harsh. The witch had started squeezing him again as she sat there, her movements completely invisible to their audience. "On the table, that will be all," he gasped out.

The man gave him a sardonic look, then turned to set down the tray. He gave them a curt bow, then turned to leave the room. Drake let himself fall back down on the bed, straining as she continued working him deep inside. The door closed with a click, and she gave a tinkling laugh.

"What's the matter, Drake?" she asked, grinning down at him.

"I'll show you," he grunted, trying not to grin back at her. Moving quickly, he rolled her under him, thrusting deeply into her. She moaned, twisting against him as she brought her legs up and around to powerfully clasp his hips. Her hands reached down to his butt, digging into each cheek as she pulled him down into her. He drove down into her again and again, pushing as deeply as he could. He wanted to bury himself in her, to push so deeply into her body that the feel of him was imbedded in her. He realized he was trying to brand her, that he felt possessive of her.

She was whimpering now, and she bucked against him as he pressed her harder down into the bed. Her fingers dug deeply into him, raking up his back, leaving a trail of fire in his skin. She was marking him, he realized. The pain of her touch only made him more excited, more eager to possess her. She was wild, and she was his. But she wouldn't give in easily.

She whimpered again, and he could feel her starting to convulse around him. He gritted his teeth with exertion; he was so close. He slammed his cock into her again, hitting deep and hard and she exploded under him. She screamed a high-pitched wailing noise that cut through him. She squeezed him so tightly it hurt, her muscles seeming to scrape against his hypersensitive skin. His balls were hard, tight with his seed. He thrust one more time and then came, the hot liquid shooting out of him with explosive force. His blood roared in his ears, and he collapsed on her, gasping for breath.

After a moment to recover, he rolled off of her. She was still gasping and whimpering from her own release, but she rolled onto his chest and kissed him deeply.

"Will you mind being my mistress?" he asked her when they paused for air. She smiled down at him, her face flushed pleasantly pink from her exertions.

"Oh, no, I won't mind at all," she whispered. "I'm looking forward to it."

Chapter Five

"Guildmistress Karya?" Calanna's voice drifted softly into the room. Her voice was unsteady, off balance.

"Yes, child?" Karya asked, leaning back in her comfortable chair.

"You have a call, from Lord Von'hot," she replied, seemingly dazed. "Lord Von'hot, himself, not his secretary or anything..."

"I'll take it from here, Calanna," Karya said, careful to inject her tone with confusion. She had no doubt their conversation was being monitored by Imperial spies. Leaning over, she carefully switched on her screen. The picture she saw next was one of decadent debauchery.

Drake Von'hot was calling her from his bedroom. He was lounging back against a pile of silken pillows. Dani was kneeling before him, her blond hair draped across his lower body. Karya assumed she was performing fellatio, although it was hard to tell. With clinical detachment, she noticed the girl was the consummate professional. Nothing in her stance betrayed the fact that this most intimate of acts was being performed before a view screen.

"Guildmistress Karya," Drake said, his voice filled with smug triumph. "I thought I'd call and let you know myself that I've convinced Daniella here to come work for me, now." He reached down with one hand, patting her head as if she were some exotic pet.

"I see," Karya replied coldly. "You do realize that it is against our code for her to make a contract with you without Guild sanction. It is traditional for a man of your position to make such arrangements through the local Guild authority. In this case, that would be me."

"I don't think that's necessary," he replied, smiling at her. "As I'm sure you've noticed, the Guild no longer holds the same position in this sector that it once held. Daniella has already made her decision."

Karya's hands clenched against the armrests of her chair. Her voice betrayed no tension, however, as she calmly asked, "Dani, is this true?"

Dani lifted her head from Drake's lap, and turned to look into the view screen. Her face was flushed, her lips red and swollen. She had the look of a woman who had been well loved.

"Yes, Karya," she said, her voice filled with malicious glee. "Lord Von'hot's made me a wonderful offer too good to refuse. Especially since he'll be paying me directly, not through the Guild. I'm tired of giving my earnings away to people like you."

"Daniella, you do realize that if you do this, you'll be expelled from the Guild. We're here to protect you-" Karya said, but her voice was cut off by a scream in the outer office. Calanna burst through the door, crying. Behind her were six heavily armed men in Drake's livery.

"I've sent you an escort, Guildmistress," Drake said in a light, amused voice. Karya's gaze snapped back to the view screen. He was pushing Dani's head back down toward his hips, and smiling with satisfaction. "I've decided that we no longer need Guild administrators on Von'hotten. Of course, individual pleasure workers will be more than welcome to stay, if they so choose. You, however, are no longer welcome."

With that, the transmission ended. Calanna was kneeling at her feet, crying and begging the men not to hurt them. Karya looked at her captors with cool dignity, then took a deep breath and stood up.

"I assume you'll allow me to collect my things?" she asked with quiet dignity. The troopers looked at each other, and then one stepped forward. With interest, she noticed his discomfort. He didn't approve of his orders, she realized.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," he said in a low voice. "But we've been instructed to escort you directly to the space port. Your ship is waiting."

"I see," she replied quietly. "Calanna, pull yourself together. They aren't going to hurt us."

Calanna, still whimpering in fright, slowly stood up. Karya grasped the younger woman's hand firmly, and together they followed the soldiers out of the room, out of the building, and into a waiting transport. Karya held herself with stiff dignity the entire time, looking neither right nor left.

In fact, she didn't allow herself to relax at all until several hours later, long after she'd left Von'hotten. They allowed her to leave on a Guild ship, and in the privacy of her own cabin, Karya went into the fresher and turned on the faucet. The cool water ran out, and she splashed a little up on her face. Then she burst out laughing, grinning at herself in the mirror like a naughty child.

They'd pulled it off. Her boy had convinced Dani to work with him. He was every bit as smart as his father had been, she thought wistfully. If only his father was still alive...

She caught herself, her iron discipline shutting the thought out. He was dead and gone, no point in thinking of him. Now it was time to help her son and her Guild.

She walked out into her room, sat down at her desk and paged the ship's communication officer.

"I need you to send a transmission for me," she said. "To the Guild's High Council." The young man nodded, and turned to adjust several controls. She waited patiently until he finished, then spoke with a steady, somber voice into her view screen.

"I regret to inform you that Lord Von'hot of Von'hotten has formally expelled Guild leadership from his system," she said. "I cannot express the dismay I feel over this, and it is with grave sorrow that I must also tell you that Daniella Forester, a member of the Guild in good standing to this point, has opted to betray us and stay with him. I spoke with her myself, and am quite sure she is not being held against her will. We will, of course, have to take immediate action against Lord Von'hot, and

perhaps appeal to the Emperor. I also recommend that we expel Daniella. She is a traitor to our organization, and should be treated as such."

Karya switched off the screen and sat back in her chair, eyes closed. *Take care, child,* she thought. She wished she could have stayed to ease things for Dani, but she knew from personal experience how hard it could be to be the mistress of a Von'hot lord. *Take care.*

About the Author

Joanna Wylde is a freelance writer who has been working professionally for more than eight years as a journalist and fund-raiser. In April 2002, she branched out into fiction with *The Price of Pleasure*, a futuristic romance published by Ellora's Cave. She is married and lives in north Idaho.

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