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DREAM MATE

Sequel to
The Katzman's Mate

Stormy Glenn

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EROTIC ROMANCE



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A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK

IMPRINT: Erotic Romance

DREAM MATE

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DEDICATION

It's finally here, Judie. Hope you like it. Thanks for all your input.
Couldn't have done it without you nagging me every day. ☺

DREAM MATE

Sequel to The Katzman's Mate

STORMY GLENN

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Chapter 1

2374 AD, The Planet Katzmann,

“I refuse to give birth without a doctor from my home world,” Demyan shouted telepathically to his mate, Commander Chellak Rai, High Ruler of the planet Katzmann.

“Demyan, I don’t think you have a choice. Our baby will come whether you want it to or not,” Chellak replied. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly, trying to rein in his frustration with his mate.

Demyan, by Chellak’s estimations, would give birth to their child in a couple of weeks. Chellak looked forward to the prospect of holding his son or daughter. He was not so thrilled with the rapid mood swings that his mate bounced through. He resisted rolling his eyes as Demyan crossed his arms over his chest and glared across their bedroom at him. From experience, Chellak knew that this defiant stance would be immediately followed by tears. Chellak could handle the little bouts of anger. The sadness ripped great big caverns in his heart.

“You don’t want me to have a doctor from my home world?” Demyan asked quietly.

Oh gods, here it comes, Chellak thought as he saw the tears begin to form in Demyan's sea blue eyes. Hoping to prevent Demyan's imminent breakdown, Chellak hurried across the floor and wrapped his arms around his smaller mate.

"Demyan, if a doctor from your home world is what you want, that's what you'll get. I'll send Trajan Varl tomorrow, okay?"

"Today?"

Chellak smiled. "Okay, my own, I'll send Trajan today." Chellak reached down and tilted Demyan's head back. He brushed his thumb across Demyan's face to wipe away his tears. "Now, let's dry up these tears, and we'll go find something to eat? I'm sure you're hungry."

"I am hungry, but what I want can't be found in the kitchen."

Chellak's eyebrows rose in surprise at the soft flush on Demyan's face. Another facet of his mate's pregnancy, one that Chellak didn't mind in the least, Demyan's constant arousal. Chellak couldn't remember having so much sex in his entire life.

He felt grateful that a brüter's pregnancy only lasted five months. Any longer than that and Chellak wasn't sure he would survive it. *Of course, it wasn't a bad way to go*, Chellak thought as he followed his mate down onto the bed.

* * * *

Saris Chattan rushed across the stone floor of the palace, hurrying after the two royal guards that escorted him. It wasn't often that he received a summons to the royal palace. Hell, he had never been ordered to the royal palace. He was too low down in rank.

Which made him wonder why a summons had been sent for him now. He tried to think of any reason why he would be summoned to the palace, any transgression he might have made that would have brought him to the notice of the High Ruler. Nothing came to mind.

Coming to two large doors, Saris took a deep breath. This was it. Beyond these doors sat the ruler of his planet. Saris knew he would

either be walking out of here happy or with his head detached. The High Ruler of Elquone had never been known for his benevolence.

Saris nodded to the guards. His heart almost skipped a beat when they opened the large doors and he walked in. Saris looked around in amazement. He had heard stories of the royal throne room, but he had never seen it himself.

It looked amazing. A long red carpet went up the center of the room all the way to the throne across the room where the High Ruler sat. All along the walls people dressed in their finest clothes twittered here and there, deep in conversation.

Ornate and colorful tapestries graced the walls. Vases filled with imported moonflowers sat on nearly every surface that wasn't covered by food or drink. The pure gold of the food platters shined in the highly lit room. Saris knew that one plate alone could feed an entire family for a month.

The furnishings and decorations seemed to become more opulent the closer to the High Ruler's dais that he walked. Saris tried to keep his disgust off his face. The High Ruler of Elquone liked the finer things in life and he didn't seem to care if his people suffered because of it.

Coming to stand at the bottom of the dais, Saris bowed respectfully. "Saris Chattan, as requested, High Ruler."

"Ah, yes, the good doctor," the High Ruler replied.

Saris nodded. He tried to ignore the dribble of red wine falling down the man's chin. "Yes, High Ruler."

"I have heard of your skills in aiding the brüter during birth. Your superiors have nothing but good things to say about you."

"Thank you, High Ruler," Saris replied. He swallowed past the lump in his throat. Okay, so the king had heard of his healing skills. So what? That didn't explain why he had been summoned to the royal palace. The High Ruler had his own physicians.

“It seems that I am not the only one who has heard of your skills,” the High Ruler said. He waved his hand, gesturing for someone to come forward.

The breath that Saris tried to keep steady in his chest flew out in one aroused whoosh when he turned to see the man that stepped up beside him. In all of his years of learning different species and training to care for them, Saris had never encountered one so magnificent.

The man’s features looked neither cat nor man, but both. A layer of fur covered what skin Saris could see. Most of his body seemed to be covered by black leather, from the tight, leather pants that hugged his long legs to the black, leather vest-type shirt that covered his muscular chest.

Beautiful blond hair hung down to his shoulders, but not sunlight blond, more the color of a reddish sunset. Small pointed ears came out the top of his head and he had a small protruding nose like a cat. Saris would just bet that he had a pink tongue and long canines to match.

Saris felt his face flush when he looked up to encounter deep black eyes. They seemed to be assessing him just as much. Trying to hide his reaction to the man, Saris turned back to the High Ruler.

“You have been requested to assist in the birth of Demyan Rai, mate to the High Ruler of Katzmann,” the High Ruler said. As much as that surprised Saris, the gleam in the High Ruler’s eyes made him nervous.

“I would be happy to assist in any way that I can, High Ruler.”

“Yes, I thought you might say that.” The High Ruler sat up straighter in his chair. He waved his hand and another man stepped forward, his chief adviser, Toc Jerell, a man hated by the population of Elquone nearly as much as the High Ruler.

The man leaned over close to the High Ruler’s ear, listening as the High Ruler spoke to him. His eyes kept coming back up to Saris, time and time again, as he nodded. Finally, the man stood. The smirk on his face sent a cold shiver down Saris’s back.

“Saris Chattan, it is my understanding that you were chosen as a brüter? Is this correct?” the High Ruler asked.

Saris nodded. It was true. He had been chosen to be a brüter due to his genetics, something that drove Saris crazy. Just because he had delicate-looking features, long limbs, and blond hair he had been chosen out of the many on his planet and considered more desirable.

Personally, Saris thought it all a load of crap. He wasn’t any better or any worse than anyone else. Thoughts like those had gotten him kicked out of the brüter program.

“It is also my understanding your superiors removed you before your training could be completed.”

“Not officially removed, High Ruler. My superiors decided that my talents could be used in a better manner,” Saris replied.

“As a doctor to the brüter?”

“Yes, High Ruler.”

The High Ruler stared at Saris so long, Saris started to get nervous. He wondered what the High Ruler intended with all of his questions and why the interest in Saris’s brüter training.

And he wondered about the man who stood next to him. Saris could still see him out of the corner of his eye. The man had an impressive bearing. He would dominate any room he stood in. He certainly seemed to be the center of attention in this room.

“So, it is my understanding from your words that you have never been officially removed from the Brüter Caste? Is that correct, Chattan?”

Saris nodded. “Yes, High Ruler, even though I am not officially a brüter, I am still part of the caste. I’m just on the medical side of things.”

The High Ruler nodded. “Very good, very good.”

Saris watched with curiosity as the chief advisor leaned over and whispered in the High Ruler’s ear. The High Ruler nodded a few times then waved the chief advisor away. His eyes turned back to Saris.

“High Ruler Chellak Rai has made a request of Elquone, one that I cannot in good conscience ignore. Therefore, as Trajan Varl is the representative of High Ruler Chellak Rai, I am signing over your brüter contract to him.”

Saris felt his blood run cold at the High Ruler’s words. Having his contract sold was one of Saris’s biggest fears. Having learned to be a doctor for the brüter, he had thought he would be safe. Guess he was wrong.

“Henceforth, Saris Chattan, you will be the property of Trajan Varl until such time as he releases you from your contract, or you have completed your duties,” the High Ruler decreed. “Is this understood?”

Saris nodded when he really wanted to yell at the High Ruler for being such a prick. He hadn’t been able to complete his brüter training because of this very thing. He didn’t want to be someone’s property.

Saris nearly jumped when the man beside him stepped forward. “High Ruler, if I may,” he said. When the High Ruler nodded, the man continued. “I am unable to take possession of the doctor’s contract. It is against the laws of Katzmann for anyone to own another person.”

“Is this so?” the High Ruler asked curiously. “How odd.”

“It is a requirement for being part of the Federation, High Ruler,” Trajan said.

“You do understand that I am unable to release the doctor without a contract being in place, don’t you?” The High Ruler asked. “He is of the Brüter Caste, and it is against our laws for someone of that caste to leave our world without a contract.”

Saris could see the tension in the body next to him. Trajan Varl didn’t seem happy. Saris couldn’t say the same. Delight filled him at the prospect of not being obligated to fulfill a contract he didn’t believe in. No man or woman should be forced to provide services if they chose not to.

“Could we not amend the contract, High Ruler?” Saris asked.

The High Ruler jumped to his feet, his fist shaking angrily at Saris. “No, we cannot amend the contract. A brüter contract is a brüter contract. It must be followed to the letter of our laws. You know as well as I do that no one of the Brüter Caste can leave our world without a contract.”

“Yes, High Ruler,” Saris said.

The High Ruler glanced at Trajan Varl, giving him a sugar-filled smile that Saris knew to be false. “Please give my apologies to your commander. Under the circumstances, I am unable to fulfill your request. I hope you understand.”

Saris looked over at Trajan Varl to get his reaction. It wasn’t long in coming. Trajan’s hands tightened into fists, his lips thinned. The fire that lit up his black eyes that fascinated Saris. It almost looked real.

“I will certainly pass your words on to my commander,” Trajan said. He cast a long look at Saris before clicking his heels together. He nodded his head, turned, and walked down the long red carpet and through the double doors.

Saris glanced back at the High Ruler in shock. He thought for sure the High Ruler would see providing a doctor for Demyan Rai as a way to get into the good graces of Chellak Rai. To deny his request, especially when it came to his mate, was akin to political suicide.

The rumor mill ran amok with stories concerning Commander Chellak Rai and his brüter mate, Demyan. Rumor said that the big Katzman doted on his little mate and would do almost anything for him.

While Saris tried to comprehend the huge mistake that he believed the High Ruler was making, he noticed Toc Jerell watching him intently. The lust blazing in the chief advisor’s eyes made Saris’s skin crawl.

Saris had never liked the man. He had spent too much time giving medical assistance to the men and women who had caught the chief

advisor's eye. He wasn't a pleasant man, even worse to those he chose to subject his desires upon.

"Saris Chattan, as your contract has been rejected by Trajan Varl, I feel that you are unsuited for the Brüter Caste. As such, I am officially removing you from your caste. Henceforth, you will be of the Vergnügen Caste."

Saris's mouth dropped open. He was being removed from his position just because someone he had never met before rejected his contract? A contract Saris didn't want in the first place?

"High Ruler, I—" Saris began only to be interrupted by the High Ruler.

"You will leave from here and immediately present yourself at the Vergnügen Caste where you will be trained in the skills of that caste." The High Ruler glared over at Saris, giving him a stern look. "Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, of course, High Ruler, but my patients. I have—"

"You will do as you are told, or you will find yourself in my dungeon," The High Ruler shouted. "Now, go!"

Saris suddenly understood what had just happened. Instead of being given to Trajan Varl to assist in the birth of Demyan Rai, he would be to be retrained as a pleasure slave. Saris knew his life had just gone to hell.

Being of the Brüter Caste gave Saris some control over his life, especially since he was a doctor educated in cross-species breeding. His skills were greatly needed. Because he had to have a contract to leave the planet, he had felt relatively safe right here at home.

The Vergnügen Caste was different. Pleasure slaves had no rights whatsoever. The owner of their contracts could do whatever they wanted to them, including rent them out for money, force them sexually, anything.

"High Ruler, I have no training in the Vergnügen Caste. I have a lot of training and experience as a doctor. I can be of such more use there," Saris reasoned. He knew he grasped at straws, but he couldn't

think of much he wouldn't do to keep from being trained as a pleasure slave.

"Guards!" The High Ruler shouted. "Escort Saris Chattan to the Vergnügen Center. See that his training is begun immediately."

Saris backed away from the dais and the High Ruler. "No, no, you can't do this," he sputtered. "I'm a doctor. I have patients that I need to see to, people who need me."

He turned to find two very large armed guards standing behind him. They grabbed Saris by his arms and pulled him, kicking and screaming, down the long red carpet. Saris gave up protesting by the time they got to the steps leading out of the palace.

A few more minutes and a transport had him delivered to the Vergnügen Center. Saris didn't struggle as he walked up the center's hard stone steps and through the large ornate doors colored in gold.

What would be the point? Everything he knew in this life would end the moment he got inside those doors. Saris wasn't sure he would retain his medical knowledge. He had heard stories of people being totally mind wiped when being retrained.

That scared him more than anything. People of the Vergnügen Caste provided pleasure like mindless drones, their only thought in life to pleasure to others. Saris liked what he did, and he was damn good at it. He didn't want to give it up.

Saris considered struggling as the two guards led him down a long, white hallway, but years of being taught to hide his emotions, even ones of terror, held him. He didn't want to do this. He needed to run, to get away. He could hear people crying out as they passed door after door until they came to the end of the hallway.

The guards led him into a small, white, walled room with a single reclining chair sitting in the middle of it. A large one way mirror sat high on the far wall. Saris knew that beyond that mirror sat the technicians that would provide his training.

The two guards lifted Saris onto the chair and clamped large bands around his arms, legs, and head. The door he had come through

just moments before opened, and a middle-aged man dressed in white walked in carrying a holopad. He clicked the buttons on it several times, then looked up at Saris.

“Ah, is this the trainee, Saris Chattan?”

One of the guards nodded.

“Very well, you may leave.” The man didn’t acknowledge Saris or the guards as they left. He walked to the wall and pressed a button, and the wall swung open to reveal a hidden cabinet. He grabbed several items and turned back to Saris.

“Now, Saris,” the man said as he began connecting electrodes to the side of Saris’s head and to his chest. “A full retraining has been ordered for you, but I don’t want you to worry. You should sleep through this fairly well. By the time you wake, you’ll be a fully-functioning Vergnügen.”

Saris opened his mouth to speak, only to have the man shove a clear plastic bite piece in the opening. He tried to spit it out, tried to tell the man he didn’t want to be retrained. He could only whimper.

“Not to worry, Saris, this is just to keep you from choking in case you have a seizure. In rare cases, the retraining is harder for some than others.” The man held up a large, metal object that looked like a gun filled with blue liquid. “Now, this should help you sleep.”

Before Saris could protest, the man put the gun to his arm and pulled the trigger. Saris screamed over the plastic mouth piece as searing hot pain shot up his arm, then down through his entire body.

Not hurt, my ass! Saris thought as his eyelids began to grow heavy. The room became fuzzy until he could only make out faint blurs moving about the room. He couldn’t even hear anything except a loud rush, like wind blowing through a canyon.

Saris thought of the tall lion man, Trajan Varl. That man who intrigued him. He would have liked to have gotten to know Trajan Varl a little more. Saris’s last thought was of the tall lion man, wondering where he would find a doctor.

As reality began to fade, Saris felt one lone tear of sorrow and regret fall down his face.

* * * *

Trajan waited outside of the palace doors for the doctor to come out. He wanted to speak to him. Hell, he needed to speak to him. Something about the man that called out to him, and as a Katzman, he couldn't ignore it.

He suspected that the man might be his mate, but he couldn't be sure, not until he had a chance to talk to him, to smell him. The scent of a mate aroused a Katzman so much, Trajan would almost be unable to resist the good doctor.

Trajan glanced at the gathering darkness and wondered why the doctor hadn't appeared. He should have left the palace by now. Worried about the time, Trajan hurried back inside the palace and tracked down the nearest guard.

"I'm trying to locate Doctor Saris Chattan. I'm hoping that he can help me find a doctor for my High Ruler's mate."

"Sorry, sir, Doctor Chattan has already left."

Damn! Trajan thought. He thanked the guard and walked back out of the palace. He stopped at the bottom of the stone steps and glanced up and down the small, cobblestone road before him. There wasn't a sign of anyone anywhere.

Determined to find the doctor, Trajan headed back to his ship. He needed to check in with Chellak and then figure out how to find the doctor. He wasn't going to leave Elquone until he did.

Chapter 2

Trajan Varl shook his head at the grimace he could see on Commander Chellak Rai's face through the vidlink. "I'm telling you, Chellak, it was like being inside of an ancient society. As long as I agreed to accept the doctor as my slave I could have him, but the moment I said no, all bets were off."

"You did tell him that because of Federation Regulations that it is against the law to own slaves, right?" Chellak asked.

Trajan chuckled. "Oh yeah, I told him. He told me to tell you that he sends his regards, but he is unable to assist us. Seems the good doctor is considered one of the Brüter Caste, and as such, he's not allowed to leave the planet without a contract."

"So, amend the contract to be a temporary use of services."

"The doctor suggested that himself," Trajan replied. "The High Ruler still wouldn't go for it. He said it went against the laws of Elquone or some such crap like that."

"Any chance that the good doctor would be willing to go against the High Ruler?" Chellak asked.

Trajan shrugged. "I don't know. I mean, he seemed to really care about his patients and all, but how can you ever tell what someone else is thinking? Not all of us have mental telepathy, you know."

"So, track him down and ask him. See if he would be willing to come anyway," Chellak demanded. "Demyan could go into labor any day now, and he insists on having a doctor from his home world."

"I'll see what I can do, but I'm not making any promises. I don't even know where to start looking for this guy," Trajan said.

Chellak remained silent for a moment as if he listened to someone else talking. Trajan knew that he was. One of the benefits of being mated with a Katzman, Chellak could talk mentally with Demyan. “Demyan says to start at the Brüter Center. He also says that if the High Ruler has already said no, that you need to be extra careful. Not many people want to go against the High Ruler. Apparently, he’s not the forgiving sort.”

Trajan nodded. He had kind of gotten that idea when he had met the man. High Ruler Shek Tavia did not strike Trajan as a man who would accept dissention in the ranks, let alone from an offworlder.

“All right, I’ll see what I can do,” Trajan said. “I’ll check back in same time tomorrow. If you don’t hear from me by then, something has gone wrong. You need to send in the troops and get my ass off this damn planet.”

Chellak chuckled. “Agreed.”

Trajan turned off the vidlink and sat back in his chair. He wondered if he would be able to get the doctor to agree to go with him, even if he could find him. He still needed to figure out how to smuggle him offworld without anyone being the wiser.

He needed some shuteye before anything else. He hadn’t had a wink of sleep since leaving Katzmann. Something told him he would need all of his faculties when he did find the good doctor.

Trajan turned on the security mode, locking the air hatch on his small ship and surrounding it with a small invisible bubble. The moment someone stepped within a foot of his ship, alarms would sound, alerting Trajan. It was a handy little system.

Leaving the bridge, he went down the hallway to his personal quarters and pulled his clothes off. A long groan fell from his lips as he lay back on the bed pad of his bed. He hadn’t realized how tired he felt until now.

He could feel every muscle in his body tense, then relax as he took a deep cleansing breath and let it out. Wiggling around a bit until

he got into a comfortable spot, Trajan closed his eyes and let his mind wander to the good doctor.

Demyan had suggested he start looking at the Brüter Center, whatever in the hell that was. He'd have to ask around a bit to find it. Maybe he could use the excuse that since the doctor couldn't go back to Katzmann with him, Trajan needed to look for another doctor.

On the other hand, he could just go visit a bar and ask a few questions there. He could get a drink and maybe find a little company, too. It had been so long since he'd laid, he wondered if he would even remember how.

It wasn't for lack of volunteers or enthusiasm on his part. Training and the invasion of Katzmann had been all he had done for the last...forever, it seemed. But that was what one did for one's pridemate, and Chellak Rai was Trajan's pridemate.

They had been put together as young children, soon after Chellak's parents were killed by Vortigern Vedek. Chellak displayed a lot of anger as a child. He had wanted revenge. Trajan couldn't blame him. He would have wanted the same thing.

Still, being grouped in a pride with Chellak had given Trajan a chance to get to know him and come to respect him more than any man he had ever met. Trajan would do anything for Chellak Rai, even find a doctor for his little mate.

As Trajan started to fade off to sleep, his last thought was of the hot little doctor that he wanted to take home with him, not for Demyan's benefit, but for his own.

* * * *

Wet, hot lips wrapped around Trajan's aching cock making him tremble. Nimble fingers gently massaged his nut sac. Lithe legs rubbed against his. Soft, silky hair tickled his hips and thighs.

Passion radiated from Trajan's core as flames licked their way up his body. He could feel each movement the man in his arms made,

hear each groan that fell from his honeyed lips. Trajan's body quaked as desire raced through him.

"Sari," he groaned, "harder, Sari. Gods, please, Sari."

A soft giggle came in response, a small lick over the triangle shaped birthmark on his left thigh, a tender nip on his hip. Trajan reached for the body between his legs out of desperation. If he didn't sink his hard cock into Sari's welcoming body in the next second, Trajan just knew he would die.

"Sari, need you, Sari," Trajan whispered as way of apology as he roughly pulled the man farther up into his arms. Grasping the hips settling over his, Trajan thrust home, feeling Sari's warmth swallow him down to the root.

Trajan opened his eyes at the soft whimpers coming from above him. The sight that met his eyes nearly brought him to tears as it always did when he looked upon his mate. He had never seen anyone as breathtaking as his Sari. Not in all of his years.

His beautiful features, so delicate in nature, yet so strong. The long, golden hair of the Elquone people not lost on Sari, even if it just barely reaching his collar. It still shone bright as the twin suns of Katzmann.

Unlike most of the inhabitants of Elquone, Trajan's mate had deep sea green eyes rather than blue. It always reminded Trajan of the grassy fields of his home world. He could look into those eyes forever and die a happy man.

They expressed every emotion, showing everything Sari felt for Trajan, something Trajan would forever be grateful for. He just had to look into his mate's eye to know that he was loved.

"Sari," Trajan whispered, awed by the man above him. He never dreamed that simple hands could feel so hot against his skin, or that a body could welcome him so much. A deep feeling of peace surrounded him. He was home.

"Come for me," Sari whispered.

Trajan could feel the heat of Sari's body course down his entire length. "I am coming for you, my own," Trajan replied as the heat at the center of his universe began to ignite.

"No," Sari replied, shaking his head, "come for me before they hurt me. Please, Trajan."

Trajan's eyes widened at his mate's words, not fully understanding them. Before he could reply, a hot tide of passion swept him away, taking his ability to think, to feel anything except for Sari, and then it took Sari.

Groaning at the intensity of his orgasm, Trajan opened his eyes expecting to see his mate, Sari, above him. His heart plummeted as he realized that it all been a dream, a fantasy. *Well, part of it anyway*, Trajan thought as he noticed the seed covering his chest and abdomen.

He dropped his head back onto the pillows. Punching his fists into the bed, he let out a loud growl. He hated wet dreams. Besides being messy, they made him want for more.

And right now, he wanted the doctor with every bit of his being, which scared the crap out of Trajan. He had never had a wet dream that had seemed so real, so right. He felt even more disturbed by how right it felt to have the doctor in his arms.

If he added that to the doctor's parting words, Trajan was pretty sure he had lost his mind. He didn't know if he dreamed that or what. If he had, why would he create a wet dream where the doctor needed his help?

Trajan shook his head. He had to be losing his mind. Maybe it was this planet, these people. Maybe he worked too hard. Whatever it was, Trajan knew that he had to forget it and get on with the job Chellak had assigned him.

Trajan grabbed his shirt off the floor and wiped the seed off of his stomach before tossing it across the room. Closing his eyes, he tried to put the images of Saris Chattan out of his head so he could sleep. It wasn't going to be easy.

As sleep started to claim him, images of those deep green eyes once again assailed Trajan. Only this time, instead of glowing with love for him, they begged for help. Trajan heard the words again, more desperate this time.

“Come for me, Trajan, before they hurt me, please. Come before it’s too late.”

Trajan jerked awake. He sat up and swung his legs over the side of his bed. Wiping a weary hand down his face, he tried to make sense of the desperate words he had heard, not once, but twice.

He knew that the images belonged to the doctor just as much as he knew deep down inside that Saris Chattan was his Sari. He didn’t know how he knew, but he did. Doctor Saris Chattan was his mate.

Knowing he wasn’t going to get any sleep, Trajan got up and dressed, taking special care to grab his many weapons and hide them in the different hidden pockets of his clothing, as he usually did when going into a fight. He didn’t know why, but he knew he needed to get ready for battle.

He wanted to call Chellak and ask him if he had indeed lost his mind. Telepathy between mates didn’t happen until the mating cycle began. Even though he had a wet dream about the doctor, they had in no way mated.

So, why did he have dreams about a man he had met for a brief few minutes, and how did he know that the same man was his mate? Wishful thinking or had he finally cracked after one too many battles?

Trajan chuckled. Maybe both. He had either been training or fighting for most of his life. His body had the physical scars to prove it. His soul had the emotional scars. Neither would ever go away.

That still didn’t explain how he knew that the doctor was his mate. It also didn’t tell Trajan how he would find him or get him back to Katzmann, two things that would not happen unless Trajan started moving.

With that thought in mind, Trajan stepped out of his ship, turned the security seal back on, and started walking toward the center of

town. From personal experience, if he wanted information about something, a bar was the best place to find it, and preferably not an upscale one. The seedier the better.

Such a place wasn't hard to find. Every town had one or two. The alcohol usually came watered down and cheap, the patrons rough and ready to fight over the slightest insult. The establishment itself would be run down and rank.

Trajan found one easily enough. He walked in, instantly feeling every head in the place turn to watch him cross the room. He moved up close to the bar and ordered a mug of ale.

Grabbing the mug the barkeep set on the bar, Trajan tossed down a coin and moved off to sit at a table near to the door but far enough in the corner that he could sit with his back to the wall.

It wasn't long before he heard the information he sought. A couple of tables over, two men sat talking, their heads pressed close together as if they didn't want anyone to overhear them.

Luckily for Trajan, Katzman had superior hearing and could pick up every word that they spoke.

"Did you hear about the doc?" asked the older man with gray hair.

The redhead shook his head. "Doc Chattan?"

The old man nodded. "Seems he got himself into a bit of a mess."

"Oh? How so?"

Yes, how so?

The old man looked around the room. Trajan quickly glanced out the window as if he waited for someone. He took a sip of his ale, grimacing at the stale, bitter taste. He had seen a lot of horrible places, but he wasn't sure he had ever tasted ale this bad.

"Toc Jerell had his highness send the doc to the Vergnügen Center for retraining."

"Vergnügen? Seriously?" the younger man asked. "But he's such a good doctor. Why would they retrain him as a pleasure slave?"

Trajan's mind froze on the words pleasure slave. Saris was being retrained as a pleasure slave? He felt a deep growl begin to grow in

his chest at the very thought of his mate pleasuring anyone but him. It was not acceptable.

“I think Toc Jerell did it,” the older man replied, catching Trajan’s interest. Toc Jerell, the chief advisor to the High Ruler? “That man’s always had a thing for the fair-haired doctor, even if the man was oblivious to it. You’ve seen how he stares at him during assembly.”

The younger man nodded. “Yeah, it’s too bad. Doc is a great guy. I doubt he’ll even remember his own name once they get done with him.”

Trajan felt his muscles tense. The way the men talked, Saris wouldn’t even be the same person once he finished with his retraining. Trajan couldn’t let that happen. Saris belonged to him.

Getting up to his feet, Trajan began making his way back to the bar, making sure that his steps seemed unsteady. As he stepped past the two men, he purposely pushed into the younger one, causing him to spill his drink.

“Hey!” the man exclaimed.

“Oh, I’m so sorry. I guess I had a little more to drink than I thought.” Trajan laughed. “But I do love to drink. Nothing like a good ale to cure what ‘ales’ you. Get it, ‘ales’ you?”

“You’re drunk,” the older man sputtered, pushing Trajan away.

“Well on my way.” Trajan plastered a look of surprise on his face. “Hey, why don’t you drink with me? Then we can all be cured. I’m buying.”

Trajan sat down in a chair between the two men and waved to the barkeep. “Barkeep, another round for me and my two friends.” He looked back over at the two men, eyeing him doubtfully and held out his hand. “I’m Varl.”

* * * *

It took everything in Trajan could do not to puke his guts out the moment he left the bar. It had taken longer than he had anticipated

getting the two men to loosen their tongues. But, in the end, Trajan had gotten the information he needed.

Saris was being held in the Vergnügen Center for retraining. He had been taken there the day before, right after Trajan had left the royal palace. Trajan hoped that he would be able to get to Saris before too much retraining took place.

Trajan knew the location of the Vergnügen Center, and he knew when the shift change happened. He also knew the most likely location inside the center where Saris might be held, the deep retraining labs.

If Trajan could believe his two drinking buddies, by the time Saris finished his retraining, the only thing he would ever want out of life was to please his master.

Saris would forgo food and bathing, gladly accept torture and abuse, and have sex with anyone instructed to pleasure, anything to please his master. Sex would be the driving force in his life. He would be unable to think of anything else. He would be in physical pain if he didn't have sex on a regular basis.

Trajan liked sex as much as the next guy, but he felt horrified that a center like this even existed. He had been pretty appalled when he had learned about Demyan. Not because Demyan could give birth to a child, but because the genetic manipulation needed for that had been forced upon Demyan.

To know that this world had a center that trained people to be mindless sex slaves sickened Trajan. No one should be forced to do anything that they didn't want to. Trajan finally understood why the Federation had denied Elquone's request for membership.

Chellak fought against just that type of tyranny. As pridemate, Trajan had gladly joined in Chellak's fight to reclaim his home world. However, for the first time, that fight felt more personal. The fight involved Trajan's mate.

Trajan slowly made his way through the dark alleys and side streets until he came to a large building, several stories tall. He

watched from the shadows across the street as a few people came and went until he knew the shift change was about to take place.

As quietly as he could, Trajan made his way to the side of the building where the workers entered. He crouched down behind a large planter, knife in hand, and waited until just the right moment.

He held his breath, his muscles poised to attack, as two workers walked by. He ignored their chitchat and concentrated on sneaking in the door behind them without being heard or seen. As soon as he got through the door, he quickly made his way around the corner and waited.

It took Trajan a moment to get his bearing and figure out where in the building he stood. He didn't know how much of the information his two drunk friends had given him was truthful and how much they made up in their ale-soaked minds.

After a moment, Trajan began making his way down the hallway. He could hear people moaning with each door he passed. Trajan had an idea of what went on behind those doors, but he was almost afraid to look.

Besides, he came here for one person, and one person only. After he got his mate safely away and home to Katzmann, Trajan had every intention of encouraging Chellak and the Federation into sanctioning Elquone or something. There had to be a way to stop this madness.

Hearing someone down the hallway, Trajan quickly opened the nearest door and went through, shutting the door behind him. He listened at the door until he couldn't hear anyone anymore then turned to see the room.

Shock filled Trajan at what he saw. A young man, no more than eighteen or nineteen years old, lay strapped naked to a reclining chair. He had wires embedded in his head and chest. A strange blue liquid pumped into his arm from a long tube attached to the wall.

The man's eyes looked glazed over as if he were drugged. His limbs lay listlessly at his sides in metal restraints. He almost looked

dead. The raging hard on jutting up from a small patch of golden hair seemed to be the only sign of life in the young man.

Trajan walked over to the young man's side. He reached up and brushed the soft, blond curls back from his face. The man didn't even flinch. He didn't move a muscle except one. His cock jumped. Knowing he couldn't leave the young man to this terrible fate, but not knowing what to do about it, Trajan leaned down to whisper in the man's ear. "I'll be back for you. Hold on until then."

With a great deal of regret, Trajan turned and headed back toward the door. He leaned his ear against the door and listened carefully for any sounds. When none came, Trajan eased the door open a crack. Peeking out, he checked for signs of life.

Not seeing anyone, Trajan made his way back into the hallway, shutting the door behind him. Deciding that Saris could be anywhere, Trajan began to cautiously open each door, peaking into each room.

He saw men and women of various ages but no Saris, not until he opened the last door in the hallway. So intent on finding Saris, he nearly didn't recognize him as the man on the bed.

Much like the young man down the hallway, Saris had wires attached to his head and chest. A long tube from the wall shot blue liquid into his arm. Metal clamps held him naked to the reclining chair beneath him.

Trajan's breath caught in his throat when he spied Saris's hard cock. He wished that he had more time to study it, watch it, taste it. It truly was a thing of beauty. He really would like to get an up-close introduction.

Shaking his head regretfully, Trajan ignored the hard cock and instead went for the wires embedded in Saris's head and chest. As carefully as he could, Trajan disconnected the wires and then moved on to the tube with blue liquid.

That one was a little harder to disconnect. It took a little maneuvering on Trajan's part, but after a few minutes, Saris came

free. Trajan searched around for something for Saris to wear, but he could only find a sheet.

Wrapping it around Saris, he picked him up. At the door, Trajan once again listened for any sounds. When he didn't hear any, he opened the door and walked out, moving quickly down the hallway to the young man's room.

Trajan knew he couldn't save everyone. Hell, he might not even be able to save Saris, but he had to try and save the young man, too. Opening the door that led to the man's room, Trajan quickly walked in and shut it behind him.

He carefully lowered Saris onto the floor then went to unhook the young man. Having done it once already, the second time went fairly quickly. Trajan wrapped him in a sheet, much as he had Saris, then lifted him up and carried him across the room.

Lifting the man to his shoulder, Trajan reached down and picked Saris up with the other arm. He grunted as he lifted Saris, grateful the man didn't weigh more than he did. Otherwise, he never would have been able to lift them both at the same time.

With an unconscious man on each shoulder, Trajan again pulled his blade weapons, one in each hand, and went back the way he came in. Moving slowly due to the weight of the two men he held, it took Trajan just a bit longer to get out than it did to get in.

Once outside of the Vergnügen Center, Trajan hurried to the opposite side of the building. He waited in the shadows for several moments to see if he had raised any alarms. When none sounded, Trajan hoped for the best and headed for his ship.

Carrying two bodies through several blocks of city would be hard on the best of days. Doing it while trying to hide and not be caught could prove to be even harder. By the time Trajan disconnected the security seal around his ship, he felt like his arms might fall off.

Once inside, he reconnected the security seal, then carried the young man to a lone bedroom and laid him down. Saris would, hopefully, be staying in his quarters. Deciding that caution would be

best, Trajan locked the young man in, then carried Saris down the corridor to his room.

Laying Saris down on the bed, Trajan took just a moment to lean in and sniff his mate. He instantly felt his cock harden as the sweet scent of moonflowers and danga fruit enveloped his senses. His mate smelled luscious.

Trajan couldn't wait to get a taste of him, but first, he had to have him conscious. He lifted Saris up and pulled the blankets down before laying him back down. He pulled the blankets back up, tucking Saris in.

Getting a wet wash cloth and a glass of danga juice, Trajan sat down on the side of the bed. He wiped down Saris's face and his neck, trying to revive him. When that didn't work, Trajan shook him. Still, Saris didn't stir.

Figuring nothing else would wake Saris until his body told him it was time, Trajan leaned over and softly kissed him on the lips. "Wake soon, Sari. I want to see those beautiful green eyes of yours."

As Trajan started to lean away, intent on going to the bridge and getting the ship ready for takeoff, Saris's eyes suddenly popped open. The feverish look in them scared Trajan right down to the bottoms of his boots.

But when Saris wrapped his arms around Trajan's neck and pressed his lips against him, Trajan couldn't resist, taking what Saris offered even when he knew he shouldn't.

"You came for me."

Chapter 3

Saris felt so hot that his very skinned burned. He ached. He just knew that the man leaning over him could dampen the lava flowing through his veins. Saris knew that the gorgeous man was the answer to every prayer he had ever uttered.

A sense of urgency drove Saris. He wanted the man's hands on him. He needed to feel Trajan's hands move over his flaming skin. Saris wiggled, trying to get his body closer to Trajan's.

He pushed the blanket down to free his legs and wrapped one around Trajan's hips. His hands pulled at the black leather fabric separating him from the body he needed to be close to. He groaned in frustration when he didn't immediately feel naked skin.

"Sari," Trajan whispered huskily, sending shivers of delight racing through him. He felt his pulse beat wildly in his throat as Trajan stared intently down at him. Trajan's large hands framed Saris's face and held it gently.

"Sari, we can't."

What? No! Saris shook his head frantically. He pulled Trajan roughly, almost violently, to him. Grabbing at Trajan with his arms and arching his body, he tried to get closer to him, desperate for the feel of Trajan's muscular body pressed against his.

"Please!" Saris begged.

Saris felt Trajan's arms encircle him, holding him snugly. He could feel the pressure of the body he wanted so much, but not in the way he wanted. Trajan had his arms pinned to his sides. His long legs were thrown over Saris's, pushing him into the bed. Saris couldn't move.

“Please, oh please,” Saris pleaded. “I need—”

“Shh, Sari,” Trajan crooned. “I know you’re in pain right now, and as much as I would like to accommodate you, I can’t. Your system is full of drugs. You don’t know what you’re doing.”

Saris shook his head. “No, I do know. I swear. If you’d just let me—”

Saris almost lost his mind when he felt Trajan’s hands move down his back and over his hip. He knew he had never felt anything so good in his entire life. He tried to push his body closer to the hand moving over him.

“Trajan, please.”

Soft lips pressed against his forehead. Saris quickly tilted his head back, trying to capture those lips with his. He could feel the heat in his body moving faster, almost as if he spiraled toward an explosion. His heart raced. His body trembled.

Saris felt desperate. “Touch me, please, just touch me,” he begged. “I won’t ask for anything else. I promise.”

The black eyes gazing down at him told Saris that Trajan felt that same intense attraction that he did. His broad shoulders heaved. Then, amazingly, Trajan nodded. Large hands moved over Saris’s skin. His body tingled at the contact.

Any contact was welcome. The mere whisper of Trajan’s breath on his cheek sent a shiver through Saris. The brush of his long reddish blond hair along his neck made Saris crave more. It tantalized him, erotic and pure pleasure, and it drove Saris crazy.

Saris couldn’t help crying out, his body bucking, when Trajan’s fingers wrapped around his aching cock. His touch, firm and persuasive, almost instantly had Saris begging for more as his senses reeled.

He lay panting, his chest heaving as the pressure in his body built. Saris gasped at the sweet agony as waves of ecstasy throbbed through him. His world spun and careened on its axis, spinning until he couldn’t see or feel anything but the man pleasuring him.

“Shh, Sari,” Trajan whispered. “Just close your eyes and rest.”

Saris didn’t have the energy to do anything else. He let his eyes drift close, savoring the euphoric lethargy that seemed to sweep through his body. He felt Trajan settle him back against the bed, blankets coming up to cover him from neck to toe.

He smiled, one lone hand coming up to brush against Trajan’s chest. “Thank you,” he whispered as he faded off to sleep, the soft swish of the door opening and closing the last thing he heard before his dreams took him away.

* * * *

Trajan heard the door close behind him as he leaned his head back against the bulkhead. His hands fisted. He took several deep breaths, trying to gain some semblance of control. He could barely stand there and restrain himself. He really wanted to go right back to Saris and take what was his.

Trajan had never seen a more beautiful man than Saris. The very sight of him made Trajan’s teeth ache. He wanted nothing more than to claim him, to mark Saris as his mate. But until the drugs had left Saris’s system, Trajan felt honor bound to care for his mate, not claim him.

Still, the feel of Saris’s naked body pressed against his, the way Saris pleaded with him, Trajan didn’t know if he would have the control not to take Saris if the situation came up again. A man could be expected to say no only so many times.

Feeling a small shiver pass through his body, Trajan stood straight and walked down the corridor to the bridge. If nothing else, preparing the ship to leave and taking off should keep his mind off the man sleeping in his bed.

Trajan entered the bridge and immediately readied the ship for takeoff. He logged his flight plan with the docking authorities,

relaying his disappointment that he hadn't been able to find a doctor as ordered by his commander.

Once the ship was ready, Trajan carefully maneuvered out of the docking bay, holding his breath as he moved beyond the docking bay doors. Until he maneuvered the ship out of the planet's atmosphere, he could be caught by the tractor beam and forced to return.

Once in open space, Trajan let out a long relieved breath. So far, so good. He still wouldn't be completely comfortable until he was safe back on Katzmann, his precious cargo with him.

Typing in the coordinates, Trajan called Chellak up on the vidlink. He tapped his fingers impatiently as he waited for Chellak to appear on the screen. He was bringing an Elquone doctor back as ordered. He just hoped that Chellak understood that said doctor was also his mate.

"Trajan," Chellak said as soon as he appeared. "Any news? Did you find a doctor?"

"Uh, yes," Trajan replied.

Chellak looked confused. "You don't sound so sure. Is there a problem?"

"Yes and no." Trajan grimaced. "I have Doctor Chattan onboard, plus one extra passenger. However, I'm not sure how much help the doctor is going to be."

"Why? Is he upset about the High Ruler denying you the contract?"

Trajan chuckled. "No." If only things could be that easy.

"Is he upset that the contract was offered in the first place?"

"I don't think so."

"Trajan, stop beating around the bush and tell me what in the hell is going on," Chellak demanded.

Trajan dragged his hand over his face then looked at Chellak. "Doctor Saris Chattan is my mate."

Chellak's eyes widened and then a huge grin broke out over his face. "Congratulations."

"Maybe, maybe not."

“What seems to be the problem?” Chellak asked. “Is he resistant to mating a Katzman?”

Trajan thought of the hand job he had given his mate before taking off. He couldn’t exactly say that Saris was resistant. But Trajan still didn’t think he had any idea what was going on, either.

“No, not exactly.”

“Trajan—”

Trajan chuckled, holding up his hand at Chellak’s exasperated growl. “After I left the palace in search of another doctor, the High Ruler reclassified Saris from the Brüter Caste to the Vergnügen Caste.”

“The Vergnügen Caste? I’ve never heard of that caste.”

Trajan nodded. He wasn’t surprised. He imagined that the High Ruler took great pains to keep that little training program under wraps. Not many planets in the system agreed with forced slavery anymore.

“Members of the Vergnügen Caste are pleasure slaves. They are trained, or programmed, much like the Brüter Caste. By the time the training is complete, they think of nothing except pleasing their master. And in Saris’s case, he didn’t agree to the training.”

“Pleasure slaves?” Chellak shouted. “He really has a training program for pleasure slaves? Demyan’s mentioned stuff like that, but I never thought it was really true.”

“Yeah, it’s true, and it gets worse, Chellak,” Trajan admitted regretfully.

“How much worse could it get?”

“Saris underwent under intense training for nearly a day before I could free him. From what I’ve learned, when someone goes under intense training, everything that they know, everything that they are, can possibly be removed.”

“And this means what?”

Trajan felt a cold shiver move down his spine as he thought about what he meant. It terrified him down to his very core that the man meant to be his mate might never be the man he used to be.

“I don’t know how much of the old Saris remains. He’s drugged out of his mind right now, sleeping. Until the drugs leave his system, I won’t be able to tell how much of his personality and knowledge he retained.”

Silence reigned for several moments. Trajan couldn’t tell if Chellak was just thinking, or talking with his mate. As Trajan waited for Chellak, he wondered if he would develop the mating telepathy with Saris common among his people, or if they would be denied that bond.

It wasn’t often that mates couldn’t talk telepathically, but it did happen. It was such an intimate way of communicating, something only shared between mates. Trajan desperately hoped the bond would develop.

Considering the wet dream that Trajan experienced with Saris as the main participant, and the words he had heard in his dreams, he felt pretty sure that the bond had already begun to form. He just couldn’t be positive.

“How out of it is the doctor?” Chellak finally asked.

Trajan shrugged. “It’s hard to tell.”

Chellak rolled his eyes. “How is he acting?”

Trajan could feel an uncomfortable flush heat his face. “He’s...uh...sleeping right now.” Trajan prayed with everything in him that Chellak would accept that explanation. He really didn’t want to tell his commanding officer that his mate was drugged and aroused beyond control.

Chellak watched him for another moment then nodded his head. “All right, I want updates every hour until you dock. The moment the doctor comes out of his drug induced state, contact me. I want to talk to him.”

Trajan nodded, letting out the breath he hadn't realized he held. "And the other passenger?"

"The other passenger?" Chellak asked curiously.

"When I rescued the doctor from the Vergnügen Center, I came across a young man under the same intense training as Saris." Trajan felt his jaw clench as he paused. "You should have seen it, Chellak. I've never seen anything so barbaric."

Chellak nodded. "Demyan has told me some of the things that happen in those training centers. It *is* barbaric. Why the Federation hasn't imposed sanctions on Elquone, I'll never know."

"I couldn't leave this man there to suffer through that, Chellak. He's so young. He has his whole life ahead of him. To be made into a pleasure slave as such an early age, I just...I couldn't—"

"I understand, Trajan, and I approve," Chellak said. A small smile graced his lips. "We'll take care of him and give him the opportunity to live the life he chooses."

"What happens if the High Ruler demands his return?" Trajan asked. "Hell, what happens if the High Ruler demands Saris's return? I won't let him go now that I have him, Chellak."

"And I wouldn't expect you to, Trajan. Once you find your mate, there is no other choice for you." Chellak shook his head. "No, for now, I think the best thing we can do is deny any knowledge of their whereabouts."

Trajan chuckled. "So we have no idea where these two could possibly be?"

"Basically. Once things settle down, Saris and this young man can petition the Federation for asylum. We'll still have to be on our guard, but it might keep the High Ruler of Elquone from storming the castle, so to speak."

Relief filled Trajan. Chellak would not only support his mating to Saris, but he would help keep Saris and the young man he rescued safe. Trajan wouldn't have to fight this battle on his own.

"I'll contact you in an hour."

Chellak nodded and signed off. Trajan turned on the auto pilot and leaned back in his chair. Things with his commander had gone pretty well. Now he just had to figure out what to do with Saris and his other passenger.

Just thinking about the good doctor aroused Trajan. He pictured the doctor in his mind as he looked earlier, naked and wanting, his soft skin flushed with desire, his plump lips begging for Trajan's touch.

Trajan groaned. He quickly reached down and unbuttoned his leather pants, freeing his cock. Wrapping his hand around his long length, Trajan leaned his head back against the chair and closed his eyes.

He imagined Saris's delicate hand held him, stroked him. The soft skin of Saris's thumb moving over the small slit at the top of his cock, the long fingers rubbing against the glands just under the head of his cock, Trajan could feel it all.

He unbuttoned his black leather vest and pushed it out of the way with his other hand before latching on to a nipple. As his hand moved faster on his cock, Trajan tugged at the brown-hued nipple.

He could feel the pleasure building in his body, the small tingle moving down his spine as he reached closer to orgasm. Trajan fantasized an even deeper ecstasy. He imagined Saris's lips on his cock, instead of his fingers.

At the first swipe of Saris's tongue against his hot skin, Trajan shattered into a million pieces, ropes of cum shooting out over his hand and abdomen. His body humping against his hands several times, Trajan cried out.

"Sari!"

Trajan stroked his cock a few more times, his movements slowing with each caress. He could feel the pulse in his neck thudding rapidly, his chest heaving. The degree of ecstasy he had just experienced stunned him.

He jerked off for years. Usually, it just released his immediate tension, leaving him wanting more. While he did want more, specifically more of Saris, he couldn't ever remember feeling this satisfied by simple masturbation.

Trajan let out a long, surrendering moan. He was hooked on the good doctor, far more than he had imagined he would be. The mating heat was always intense, but Trajan had no idea it would be this consuming.

Every thought he had, every action he took was with Saris in mind. Would he be safe? Would he be happy? Would he want Trajan as a mate? The mere thought that Saris might reject him sent Trajan's heart plummeting to his feet.

Jumping up, Trajan started for the door when he realized that he still had his spent cock in his hand, cum dripping down his abdomen. With a small roll of his eyes, Trajan walked to the bathroom off the bridge and cleaned up.

With all of his bits tucked back in place, Trajan made his way down the corridor to his private quarters. He stopped briefly to check on the man in the room across the way, finding him still asleep, before opening the door to his own room.

A small ray of light from a passing star shone through the window, illuminating the soft contours of Saris's face as he slept. He looked peaceful, almost content. His small, delicate hand curled under his cheek, his lush, rosy lips curved up at the ends.

To Trajan, he looked adorable. He couldn't describe the man any other way. Awake, Saris was breathtaking. Each movement he made seemed to be done with grace and style. Asleep, Saris looked adorable, cute even.

In both states, Trajan wanted him. He hoped and prayed that Saris would accept him because the more time he spent around the man, the more he knew that he never wanted to give him up.

Trajan started into the room when a sudden explosion rocked the ship. His eyes widened briefly until alarms blared announcing an

attack on the ship. Casting one last glance at Saris, Trajan turned and ran for the bridge of the ship.

Alarms screamed and lights flashed on the control panel. He immediately ran to the console, checking to ensure the shields protecting the ship still operating properly.

Once assured of that, Trajan tried to zero in on the ship that that shot at him. It took only a moment to locate the hostile vessel. It was a Bergius Fighter ship, common in the system, easy to maneuver, and cheap to purchase. They also only allowed two people onboard due to their small size. Luckily, the small fighter was only equipped with short range pulse cannons. Trajan knew that if he could put enough distance between him and the fighter, he could get away unscathed. If not, he would have to stay and fight.

His ship was a Reran Fighter, though, better equipped with long and short range pulse cannons, laser guns, and high-powered deflector shields. It could support a crew of ten and had a cargo bay that could hold a small ship like the Bergius Fighter.

With his precious cargo onboard, Trajan wanted to avoid a fight. While his ship could take a lot of damage, one good hit could disable him enough that the other ship might be able to finish him off. Trajan couldn't allow that.

Putting his ship into overdrive, Trajan concentrated on putting as much distance between him and the hostile ship as possible. As he maneuvered in and out of a nearby asteroid belt, Trajan called up Chellak.

"It hasn't been an hour yet, Trajan. Did the doctor wake up?" Chellak asked the moment he came on screen.

"No, we're being attacked by a Bergius Fighter ship."

Chellak's eyebrows rose in surprise. "Piss someone off?"

"I'm betting that I pissed off Toc Jerell." Trajan's body jerked as another hit vibrated his ship. He glanced over quickly to see if the shields had weakened. Power was down to seventy-six percent but still holding.

“Toc Jerell?”

“The chief advisor to Shek Tavia,” Trajan replied. “It seems he took a liking to Saris. I wouldn’t be surprised if he arranged for Saris to be retrained as a pleasure slave just so that he could do whatever he wanted to him.”

“And you think he’s the one attacking you?”

Trajan shrugged. “Can’t think of anyone else I pissed off lately. Besides, this is a Bergius Fighter. If the High Ruler wanted to come after me, don’t you think he’d use something stronger than that?”

“Yeah, okay,” Chellak agreed. “I’ll send out some fighters to escort you home. Just don’t get your ass shot up. Demyan is driving me crazy demanding a doctor from his home world.”

Trajan chuckled as the vidlink shut off. He’d bet it was the one time in the universe that Chellak wished his mate couldn’t talk telepathically to him. It wasn’t something he could get away from by going into another room. It followed him everywhere he went. Trajan couldn’t wait for it to happen for him and Saris.

Making another deep dive through a series of small asteroids, Trajan glanced over at the sensor array. The Bergius Fighter still followed, but dropping behind fast. In another minute or so, they should be out of firing range.

Trajan knew that the pilot of the other ship had figured out the same thing when he began to fire in rapid session. Trajan felt hit after hit land on his ship, jarring him repeatedly. By the time his sensors said he was out of firing range, his deflector shields were down to twenty-five percent.

Trajan didn’t breathe a sigh of relief until he had passed through the asteroid field and the other ship had dropped off his sensors. He hoped that he could stay far enough ahead of the other ship to get home before he got attacked again.

He also hoped no more surprises awaited him between now and home. One more massive hit, and he would be without shields. And then he would be easy to pick off.

Setting the ship on auto pilot once more, Trajan ran a series of ship-wide diagnostics to assess the damage inflicted by the Bergius Fighter. Luckily, the damage to the ship seemed minimal, nothing that couldn't be repaired once he docked on Katzmann.

For the first time since the first shot hit the ship, Trajan leaned his head back and relaxed his tense muscles. He hated fighting onboard a ship. He much preferred meeting an adversary on solid ground where he could look into his face.

Fighting from a ship seemed like a dishonorable way to fight. It wasn't an indication of a fighter's abilities but rather a show of how much coinage they had sunk into the upgrades on their ship.

Trajan sent Chellak a brief message stating that he had evaded the Bergius Fighter. He also relayed the damage report on his ship, knowing that Chellak would have technicians ready and waiting when he landed.

Taking one last look at the ship's trajectory, Trajan stood up and began to turn toward the door. A flash of white caught his eyes. Trajan instantly pulled two blades out of hidden pockets in his leather pants and turned to face whoever stood behind him.

He nearly dropped the weapons in his hand when he found Saris standing behind him, a white sheet wrapped around his hips, and a bewildered look on his face.

"How did I get here?"

Chapter 4

Saris stared at the magnificent man standing before him with a bit of awe. He vaguely remembered him, but he didn't know where he remembered him from. Noting the rising bulge in the man's pants, he wondered if they were lovers.

"Do I know you?" Saris asked.

After a small hesitation the man nodded. "We've met."

"Are we lovers?" Well, he had to ask.

"Uh...no."

Damn!

"Are we going to be lovers?"

"I kind of hoped for a little more than that," the man replied, an easy grin playing across his lips.

Saris took another step into the room. "More?" Oh, he could definitely see them doing a lot more, but right now, he just wanted to get down to the lover part, plain and simple. He took another step, grinning when the man mirrored his action.

"Just what did you have in mind?" Saris asked. He could feel his pulse speed up. He had a lot of things in mind, but he wanted to be sure that the man before him thought the same thing.

Just when Saris thought the man might take hold of him, he suddenly stepped back, a stoic look dropping down over his face. Saris became confused, not quite understanding the small ache the look gave him in the pit of his stomach.

"How are you feeling?"

"Feeling?" Saris repeated absently. He couldn't explain how he felt. Too many emotions spiraled through him for him to even pick

one to concentrate on. Having suppressed his emotions most of his life, the emotions filling him bewildered him.

“You’ve been drugged,” the man supplied.

“You drugged me?” Saris gasped.

The man quickly shook his head. “No, no, I would never drug you, I swear. You were already drugged when I found you. I’ve just been waiting for the effects of the drugs that they gave you at the Vergnügen Center to wear off.”

“The Vergnügen Center? What in the hell was I doing at the Vergnügen Center?” A spurt of hungry desire spiraled through Saris when the man’s face flushed. He couldn’t believe how incredibly hot that looked.

“I went to Elquone to find a doctor for my commander’s mate. He’s a brüter and due to give birth any day. Your High Ruler offered me your contract so that you could accompany me back to Katzmann but—”

“You bought my contract?” Saris’s desire of a moment before went up in flames as he realized that he stared at his new master. His greatest fear realized. He had been sold to another, never to have a will of his own again.

“No!” The man exclaimed his objection so forcibly that Saris took a step back. A part of him was shocked at the man’s denial. Another part felt almost insulted. Did he lack something that made this man not want him?

“So, if I don’t belong to you,” Saris asked, holding the sheet against his body with one hand, the other hand landing on his hip, “then what in the hell am I doing here?”

“I can explain.”

“Then start explaining,” Saris replied sharply. “And it had better be good.”

“Why don’t we go somewhere that we can be more comfortable while we talk,” the man suggested as he edged toward the door. To Saris, he almost looked like he was preparing to run.

"I'm fine right where I am. Now talk!" With a pang, Saris suddenly realized that he stood in the middle of the bridge covered in nothing but a sheet. No wonder the man looked so edgy.

"Maybe you could find me something to wear?" Saris muttered uneasily. He bit his lip, turning away from the man's intense stare.

"Come on," the man said. "I'm sure that I have something in my quarters."

Saris followed behind the man as they made their way back down the corridor he had come through moments before. He was surprised when the man stopped before the door of the room he had woken up in, more so when the man opened the door and walked in.

"I slept in your quarters?"

"Uh, yes. This is a small ship and the other rooms are occupied." The man went to the cabinets hidden in the wall and pulled something out, handing it to Saris before closing the drawer.

Awkwardly, Saris cleared his throat as he waited for the man to leave the room so that he could dress. When he made no move to leave, Saris turned his back and started pulling the one piece black bodysuit on under the sheet.

It took some maneuvering but eventually, he got dressed and dropped the sheet back onto the bed. Running his hand over the soft black material, he realized that it was made of Jarcon fabric, a simple stretchable material that enabled people of different sizes to wear the same outfit. Saris was impressed. Jarcon-made clothing did not come cheap.

When Saris looked up, the man gestured to a nearby chair. "Please, have a seat and I will explain everything to you."

Saris moved to the chair and sat, his thin fingers tensed in his lap as he waited. He didn't understand why he was on this man's ship, but knowing that his brüter contract had been offered and rejected made him feel somewhat inadequate.

“My name is Trajan Varl,” the man began. “I’m a warrior from Katzmann. My commander, Chellak Rai, is mated to a brüter who is due to give birth any day.”

“You said this part. Get to the part about how I came to be onboard your ship.” Uncertainty made his voice harsh and demanding. He knew it, but he felt helpless to stop it. He didn’t understand what interest this man had in him.

“I’m getting to that.” Trajan ran a hand quickly through his reddish blond hair. “Look, I asked for a doctor. When the High Ruler offered your contract, I couldn’t accept it. It’s against my laws, and frankly, I think it’s nauseating to even consider owning another person.”

Saris sat up straighter in amazement. He didn’t often encounter people who didn’t believe in owning others. It was pretty normal on his home world and something that Saris hated beyond words.

“When I refused your contract, the High Ruler said he couldn’t let you leave the planet without one. I needed to find someone else.”

Saris nodded. That sounded like the High Ruler. He liked getting his way. He didn’t like it when he didn’t. In fact, someone usually ended up losing their head if the High Ruler didn’t get his way.

“I guess that after I left, the High Ruler reclassified you to the Vergnügen Caste. From what I’ve been able to learn, they took you to the center for deep retraining.” A look of guilt crossed over Trajan’s face. “I couldn’t get to you until you had been there for more than a day. I don’t know how much damage you suffered.”

Saris swallowed with difficulty and found his voice. “That’s why I was drugged?”

Trajan nodded. “They had you hooked up to these machines when I found you, Sari, two in your head and two in your chest. A tube pumped blue liquid into your arm. They had you strapped down to the table.”

“What did you just call me?” Saris whispered. One word, one lone word blazed to the front of every word Trajan spoken to him. No one had ever called him Sari except the faceless man in his dreams.

“Sari.” Trajan said the word tentatively as if testing it. He looked so hesitant that Saris ignored the warning bells ringing in his head.

“Why would you call me that? My name is Saris.”

Trajan’s face flushed, but he shook his head anyway. “No, you’ve always been Sari, always will be.” His voice had drifted into a hushed whisper, a gleam of something Saris couldn’t identify in his black eyes.

“How do I know you?”

“We met at the royal palace, remember?”

“We’ve met somewhere else,” Saris insisted. He felt sure of it. This man seemed too familiar for them not to know each other from somewhere else. Saris bet that Trajan even had a triangle-shaped birthmark on his left thigh.

Trajan shook his head. “I’ve never met you before yesterday at the royal palace.”

“You’re lying,” Saris growled, jumping to his feet to stalk across the room. “Why are you lying? Why are you denying me?”

Trajan regarded Saris quizzically for a moment, his mouth opening and closing as if he had something to say but wasn’t sure if he should say it. An uncertainty crept into his expression.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” Trajan finally said.

“Try me.”

“We’ve met in our dreams.”

An unfamiliar image crept into Saris’s mind, one of him bent over Trajan, lavishing his cock with his mouth, of Trajan begging him to suck harder. He could see the long length of Trajan’s cock before him, feel the strength of his body beneath him.

Saris’s mind floundered as he tried to grasp what he saw, what Trajan told him. “How—” Saris suddenly felt weak and vulnerable in the face of confusion. He stiffened, momentarily abashed.

"I am a Katzman," Trajan replied as if that explained it all.

* * * *

Trajan could see the confusion clouding Saris's green eyes. Positive that Saris would turn away from him at any moment, Trajan was shocked when his eyes suddenly filled with a fierce sparkling. He had an almost gleeful tone to his voice when he spoke.

"If we've dreamed together then that means we're mates, doesn't it?"

Trajan couldn't do anything more than nod as surprise filled him. The connection between mates was a highly kept secret known only to those that had experienced it and their close friends and family. He only knew of it because of the unusual bond between Chellak and Demyan.

"Then why are you denying me?" Saris shouted curtly.

"Sari," Trajan said quickly, grabbing him by the arms and giving him a little shake. "I'm not denying you. I would never deny you, but I just kidnapped you from a Vergnügen Training Center. I don't know how much of you is you and how much is the training that they put you through."

"I'm all me, Trajan, every last bit," Saris replied in a gentle, quite tone. "And I'm all yours for the taking."

A cry of relief broke from Trajan's lips as he wrapped his arms around Saris and buried his face in his golden hair. He breathed in the heady scent of his mate letting it wash over him. It had a calming, peaceful effect on him making him believe that life might just be perfect.

It also had another effect on him. Trajan could feel his cock harden and press against his leather pants as if demanding freedom. Trajan lifted his head to look down at Saris. He cupped his chin, searching his upturned face for any sign of anxiety.

"Why are you not upset?"

Saris shrugged. "I've been studying different life forms for many years so I could meet the needs of all of my patients. When I heard through the grapevine that a brüter had become the mate of Chellak Rai, I made it my business to study Katzmen. I learned a lot about their mating habits."

"So, you know that—"

Saris placed his finger over Trajan's mouth. "I know that if we can connect on a dream level, and both of us experience it, then we're destined to be mates. And if I'm not mistaken, you have a triangle-shaped birthmark on your left thigh. Am I correct?"

Stunned, Trajan nodded.

"Then that means the dream I had the other night wasn't something I just conjured up in my own mind. You experienced it, too."

"You remember that?" Trajan felt the soft brushing of Saris's fingers against his cheek.

"I remember a lot of things," Saris said in a low, husky voice.

"Do you...do you remember earlier?"

Saris's dark blond eyebrow shot up in surprise. "Earlier?"

Trajan felt his face flood horribly at the quizzical look on Saris's face. *Oh, this is going to be interesting*, he thought. *One wrong word and I could lose Sari forever.*

"After I brought you onboard and put you to bed you woke up. You... well," Trajan paused to swallow past the lump in his throat. "You were still under the influence of the drugs, and you started pleading with me to touch you and—"

"You had sex with me while I under the influence of drugs?"

"Gods, no!" Trajan replied sharply, maybe more so than he meant to because Saris looked slightly offended. "I wanted to, gods, did I want to, but I wanted you to want it too and not because you had been trained to want it."

Trajan had no idea why his mouth had decided to run away from him. He said things to Saris that he never would have thought to say

to anyone. He just couldn't seem to help himself. His mouth had a mind of its own.

"So, what did happen?" Saris asked.

Trajan shrugged, knowing his face burned bright red again. "I kind of jerked you off until you fell asleep and then went to the bridge," Trajan murmured.

"And?"

"And nothing," Trajan replied. "I tucked you in and let you sleep."

"You didn't do anything else?"

Trajan's eyes fluttered closed. He let out a small groan. Saris would keep asking questions until Trajan told him every last detail. If the future with his mate looked like that, Trajan wondered what would be the point of being able to talk telepathically.

"I swear I didn't touch you in any other way," Trajan hedged.

"And?"

"And I went to the bridge and masturbated." Trajan opened his eyes in surprise when he felt Saris pat him on the cheek.

"There, see? That wasn't so hard, was it?" Saris said as he pushed away from Trajan and walked across the room. He stopped on the other side, turning to glance back at him. "You know, this whole mating thing is going to be a lot easier for you if you just tell me things upfront."

Trajan inclined his head in compliance, still stunned by Saris's easy acceptance of everything he told him. "You don't mind?"

Saris chuckled. "Mind that you felt so aroused you had to go jerk off? No, should I? I mean, I would have preferred that we enjoy these things together, but I can understand why you didn't, commend it even."

"So, you agree to be my mate?" That burning question ate Trajan up inside. Saris may have been accepting of everything Trajan told him, including the little bit of playing around. That didn't mean he would accept being Trajan's mate.

"I'm not adverse to it, how's that?" Saris asked. He crossed his arms over his chest and bent his head slightly forward. "I think I need to know more before I can agree to anything, the first being, where are you taking me?"

"Katzmann," Trajan replied simply.

Saris laughed. "Yeah, I should have guessed that."

"Next question?" Trajan asked eagerly.

Saris smiled. Trajan thought it a beautiful smile. It lit up Saris's face and made him seem young and carefree. Trajan vowed to himself then and there that he wanted to see that smile on Saris's face as often as possible.

"If we become mates, how does it work? I mean, what is the process and what are the effects?" Saris asked. "I've researched as much as I could, but a lot isn't known about the Katzman mating habits. I know that we can share dreams. What else?"

"If we mate, we'll be able to speak to each other in our minds."

"Can we speak mentally to others of your kind?"

Trajan shook his head. "No, it's just between mates. Demyan, my commander's mate, is unable to speak due to an old injury. He just recently learned how to read and write. Before that, they couldn't communicate at all. It's a mess. Now, they talk all of the time with their minds."

"Convenient."

Trajan leaned back against the bulkhead behind him and fit his fingers together over his abdomen. "We'll be able to talk that way, too. We'll also always be able to tell where the other one is, kind of like a homing beacon."

"Makes hide and seek kind of moot, doesn't it?"

"Hide and seek?" Trajan asked in confusion.

"Yeah, hide and seek. It's a game where one person hides and the other one tries to find him." Saris laughed again. "Haven't you ever played games like that?"

Trajan shook his head. "I've been training to be a warrior since I was a small child."

"Why?"

Trajan shrugged nonchalantly. "It was expected of us. We always knew what our pride was destined for, what we trained for. The harder we trained the better chance we had of victory."

"Victory over what?"

"Vortigern Vedek."

"Who?"

Trajan couldn't help but smile at the bewildered look on Saris's face. "Thirty years ago, Vortigern Vedek came to Katzmann on a trade mission. His forces overpowered the peaceful people there and killed the High Ruler, Chellak's father, who reigned at the time."

Sudden understanding came over Saris's face. "You were both in the same pride so his fight became your fight. That's why you trained so much, to retake Katzmann from Vortigern Vedek."

Trajan nodded. "We took Katzmann back about five months ago. Demyan was a slave to Vortigern Vedek when we arrived. Chellak, not knowing anything about brüters, claimed Demyan as reparation for the death of his father."

"He didn't know about brüters?"

Trajan chuckled. "Not a damn thing. Imagine his surprise when Demyan announced that they had a child on the way. Of course now he's thrilled about it, but at the time, well, he fell over in a dead faint right in front of the Federation Council."

Saris chuckled. "I probably would have paid to see that."

"Me, too," Trajan laughed. "I heard about it from Chellak's brother, Ciprian."

"What do *you* know about brüters?" Saris asked quietly a few moments later.

Trajan looked at Saris sharply. "I know that you belong to the Brüter Caste, but at some point you couldn't complete your training so you became a doctor."

Saris nodded. “That’s true. I had a hard time adjusting to some of the requirements of being a brüter. I’m much better suited to being a doctor.”

“What requirements?” Trajan asked, suddenly worried for his pridedmate, Chellak.

“When someone becomes a brüter, he is required to follow a set of rules. One of those rules states that any child that you give birth to does not belong to you but the sire of that child. We have no rights to it. The child can be taken away from us, given to someone else, even sold, and there is nothing we can do to stop it.”

Trajan felt his heart ache at the agony in Saris’s voice. “Did that—has that happened to you?”

Saris shook his head. “No, but it happened to my twin brother, Karis. He gave birth to a little boy four years ago. The child was taken away by the sire, and he never saw it again. Since he had fulfilled his contract, he was returned to our family. He just wasn’t the same after that.”

Trajan walked over and laid his hand down on Saris’s shoulder, giving it a small squeeze. He wanted desperately to reassure his mate that he would never be so callous as to return him to his family and give away a child.

“I’m sorry, Sari, but you know that would never happen with a Katzman. We mate for life. There would be no returning you to your family even if you had completed the training and I had accepted your contract. And we cherish our children, every one of them. We would never give them up.”

Saris lifted his head to look up at Trajan. A small smile played across his lips. “I hope so, for me and for Demyan.”

“Chellak would no more hurt Demyan in that way than he would return control of Katzmann to Vortigern Vedek. Demyan is his world. Any child that they have will be treasured just as much.”

Saris nodded.

“Where’s your brother now? Has he been contracted again?”

“No, the emotional effects of losing his son made him unsuitable for another contract. They terminated him from the program and returned him home in shame.”

“In shame?” Trajan exclaimed, causing Saris to jump. “How can he be ashamed of loving his child?”

“You don’t understand how things are done on Elquone,” Saris bellowed right back. He pushed himself away from Trajan and began pacing around the room. Trajan watched in confusion as Saris seemed to unravel right before his eyes.

“Once we’re in a caste like the Brüter Caste, we have no rights beyond what we’re given by the owner of our contract. We are required to fulfill our contract under penalty of death. We don’t even get to choose what caste we enter into. It’s chosen for us when we hit puberty.”

“Hasn’t anyone ever objected before?”

“Sure, many people. They’re just sent to deep training, usually in whatever caste they avoid in the first place.”

“But I saw a lot of people coming and going like normal people. Are they all in castes?”

“Everyone on Elquone that is of the lower class is in a caste of one sort or another. The only way that you can get out of your caste is to die, be reeducated, marry up in ranking, or have a contract owner set you free. Most don’t, they just send us home to be contracted out again.”

Trajan blew out a long breath. No wonder Saris had fought his training so hard. Being a citizen of Elquone sounded like a nightmare. If Trajan had anything to do with it, Saris would never be returned to Elquone again.

“How did Demyan’s contract state that he became the lawful dependent of the sire if he could be returned to his caste?” Trajan asked as the thought suddenly came to him.

“Well, if his family is well off, they could have bought a special dispensation to add to his contract. It happens but not often. Those of the Brüter Caste are chosen because of our superior genetics.”

“Superior genetics?” Trajan asked in confusion.

Saris grimaced. “We make pretty babies.”

“Oh.” He chuckled, a little uncomfortably.

“Once we have completed our training, we become good little money makers, producing child after child for whoever pays our High Ruler the most amount of money. The better our genetics, the more money we make.”

Trajan shook head. He knew he hadn’t kept the disgust off of his face when Saris nodded at him. “A slave is a slave, Sari, and on Katzmann slavery is outlawed. Chellak saw to that himself.”

“I want to believe what you are saying, Trajan, really, I do, but I’ve heard pretty little stories too many times. I don’t know how much I can believe without seeing it for myself.”

“I understand, and I don’t expect you to take me at my word without proof.” Trajan smiled, suddenly filled with confidence. “You’ll see that I’m telling you the truth once we reach Katzmann.”

A sudden blast rocked the ship, knocking Saris down, but Trajan jumped over and grabbed Saris before he could hit the floor. Saris’s face filled with alarm as he looked up at Trajan.

“*If* we reach Katzmann, you mean?”

Chapter 5

Saris followed Trajan quickly down the corridor to the bridge. Trajan seemed worried but not any more than Saris. The shock waves that had hit the ship weren't from any passing debris. They had been fired upon.

Saris watched as Trajan sat down in the captain's chair and began searching the sensors for signs of what had hit them. He was shocked when Trajan started laughing.

"That sorry ass bastard."

"Uh, want to let me in on the joke?" Saris asked.

"Someone is trying very hard to keep me from returning you to Katzmann. I suspect that it is Toc Jerell," Trajan replied as he began maneuvering the ship through a series of evasive moves.

"Toc Jerell? The chief advisor?" Saris asked totally bewildered. "Why would he care about me? How does he even know who I am?"

Trajan chuckled, glancing over his shoulder at him. "Guess it's because you're just that darn cute."

Saris went to deny Trajan's words until he remembered the look of lust Toc Jerell had given him in the royal palace. It had given him the creeps then and it gave him the creeps now. That man was sick.

"Uh, I'd really prefer not to go back to Elquone if you can arrange it."

"I have no intentions of returning you to Elquone, Sari. You said that you wanted to explore our relationship a little more. That can't happen if we're worlds apart. Now get over to that vidlink and contact Chellak. He has fighters coming to meet us."

Saris quickly moved to do as Trajan ordered, hitting the buttons on the vidlink, blinking at the man who almost instantly appeared. “Uh, are you Chellak Rai?”

“I am,” the lion man replied. “You must be Saris.”

“Sari, please.”

“No!” Trajan shouted from beside Saris, never taking his eyes of the console in front of him. “Sari is just for me.”

Saris grinned. “Please, call me Saris.”

“Saris it is, then,” Chellak chuckled. “Now, what seems to be the problem?”

Saris grimaced. “We’re under attack.”

“Again,” Trajan added.

“Again?” Saris asked in surprise. “We’ve been attacked before?”

“Yep, only this time, he’s brought a friend.”

“He?” Saris asked as he turned around to look at Trajan. “How badly did you piss Toc Jerell off?”

Saris looked back at the vidlink when Chellak chuckled. “He so has your number, Trajan.”

“I told you I think Toc Jerell sent these fighters after us to get you back,” Trajan explained.

“Then why in the hell is he shooting at us?” Saris shouted. “Doesn’t he realize that it could get me killed?”

“I think he’s hoping to disable us enough that he can board us.”

“Board us?” Saris gulped fearfully.

“Not going to happen, Sari,” Trajan replied with a lot more confidence than Saris felt. “I won’t let him take you away from me now that I’ve found you. However...”

Trajan stopped speaking as he made a particularly difficult maneuver, swinging the ship around and driving it through a series of zigzag moves, then down through a cluster of asteroids surrounding a nearby planet.

“However?” Saris encouraged, wanting Trajan to finish his sentence.

“It wouldn’t be a bad idea for you to get to the escape pod,” Trajan replied. “And don’t forget the young man sleeping in the room across from you. I rescued him from the Vergnügen Center along with you. I think he’s still drugged.”

“What about you?” Saris whispered. A flicker of apprehension coursed through him at the solemn expression on Trajan’s face. “You’re coming, too, aren’t you?”

“I’ll be right behind you, Sari.”

Saris knew that Trajan lied. He also knew that Trajan could tell that Saris knew it. Still, Trajan had to say the words, and Saris could understand that. That didn’t mean that he wasn’t going to give Trajan a reason to fight.

Saris stepped over to Trajan, grabbing his face in his hands and capturing his lips. He put all of the chaotic emotions he felt into his kiss, the wonder and excitement, the attraction and growing bond. His tired and lonely soul melted into it.

When he finally lifted his head, Saris’s eyes clung to Trajan’s, analyzing his reaction. The expression in Trajan’s black eyes seemed to plead for Saris’s understanding, to not make their separation anymore difficult than it had to be.

Saris nodded that he understood the unspoken message Trajan gave him. Trajan would stay with the ship and do what he had to do to keep his mate safe. Saris’s duty was to keep himself safe, even if it meant Trajan’s death.

When Saris spoke again, his voice sounded tender, almost a murmur. “I’ll be waiting for you in the escape pod, Trajan.”

“I’ll be there, my own.”

Saris gazed at Trajan for another moment then turned and ran from the bridge toward the escape pod. He stopped at the room across from Trajan’s quarters, surprised when he found the young man still unconscious on the bed.

With all of the noise from the other ship shooting at them, Saris would have thought the young man would be awake, even afraid. He

seemed to be sleeping like a baby. Saris surmised that the man had to have had more drugs in his system than Saris had. It was the only explanation.

Picking up a spare bodysuit, Saris grabbed the man by his arms and dragged him down the corridor to the escape pod at the end of the walkway. It took a bit of maneuvering on his part, especially with all of the explosions rocking the ship, but he finally got the man inside the escape pod and buckled in.

Saris took just a moment longer to assure himself that the escape pod had adequate food and medical supplies. He had an idea that they might need them. He had no idea where they were going or how soon it would take for help to arrive, but he wanted to be prepared.

The next explosion that hit the ship sent Saris careening to the floor. He caught himself right before he would have hit his head on the side of the escape pod bench seats. Saris took a moment to steady himself, then pushed himself to his feet.

An automated voice requested evacuation of the ship, counting down the minutes until life support would be deactivated. Saris knew he only had moments before the escape pod would deploy with or without passengers.

He leaned out of the escape pod door and looked down the corridor for any sign of Trajan. Red lights blared as sparks and smoke filled the corridor. The damage to Trajan's ship was massive.

Saris glanced back at the sleeping man behind him. He was still unconscious but safely strapped in. If the escape pod left without Saris and Trajan, the young man would still be safe until help arrived—hopefully.

Still, Saris had to take the chance. He couldn't leave Trajan behind, no matter how much Trajan argued about it. Determined not to leave his newly found mate behind, Saris left the escape pod and made his way down the corridor.

It was slow going. He had to dodge falling debris and try to stay on his feet as the ship continued to shake from explosions. Saris

picked up his pace. He knew that he had to hurry before the ship blew apart.

Stepping over a ceiling beam that had fallen to the floor, Saris stepped onto the bridge. It took him just a glance around the room to understand that he and Trajan were in more danger than he thought.

No one piloted the ship. A large ceiling beam pinned Trajan to the floor. He had blood covering his forehead, and he didn't seem to be moving. Saris ran across the floor, falling to his knees beside Trajan. He quickly searched Trajan over for injuries, finding a small lump under the blood on his head.

Wiping the blood away, Saris surmised that it wasn't a life-threatening injury, but it explained his unconscious state. From the location of the beam pinning Trajan to the floor, Saris knew it was most likely the cause of the injury.

Saris looked around the room and considered his predicament. He had to get Trajan free of the beam he lay under and get them both to the escape pod before it detached from the ship *and* the ship exploded. He didn't have much time.

Saris ran to the vidlink and sent a quick message to Chellak summing up their situation, giving the coordinates where they were presently and to the planet Saris hoped they were headed for. He also listed that Trajan's injuries.

Grabbing a long, steel rod off of the floor, Saris used it as leverage to lift the bigger beam off of his mate. It took a few tries, but eventually, his hard work paid off. The beam lifted up just enough for Saris to move it to the side of Trajan.

Saris jumped when the heavy beam hit the floor, making a large clanking noise against the steel floor tiles. He stopped to take a deep breath, then grabbed Trajan under his arms, dragging him down to the corridor as he had the young man.

Pulling Trajan into the small escape pod, Saris just had time to close the hatch and lock it before the automated voice from the

computer announced that life support had been deactivated. The ship would implode in mere moments.

Saris's heart beat frantically in his chest as he pulled Trajan up onto the bench seat and secured him for the ride. He had just enough time to strap himself in before the escape pod launched into space.

Seizing Trajan's lifeless hand, Saris gazed out the window of the escape pod as Trajan's ship grew smaller and smaller. A large flash of light nearly blinded him as the Reran Fighter Ship exploded. Pieces of debris flew in every direction.

The only bright spot for Saris was seeing one of the other ships get caught by a piece of flying debris, exploding right along with Trajan's ship. The second ship had moved off to a safe distance. Saris just hoped that the explosion would hide their escape.

Saris turned his attention to the escape pod's console. The pod flew through space, programmed to land on the first inhabitable planet, one that could sustain their lives until help could arrive. By Saris's estimations, the planet three sectors away would fit that requirement. It shouldn't take more than an hour to get there and land.

In the meantime, Saris wanted to ensure that he deactivated the locator beacon attached to the escape pod. If Trajan wanted to reactivate it once he woke up, he could do so. Until then, Saris felt better if they stayed hidden. Locator beacons didn't discriminate between good guys and bad guys.

A small groan from the man beside him had Saris quickly turning to look at Trajan. He reached over and checked the wound on Trajan's head, pleased that the bleeding had stopped. It still looked nasty though. It might even need a few stitches, something Saris could take care of once they landed.

Assuming they landed in one piece. As great as escape pods were, there was always chance of damage to the pod, burning up in the atmosphere due to damage to the pod, and a hard landing. All of which could cause serious injury or death.

Saris hoped for neither as the shock waves from entering the atmosphere began rocking the small escape pod back and forth. The small vessel rocked enough that Saris began to wonder if it would hold together long enough for them to land.

His eyes strayed to the two men who shared the small space with him. Saris held on to the edge of the bench seat with one hand and held Trajan's hand with the other. The computerized voice system in the escape pod announced their rate of descent. Saris wished he had disconnected it too.

"One thousand feet."

Saris glanced one more time at Trajan, hoping that it wouldn't be the last. He really wanted the chance to get to know the man better, to find out what being the mate of a Katzman, this Katzman, was all about.

"Five hundred feet."

Saris closed his eyes tightly and held his breath, the muscles in his body tensing as he readied himself for impact.

"Please hold for landing."

Saris wanted to roll his eyes, but fear filled him. He held on for landing. He held on for dear life. A sudden jarring thud and the escape pod came to a stop. Saris grunted, feeling like his ass had just been pushed through the top of his head.

He took a moment to breathe before opening his eyes and looking around the small space inside the pod. The young man he had dragged into the pod remained unconscious. So was Trajan. Saris predicted that he would be on his own for a while.

Saris unbuckled his restraints and stood to his feet, realizing as he did so that the shaking in his body extended all of the way down to his toes. His steps were unsteady as he stepped across the pod to the window and looked out.

The view from the window surprised him. The planet they had landed on didn't seem too hostile. He could see blue sky above, trees

in many different colors, and even snowcapped mountains off in the distance.

All in all, it looked pretty good. Saris probably would have chosen to come to a place like this for vacation, assuming he had ever been allowed to go on vacation. Saris just hoped that whatever life forms that inhabited this planet wouldn't consider them on the dinner menu.

Saris pushed a couple of buttons on the control console and then moved to unlock the door. When the door opened, cool air filled the escape pod. Saris took in a deep breath, smiling when he realized that if the air was bad, he was fucked already.

Saris grabbed the phase pistol out of the emergency box then stepped outside of the pod. He could see that they had landed on the edge of a large meadow covered in grass in several shades of green.

A large section of trees lined the area behind them. A sheer rock cliff could be seen just to the left side of the meadow, a small river on the right. Considering where they had landed, Saris started to feel optimistic about their situation.

Until he heard a loud roar off in the distance and realized that they were not alone. He had no idea what had made that intimidating sound, and he really didn't care to find out. It sounded large and hungry.

Saris closed the hatch behind him, locking it tightly. He turned and scanned the area around them trying to figure out the best location for them to hide. Down by the river where they would have a fresh supply of water seemed good.

Hearing another loud roar, Saris changed his mind, deciding that something up higher might be a better chance. He looked over at the cliffs to the side of the meadow. Maybe he could find a spot by the cliffs that at least would give them some semblance of security.

With that thought in mind, Saris began walking toward the cliffs. He glanced around frequently trying to see anything that might be coming in his direction. It would be just perfect to get through being

rescued by Trajan, an attack on the ship, and landing on an alien world only to get himself killed before he could be rescued.

Saris heard a few more loud roars, a few quieter roars that seemed to come from different animals, and howling. Some large birds even flew overhead. But Saris made it to the cliffs unimpeded.

Once there, he wasn't really sure what he looked for. Healing was his expertise, not strategic planning. Saris wished that Trajan was here. He'd know what to do, what they would be looking for.

Realizing that until Trajan woke up he had to look out for them all, Saris began to walk along the cliffs. He looked for any outcropping or collection of large boulders, anything that they could use as cover.

Just as he spotted a small outcropping that looked like it had potential, Saris slipped. He cried out as his knee scrapped along a particularly sharp rock, cutting into the flesh of his knee. Saris tried to keep the tears of pain from spilling as he sat down on the ground and looked at the damage to his knee.

More of a scrape than a cut, it bled just a little and hurt a whole lot. Saris covered it with his hand putting pressure on the wound. He leaned his head forward and rested it on his knee, letting the strain of the situation carry him away for a moment.

He was all alone on a planet that he had never been on before. His only companions were either drugged or injured, and someone hunted him. He would ask the powers that be if things could possibly get worse but he was too afraid if he did, they would.

Trying to suck up his courage, Saris wiped the tears from his eyes and climbed to his feet. He looked up at the outcropping of rocks over his head, determined that he would reach them but unsure of how to do it.

There wasn't a set of stairs in sight. Grabbing a hold of the nearest rock, Saris climbed to the next one, then the next, and the next. Surprisingly, he had climbed to the ledge of a small cave before he knew it.

Holding the phase pistol in his hand for protection, Saris entered the cave. He hoped to find it empty. The opening itself wasn't any larger than a set of double doors on the ship. But a few steps inside and the cave opened up.

Saris stared around the cave, his mouth dropping open in shock. Inside seemed huge, massive even. It looked bigger than a cargo bay. Large stalagmites covered one side of the room. The rest seemed to be covered in sand.

From what Saris could tell, most of the cave seemed to be made of some sort of limestone. Hopefully, it would hold in the heat when it became dark outside if they had a fire. If he could transfer both men up the cliff edge, this place would be perfect.

Saris made his way back down the face of the cliff and back across the meadow to the escape pod. Both of his patients were still unconscious. At first, Saris wasn't sure how to transport the two motionless men and the supplies they would need.

Knowing that he only had the strength make a few trips, Saris went back to the pod and searched the supply box for the tarp and some rope, things that were always present in case of emergencies.

He tied the rope to two edges of the tarp, leaving a length between the two tied ends that would fit around his body. Once done, Saris unbuckled Trajan and pulled him out of the escape pod and onto the tarp.

He pulled several items out of the supply box and tucked them around Trajan, hoping that they would stay in place. Closing the door behind them, Saris began pulling Trajan toward the cave.

The distance between the pod and the cave didn't seem so far when he had walked there and back. Tied to a tarp, pulling Trajan and a few items from the supply box behind him, the cave seemed a million miles away.

Once there, Saris sat down and took a moment to catch his breath. He could already feel the muscles in his arms and legs tensing from the strain, and he hadn't even gotten Trajan inside the cave yet.

Knowing no one could do the work except him, Saris got to his feet and carried the supplies up the rocks to the cave. He came back out and repeated the process with Trajan.

Saris carefully settled Trajan on the sand, the supplies stacked across from him, before moving back outside. He still had another man to rescue and more supplies to retrieve. After that, he suspected that collecting some firewood would be a good idea.

It took Saris nearly an hour to get everything moved from the escape pod to the cave. It took another hour to cover the pod with some fallen branches and leaves. He knew that Chellak and his warriors wouldn't be able to find them if he hid the pod, but neither would the bad guys.

He spent just a little more time gathering firewood and getting water from the river on the opposite side of the meadow before heading back to the cave. By the time Saris carried the last of his load into the cave he felt like his arms might fall off.

Exhaustion overwhelmed him. He could sleep for a week if given the chance. He just wished he had the chance. Saris went around organizing their supplies, double checking what exactly they had, and seeing to the comfort of his patients. He bandaged Trajan's head wound and covered both him and the other man with a silver warming blanket.

As the darkness outside grew, Saris wanted to start a fire, but he was afraid to without Trajan telling him it was okay. Saris didn't know much about survival, but he did know that smoke could be seen from the air.

Knowing that there would be nothing he could do until Trajan woke up, Saris settled his tired body down next to him and covered them both up with the silver warming blanket. The warmth of Trajan's body against his fought off the chill that had begun to settle in Saris's bones.

It felt nice to have someone to cuddle up with. He had never experienced it before. It made him wonder if being someone's mate

had other benefits as well. He began to think that this mating thing wasn't half bad. Now if only his mate would wake up.

Chapter 6

Trajan groaned. His head felt like it had been bashed in with a hammer. He opened his eyes cautiously and glanced around, surprised to find himself inside somewhere besides the bridge of his ship. The darkness that surrounded him made it hard to tell.

Check that, surrounded them, Trajan thought when he noticed the man curled up by his side. He leaned his head out a bit so that he could peer down at the face of the man with his ass pressed back against Trajan's groin.

Trajan knew he looked at Saris even before he saw his beautiful face. The unique scent that belonged only to his mate permeated the air around them, sinking into Trajan's senses and filling his heart with joy.

The last thing he remembered was ordering Saris to the escape pod and then a large explosion rocked the ship. Hearing a noise, Trajan had looked up just as a large beam fell from the ceiling above him. After that, everything went blank.

As Trajan's eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness, he noted that they seemed to be inside of a large cavern. The young man that he had rescued along with Saris slept several feet away from them. Trajan wondered if he had woken up yet.

A stack of firewood, a couple jugs of water, and the supplies from the escape pod were stacked neatly against the far wall. Trajan knew that Saris had been responsible for that. Something about the man told Trajan his mate was a neat freak.

The scent of his mate floated up to Trajan again as Saris moved in his sleep. Trajan groaned, feeling his cock harden against Saris's tight

little ass. He knew his little mate no longer felt the effects of the drugs forced into his system.

Knowing this and unable to deny himself a moment more, Trajan moved his hand down over Saris's chest, reaching for the hidden zipper to his body suit. He slipped his hand inside of the opening, delighting in the feel of Saris's smooth skin.

Trajan had been around the block a time or two. It wasn't something he felt ashamed of, just a fact. But his usual bed partners, while being temporary because they weren't his mate, had all been Katzmen. Trajan had never been with someone outside of his species.

He certainly had never been with someone that didn't have a fine covering of hair over their entire bodies. As his hand moved farther down Saris's smooth chest, Trajan decided that he much preferred the silky texture of the hairless skin beneath his fingers.

Trajan moved his hand back up Saris's chest until his fingers encountered a little nub. He gently tugged on the nipple. Saris's growing arousal filled the air around them, overwhelming Trajan's senses.

Needing to know if Saris was in fact aroused more than he needed his next breath, Trajan reached down and cupped Saris's cock in his hand. A low groan fell from his lips when he felt the cock harden through the fabric of the bodysuit.

He gave it a little squeeze, groaning again when Saris humped his hips at him. Trajan couldn't stand it anymore. He needed to claim his mate once and for all. The need overwhelmed him, consuming him until he felt nothing else.

"Sari," Trajan whispered into Saris's ear. "Wake up, my own."

Trajan gave Saris a little shake. He gritted his teeth against the agony produced when Saris simply rolled onto his side and pushed his ass back against Trajan's raging hard on. Trajan swore he could feel the tightness of Saris's ass through the thin fabric.

"Sari," he said again, this time a little louder. His eyes briefly lifted to the man sleeping several feet away to see if he still slept. He

seemed to be asleep, or at least the snores that Trajan could hear coming from him said so.

Trajan scooted back out of desperation and a need to get rid of his restrictive clothing. He sat up and unbuckled his boots, pushing them down his feet and setting them aside. Then he went to work on his pants and his shirt vest.

Praying desperately that Saris had gotten all of the supplies out of the escape pod, Trajan crawled over to them and searched around. He nearly yelled in triumph when he located a small bottle of oil.

His prize in hand, Trajan crawled back over to Saris and pulled the silver warming blanket back from his naked body. Trajan was naked and horny. He had oil in hand. Now he just had to wake his mate.

“Sari,” Trajan whispered into Saris’s ear again. This time he followed it up with a long lick of his tongue along the pointed edge of Saris’s ear. Saris responded with a small moan, a smile flittering across his lips.

So apparently Saris liked his ears licked. *Good to know*, Trajan thought as he did it again. This time he added a small nibble with his lips. He nearly jumped out of his skin when Saris purred.

It stunned Trajan so much that he was unable to move for a moment. His mate purred! Trajan knew under certain stimuli that Katzmen could purr, but he had never heard of another species making that noise.

Joy filled Trajan to bursting. He leaned down and ran his tongue along the soft shell of Saris’s pointed ear, nibbling at the edge with his lips. *Yes, more purring!* Wanting more, Trajan pushed his hand inside of Saris’s bodysuit and tugged on his nipple at the same time.

Soon, Saris began to move. His hands started caressing Trajan’s arms. His hips pushed back against Trajan’s hard cock. The little aroused purrs coming from his throat grew louder, more intense.

“Sari,” Trajan growled, “wake up, my mate, wake up so I can claim you.” He could feel himself coming to the end of his endurance.

His control hung on by a thread. This time when he licked the edge of Saris's ear, he used his teeth and bit down just a little.

It had the desired response. Saris's purr turned into a groan and his eyes opened. He blinked several times as if he didn't quite know where he was. For a brief moment, Trajan thought Saris had succumbed to the drugs again.

Then, long delicate fingers cupped Trajan's face and a wide grin was aimed in his direction.

"Trajan, you're awake," Saris whispered.

"So are you, my own," Trajan responded. He gave Saris just a moment to realize that they lay cuddled together before using his tongue to caress the edge of Saris's ear again. Saris groaned, a shudder moving down his body.

"Wha...what are you doing?"

The husky tone of Saris's voice sent a matching shudder through Trajan's body. His hand moved down to cup Saris's cock through the bodysuit again. His lips went back to licking and nibbling.

"I'm claiming my mate," Trajan whispered between nibbles. He paused, his teeth scraping over the edge of Saris's ear as he pulled back a little. "If you want me to stop, tell me now, but remember, if you agree, this is forever."

Saris remained silent. Trajan wondered if he had crossed some line with Saris that couldn't be uncrossed. When Saris tilted his head back to look up at him, Trajan braced himself, expecting to see anger and resentment.

What he saw instead made his heart pound in his chest for just a moment before it flew free. "Sari?"

"You promise you won't ever return me or cancel our contract?" Saris whispered.

Trajan felt tears gather in his eyes. He shook his head. "No, Sari, I won't ever return you or cancel our contract. I'll never let you go. If I have anything to say about it, you will never leave my side."

Saris's misty eyes begged Trajan not to lie to him. Trajan shook his head in response because tears clogged his throat and he couldn't speak. He leaned down and pressed a gentle kiss to Saris's lips.

Before he could lift his head, Trajan felt Saris's arms wrap around his neck, pulling him closer. The calm Trajan worked so hard to reclaim a moment ago shattered under the hunger of Saris's kiss. It sang through Trajan's veins and ignited a fire that only Saris could quench.

Giving himself up to the passion of the kiss, Trajan's tongue caressed the soft fullness of Saris's lips. He crushed Saris's body to his, delighting in the feel of it pressed against him.

Trajan's lips continued to explore the recesses of Saris's mouth. His hands pushed and pulled at the bodysuit covering the smooth skin he wanted to feel with his hands. Finally, he pushed the offending fabric down Saris's legs.

Smooth, silky skin pressed against his body. His heart jolted and his pulse pounded. His hands slipped up Saris's arms, bringing him closer. His lips moved to the soft contours of Saris's mouth, over his cheek, and back up to the edge of his ear.

He felt the occasional brush of Saris's thigh against his hip. Hands moved down his back to his hips and back up to grasp Trajan's jaw, bringing his mouth back to Saris's. Trajan's body tingled at the contact.

"Sari," Trajan groaned against Saris's lips, "I need..."

"Yes," Saris murmured back.

Trajan's heart raced. Saris opened his legs, throwing one leg over Trajan's hip and crooking it. His knee came to rest near Trajan's armpit. Trajan turned, gently easing Saris down onto their makeshift bed.

Saris buried his face against Trajan's neck. Trajan poured the oil into his hand then moved down to the soft curve of Saris's hip and beyond. He carefully moved his fingers between Saris's butt cheeks to the hidden entrance there.

He moved in, brushing his fingers over the puckered hole. Saris jerked in his arms, but a small groan escaped the lips pressed against Trajan's neck. More strokes brought more moans, then whimpers.

The purring began when Trajan pushed one oil covered finger into Saris's tight hole. Saris's body moved against his as he began pushing his finger in, then pulling it out. Trajan didn't know if he would make it long enough to feel Saris wrapped around his aching cock.

Trajan added another finger. Saris began to move wildly. Trajan felt his hands clench desperately at his shoulders. Soft bites pressed into the skin of his neck. Long limber legs wrapped around his hips.

"Are you ready for me, my own?" Trajan whispered, his breath heaving against Saris's ear. "Are you ready for me to claim you as my mate?"

Saris stilled, his head falling back, his eyes finding Trajan's in the darkness. "Yes," Saris whispered.

Trajan let his eyes briefly close in thanks to all of the powers that be for the gift granted to him the moment he met Saris. Trajan opened his eyes and gazed down at the beautiful face looking up at him.

He was fully aware of the hardness of Saris's thighs over his as he slowly pressed his way past the first ring of muscles, then farther in until he felt the soft tickle of Saris's pubic hair against him.

Once he pushed in all the way, Trajan paused. He lifted himself up onto one arm. Using the sharp claws on the other, he cut a small cut in his chest just over his heart. Reaching down to cradle the back of Saris's head with his hand, he lifted him.

"Drink, my own."

Trajan's head fell back and he closed his eyes. A long groan rushed from his lips as Saris's lips touched his skin, his tongue lapping at the blood. Saris's eager response seemed to match his.

A spurt of hungry desire shot through Trajan. He leaned over his mate and sank his sharp canines deep into the soft skin between his neck and shoulder. Trajan was totally unprepared for the sweet taste that filled him.

He began to thrust his hips, pushing his hard cock deep into Saris's tight grasp, then pulling out. The dance would almost immediately start again when Trajan thrust back in. Over and over he moved until his whole body flooded with desire.

Pulling his teeth from Saris and licking away the dripping blood, Trajan grasped Saris's face in his hands. He stared down into Saris's green eyes as he moved, stunned by the emotions he could see there. He was the glowing image of fire, passion, and love. He was mate.

Trajan roared as he yielded to the burning passion consuming him. An answering cry met his, and he felt Saris's hot seed spill between their bodies even as he filled Saris with his own. With one last thrust, Trajan felt the knot at the end of his cock extend and lock him into place within his mate. He never wanted to leave.

Trajan dropped his head forward to rest against Saris's shoulder. His chest heaved with the enormity of what had just happened to him, of what still happened to him. Soft hands caressed his back as he tried to regain some control.

"Sari?" Trajan whispered telepathically, hoping that they had been gifted with the mating bond. When Saris didn't answer him, Trajan lifted his head and looked down at him. Rapid breaths escaped Saris's slightly parted lips, his eyes closed.

"Sari?" Trajan whispered again.

His eyes widened when Saris growled at him through clenched teeth. "Move, damn it."

Trajan knew that they were still knotted together. If he moved too much he could injure Saris, but just a little shouldn't be a problem. Trajan thrust his hips forward. Saris groaned. He did it again and again until Saris cried out, a wetness filling the space between them again.

When the knot finally receded, Trajan reluctantly pulled from his mate and rolled them both to their sides, Saris's head pressed against his throat. Trajan wrapped his arms around him, holding him close.

"You okay, Sari?" Trajan asked out loud.

"I'm not sure," Saris said, chuckling.

"Do you hurt?" Trajan asked, suddenly worried that he might have injured his mate.

Saris shook his head. "No."

"Then what's wrong?" Confusion filled Trajan. Saris wasn't acting like he thought a newly bonded mate would act.

"I can't move."

Trajan instantly loosened his arms. "Am I holding you too tight?"

Saris chuckled again. "No. You're holding me just right."

Trajan got more confused by the moment. He opened his mouth to ask Saris what was really wrong when he felt a hand pat him on the chest. Surprised, considering Saris's words, Trajan glanced down only to realize that it was indeed Saris's hand.

"I'm okay," Saris said. "I'm just tired."

Trajan let out a relieved sigh thankful that he hadn't done anything to harm his mate. That would devastate him. As Trajan held Saris to him, his eyes strayed to the carefully organized stack of stuff on the opposite wall.

"Did you do all of that?" Trajan asked, gesturing to the supplies, stacked firewood, and jugs of water.

Saris turned his head to look where Trajan pointed, then glanced back. Saris shrugged, dipping his head as if embarrassed. "Yeah, it seemed like the thing to do at the time."

"I thought I was supposed to be rescuing you, not the other way around."

"Oh, you're more than welcome to take over the job, believe me," Saris said. "This emergency preparedness stuff is for the birds!"

"What happened? I thought I ordered you to the escape pod."

Saris laughed. "You did, but one thing you'll learn about me is that I have a real hard time following orders." Saris's eyes moved up to meet Trajan's. "Especially if I feel strongly about something or someone."

"So, you ignored my orders?"

“Hell yes,” Saris said. “The computer read down the time before life support would be shut off and explosions went off all over the place.”

“Which is exactly why I wanted you safely onboard the escape pod,” Trajan reminded Saris. Inwardly, he felt pleased that his mate had risked his life to save him, even though he wasn’t happy the danger Saris experienced. It showed that Saris cared for him on some level.

“Trajan, I couldn’t leave you there to die, and we both know that’s exactly what you planned on doing.”

“Sari, I—”

Saris sat up. “You can’t tell me that that’s not what you planned, Trajan. You’d be lying.”

Trajan didn’t have a way to argue with Saris. He had known he would die onboard his ship when he had sent Saris away. Someone had to stay and steer the ship, distract their attacker until the escape pod could get away. That someone wasn’t going to be his mate.

“So, what did happen?” Trajan asked as he pulled Saris back down into his arms. He chuckled when he saw Saris roll his eyes. It looked like his mate wasn’t going to be a submissive type of person like Demyan. Trajan wasn’t sure that was a blessing or a curse.

“You got knocked out by a falling beam. I pulled you free, got us to the escape pod, and away we went. I’m sorry, Trajan, but your ship exploded while we escaped.”

Trajan nodded. He wasn’t happy about losing his ship, but having his mate alive and well meant a whole lot more. Still, it had been a good little ship, getting him where he needed to go and mostly keeping his ass out of trouble.

“So how did we end up in a cave?” Trajan finally asked.

Saris groaned. “It wasn’t easy, I can tell you that. You need to consider a diet because your ass is heavy when you’re out cold.”

Trajan chuckled. He could just imagine. Well, no he couldn't. He'd never been in this particular situation before. "Sari, how did you get me into this cave?"

Saris pointed across the room to the folded up tarp. "I loaded you on that and pulled you here. Then I went back for your little friend over there. Next, the supplies."

"And the escape pod?"

"It's outside across the meadow." Saris looked like he was contemplating something for a moment. "I disabled the locating beacon and covered the pod with branches."

Trajan frowned, surprised. "Why would you do that?"

"One of the ships attacking us was destroyed when your ship exploded, but the other one is still out there. As this is the closest habitable planet and a sure place for us to land, I didn't want us to be discovered until you had regained consciousness."

Saris leaned his head back and glanced up at Trajan. He had a worried look on his face. "I consider myself a pretty smart cookie, but I can't fight my way out of any situation, Trajan. I'm more likely to stab myself in the foot than fight off an adversary."

Trajan chuckled, patting Saris on the arm. "That's okay, Sari, you have me for that."

"Do I?" Saris asked with a bit of his uncertainty written on his face.

"We've mated now, Sari. That means you belong to me and I belong to you," Trajan assured Saris. "I'll never send you home. I'll never cancel our contract. And I'll never let you go."

"Promise?" Saris whispered.

"I promise, Sari."

"You wouldn't lie to me, would you?"

"I'll never lie to you, Sari," Trajan assured him.

"Then would you please tell me how in the hell we're going to get off of this damn planet?"

Chapter 7

“Here, Sari, I got you something to eat,” Trajan said as he held a tin of food out to him. Saris sat up, grabbing the tin. He gave it a small sniff, his nose crinkling in distaste.

“What the hell is this swill?”

Trajan chuckled. “Uh, I believe it’s Chicken ala King, but I could be wrong.” He glanced down at the tin in his hand, eyeing the glob of cream colored goo doubtfully. “Very, very wrong.”

“I don’t suppose there’s some fresh fruit in there?” Saris asked, nodding toward the supplies.

Trajan shook his head. “Nope. Emergency rations are compact, made to last long periods of time, and aimed toward giving us the most nutrients with the least amount of taste.”

“That’s reassuring.”

“Isn’t it?” Trajan took another bite from his tin, gulping past the bland taste. He took another few bites then set the tin down on the sand next to him. He didn’t know if he could stomach another bite, no matter how hungry he felt.

“How about I go out and see if I can catch us something to cook over a fire?” Trajan asked, looking across at his mate. He chuckled at the surprised look on Saris’s face.

“You can do that?”

“Sure,” Trajan said as he pushed himself forward onto his knees, his face within an inch of Saris’s. “They teach us all sorts of neat stuff like that at warrior training school.”

“Oh yeah?” Saris asked, his voice sounding husky, filled with need.

“Yeah.” Trajan leaned closer and ran his tongue along the edge of Saris’s plump lips. He grinned when he heard Saris groan.

“They teach you *that* in warrior training school?” Saris asked, his voice low and seductive. It made Trajan’s toes curl.

“No, I learned that all on my own.”

Saris’s lips thinned. “From whom?”

Trajan’s eyebrows shot up. Did he detect a bit of jealousy in his mate’s tone? Trajan wasn’t sure he could adequately express the joy that brought him. “I don’t remember.”

“Been with that many people, have you?”

Trajan bit his lip, suppressing his grin. “No, but they don’t matter anymore. They aren’t my mate. You are.”

Trajan felt the intensity of Saris’s stare. He seemed to be measuring Trajan’s words for their truthfulness. Trajan knew that Saris had no reason to believe him. They had only known each other for a few days. True, they had been eventful days, but still, it wasn’t a lot of time to get to know someone.

After a moment, Saris nodded. “Good answer.”

Trajan let out a relieved breath. “Good enough for a kiss?”

Saris laughed. “Maybe.”

“What would I have to do to convince you?” Trajan liked this game. It filled him with light and joy, made him believe that all was right in the world. And all of it due to his gorgeous mate. Trajan determined that they would have many moments like this.

He was mildly surprised, and forever grateful, that his mate had such a playful personality. Besides Saris being intelligent, humorous, and downright sexy, Trajan respected the man.

Expecting a kiss, shock filled Trajan when Saris held the small tin of food out to him. “Find me something to eat that doesn’t taste like kuhmucca dung.”

Trajan’s lips twitched. He leaned forward quickly and stole a kiss from Saris before climbing to his feet. He grinned down at Saris. “Consider that my incentive.” He walked over to the supplies,

grabbed the phase gun and a small length of rope then headed for the mouth of the cave. His mate wanted something to eat? Trajan could provide that.

* * * *

Saris watched Trajan walk out of the cave, still a little stunned with how quickly the man had agreed to go find him some real food. The creamy glob in the tin Trajan had given him could not be considered food. Nutrients? Yes. Food? No.

He thought over the last couple days since he had met Trajan. If nothing else, they had been eventful. Between being reclassified as a pleasure slave, being rescued by Trajan only to learn they were mates, and being shot out of space by someone hunting them, Saris wondered what would happen next.

He wasn't sure he wanted to know. Granted, he'd go through it all over again if it meant meeting Trajan. Saris had never met a man like him. Trajan seemed easy going, funny, and loving. He also seemed totally committed to trying to make their unusual relationship work.

The tingle that shot down his spine when he thought of Trajan and the things they had done together earlier didn't surprise Saris. Trajan was gorgeous and sexy and totally drool worthy.

Saris hadn't expected to feel the connection to Trajan that he did. He worried about him being outside all on his own. He worried that something would happen and he would never see Trajan again. He worried that Trajan would be injured and Saris wouldn't know. Hell, he just plain worried.

Could he really make Trajan happy? Could he fulfill the needs of a Katzman? He knew from his research that Katzmen naturally had very active libidos. The sum of Saris's sexual experience could be counted on one hand. He didn't know if he could satisfy Trajan.

The whole mating thing just topped off the last couple of days. According to Trajan, as mates, they had a special connection, one that only they would share between them. It went soul-deep.

It made Saris wonder why they couldn't speak mentally as Chellak and Demyan could. They had mated, they had exchanged blood as the mating ritual required. Saris had even felt Trajan's knot lodge inside of him. In fact, he delighted in it. Were they truly mates?

Trajan said he wouldn't lie to Saris. He would always tell the truth. Saris hoped so. If this all turned out to be some sick joke or just Trajan's way of getting down his bodysuit, Saris wasn't sure he would be able to live through it.

Shaking his head at the morose direction his thoughts had taken, Saris got to his feet and walked over to the young man still sleeping across the way. The man remained unconscious. It concerned Saris.

He couldn't find any signs of trauma other than the injection spot for the blue liquid. It looked a little red, but nothing more than Saris expected from an injection tube. Other than that, nothing explained the young man's condition.

Until he had access to more modern technologies, Saris could only make him comfortable. Saris wet a rag and squeezed a few small drops onto the man's lips then wiped down his face and neck. With nothing else to do, he covered him back up and walked to the mouth of the cave.

From where he stood on the edge of the small rock ledge, Saris could see across the meadow to the river and the tress beyond. Off to one side he saw the escape pod, still covered with branches and leaves.

It looked to be midday, the sun from above shining down as a soft wind blew through the tall green grass. Trees gently swayed in the breeze. All in all, it looked like the perfect setting. Except that Trajan was out there somewhere all alone.

Saris would give anything to be with Trajan. He knew he wouldn't be much help, but at least they would be together. And if

something happened to Trajan, Saris could be there to help him, give him medical attention.

Saris disliked not knowing where Trajan, if he had been hurt or worse. He knew somewhere out there, Trajan hunted for food. He could at least feel that. Saris attributed it to the mating bond. He just wished that they had developed the telepathy part. Then Saris could contact Trajan and assure himself that nothing had happened to his mate.

With nothing to do but wait, Saris decided to gather more firewood and refill the water jugs. Granted, they had yet to use any of the firewood and only a bit of the water, but it never hurt to be prepared.

It took Saris less than thirty minutes to complete his task. Standing on the edge of the rocks again, Saris cast one more look out over the meadow for Trajan. This waiting thing sucked big time.

As he started to turn and head back into the cave a flash of something moving through the edge of trees on the far side of the meadow caught his eye. Saris paused, squinting for a better look. His heart hammered in his chest when he recognized Trajan.

A delighted bounce in his step, Saris jumped down from the rocks he stood on and ran across the field toward his mate. He could see the wide grin that crossed Trajan's face when he spotted Saris running in his direction.

Trajan had just enough time to drop his catch on the ground before Saris threw himself into his arms. Saris heard him chuckle, his strong arms wrapping around him.

"More welcome homes like that and I might have to leave every day."

"Leave again and you won't be welcomed home again," Saris responded with a small snarl. He pushed himself away from Trajan trying to pretend that he wasn't relieved that the warrior had come back safe.

“What did you get me to eat?” Saris asked, quickly changing the subject.

“Do I get a kiss?” Trajan asked, one eyebrow raised in a way that irritated Saris to no end. It made him feel like Trajan could see right through him and tell how emotional he felt despite his calm demeanor.

Saris crossed his arms over his chest and glared up at Trajan. He ignored the grin on Trajan’s face. “Do I get dinner?”

Trajan countered. “Do I get a kiss?”

Saris knew he acted childish, but he couldn’t help it. He had been so worried about Trajan and he felt like Trajan made light of his concern. He stomped his foot on the ground.

“Oh!” he growled, “go soak your head.”

Saris turned on his heel and started back toward the cave only to be stopped by two powerful arms wrapping around him from behind. He felt Trajan’s body press against his, his soft breath on his neck.

“What’s wrong, Sari?” Trajan asked softly.

Saris leaned his head back against Trajan’s shoulder. He took several deep breaths, blinking to clear the tears that had gathered in his eyes. He didn’t like this new emotional turmoil he felt. His emotions seemed to be out of control, nearly raging.

He felt like it unmanned him, made him less than what he was. But he couldn’t seem to stop them. He felt anxious and confused. At the same time he felt desperate and needy. And all of it narrowed down to one gorgeous man, the one that held Saris in his arms.

“Sari?”

“Nothing,” Saris replied quietly. “Nothing is wrong, Trajan, I’m just hungry.”

Saris wasn’t sure that Trajan would buy his explanation, but he wasn’t ready to discuss his chaotic emotions just yet. Hell, he wasn’t sure he would ever be ready to discuss them. He had been taught from an early age not to have them or, at least not to express them.

It sucked, but it was the way things were done on Elquone. Those of the Brüter Caste weren't allowed to show emotion at any cost. Emotions meant attachment, want, need.

Emotions meant that when the brüter returned to Elquone after his contract had been fulfilled he would be unfit to be contracted out again. Saris had watched it happen with his brother, Karis, and he never wanted to experience it for himself. It destroyed people.

"Well, luckily, I found a couple of rabbits running around," Trajan said. He reached down and picked up the catch he dropped earlier. He held them up in the air for Saris to see.

"There's not much to them, but there should be enough for us to have a good dinner tonight and maybe breakfast tomorrow morning."

"You think we're going to be here that long?"

"What?" Trajan asked looking away from the dead rabbits to look at Saris. "No. At least, I hope not. Chellak should be looking for us even now. But it never hurts to be prepared just in case."

Saris nodded. He had that very thought several times. "So, do you know how to cook these things?" he asked, pointing to the two dead rabbits.

Trajan nodded, grinning. "Just another skill from warrior training school."

"You seem to have learned a lot of things from warrior training school," Saris replied as they started making their way back across the meadow. "What else did you learn?"

"Well, I'm pretty good in a fight, although Chellak has handed me my head a time or two."

"Seriously?" Saris asked. He wasn't sure he liked the idea of anyone touching Trajan in any way. His little spout of jealousy earlier had surprised him. The thought of Chellak Rai fighting with Trajan in fun or for real just made him angry.

"Most of it was all for fun," Trajan said quickly.

"Most of it?"

Trajan shrugged. "We did get into it a couple of times when we had a difference of opinion. Katzmen can be a stubborn lot."

"No!" Saris exclaimed in mock shock. "Really?"

Trajan's lips twitched. "Brat!"

Saris chuckled. "You did walk into that one, Trajan."

"You didn't have to walk away with it," Trajan complained, but Saris could tell he wasn't really offended. The grin on his face told him that much.

"Yeah, I did."

* * * *

Trajan sat across the fire from Saris watching him lick his fingers clean. They had just finished eating the rabbit Trajan caught and cooked. Watching Saris lick his fingers made Trajan wish Saris would lick something else.

He doubted Saris had a clue how sexy he really looked, or how aroused Trajan felt just watching him eat. It was stupid to be turned on from watching Saris eat. But each stroke of Saris's tongue made Trajan ache.

Even the damn firelight seemed to be against him at the moment. The soft red glow of the flames cast just enough light to make Saris seem almost ethereal. The delicate contours of Saris's face, the lean muscles of his chest, the soft curve of his hips, all designed to drive Trajan crazy. He just knew it.

Trajan wanted nothing more than to cross the room, take his mate in his arms, and claim him again. But something had happened to Saris while he had gone hunting. Trajan didn't know what exactly, but something felt different.

Saris would converse with him, even laugh and joke, but the moment Trajan crossed some invisible line between them, Saris backed off faster than Trajan could blink. It felt as if he couldn't stand to be intimate with Trajan.

And it made Trajan's heart ache. Saris had agreed to be his mate the night before. Trajan hadn't forced him. He had even given him several opportunities to decline. Saris hadn't declined. He had accepted being Trajan's mate and even seemed enthusiastic about it.

He dropped his eyes from the tantalizing sight of his mate to look down at the sand beneath his feet, anything not to look at Saris. He knew that if he continued to look at him, he wouldn't be able to keep himself from claiming him.

Trajan just didn't understand. Maybe this explained why they couldn't communicate telepathically. Maybe Saris didn't really want to be his mate. Trajan guessed it could always be a possibility.

As big and as strong as Trajan appeared, he knew it would be a natural reaction for someone like Saris to look to him for protection. He just hoped that Saris knew that that protection didn't come at a price. He'd protect Saris no matter what. That's what warriors did.

If Saris agreed to be his mate because he thought he had to in order for Trajan to protect him, Trajan felt pretty sure his heart would break. He wanted Saris to want him for him and not because his strength meant he could protect the man.

"Sari," Trajan said, lifting his head to look across the fire at him. "You know I would protect you and take care of you even if you weren't my mate, don't you?"

Surprised eyes looked up at him. "Yeah, I know that."

Okay, so that wasn't it, Trajan thought as he looked back down at the sand. He picked up a small stick and made doodle lines in the sand as his thoughts moved about in his head.

Had he done something to cause Saris to not want to be with him anymore? Trajan racked his brain and tried to think of anything he might have done to make Saris angry or upset. The only thing he could think of was when he had asked for a kiss. Saris had looked pissed.

Trajan felt like someone squeezed his heart in his chest as he realized that Saris might be angry at him for asking for a kiss. Did

Saris not like kissing? Had Trajan done it wrong? Had he done it too much? Was asking for a kiss wrong where Saris came from? Had he insulted Saris by asking?

Question after question flew through Trajan's mind and doubts began to fill him. Just because he felt the mating bond between them didn't mean Saris did, too. He said he had studied the Katzman race and knew of the bond. He had readily accepted it.

Trajan wondered if Saris ever really wanted to be his mate in the first place or if he had just accepted it. Or had he? Maybe that was the problem. Maybe Saris hadn't accepted their mating. That would explain why they weren't able to speak telepathically.

Even if they had mated, if they didn't truly accept each other then they wouldn't be able to speak to each other in such an intimate way. The more Trajan thought about it, the more that it made sense, and the more it made his heart hurt.

Trajan blinked several times to clear away the tears forming in his eyes. He stood up and started toward the mouth of the cave before Saris spotted the wetness in his eyes that threatened to spill down his face.

There was no point in Saris knowing how much agony filled him. Besides the fact that Trajan wasn't sure Saris would even care, he didn't want Saris to feel pressured into being nice to him. Or, gods forbid, pretend.

"Where are you going?" Saris called out just as Trajan reached the entrance to the cave.

Trajan paused. He turned his head just a little to acknowledge Saris, but not enough for his face to show. "I need to scout around just a little before it gets too dark outside. I want to make sure we're still hidden."

He waited for a response from Saris, any response. When none came, Trajan walked out into the cold air that had settled in the small valley. He got as far as the edge of the cliff before he had to sit down before he fell down.

His misery felt like a physical pain as it filled him. His eyes burned from holding the tears in. His head pounded. Trajan covered his mouth with his hand as a raw, primitive grief overwhelmed him.

Trajan knew he felt things strongly. He always had. Chellak had often accused him of being too emotional. Right now, he almost wished he felt nothing at all. That would be much better than this all-consuming heartache.

Trajan almost cried out at his sense of loss as he thought about Saris. He couldn't keep Saris if he truly didn't want to be together, and Trajan would never force him. That meant giving Saris his freedom.

Trajan wasn't sure he would survive it. He wasn't sure he wanted to. Being without his mate after bonding with him would be akin to a death sentence. Trajan had seen it happen before with other Katzmen who had lost their mates. They slowly lost their minds.

Katzmen were very possessive of their mates. They needed to know that they were safe and happy at all times. It became a driving force in their lives once they found their mates. To be separated and not able to protect or care for their mates was more than most Katzmen could handle.

Trajan suspected from the misery he felt just thinking about it that he would be one of the ones that totally lost it. He knew without Saris, he would grow more and more careless with his safety, not caring what happened to him.

He might even look forward to his own death, anything to get away from the loss. That knowledge twisted and turned inside of him because he knew it would come. His heart still squeezed with anguish as he realized that he would do anything to make Saris happy, even give him up.

"Trajan?" murmured a sweet voice behind him. "Are you coming to bed soon?"

Chapter 8

Saris didn't know how he knew that Trajan was upset, but he did know. He could feel the anguish flowing from him. Trajan's emotions swirled around and twisted together with Saris's until he didn't know who felt what.

Saris felt overwhelmed. The emotions inside of him, the emotions he felt coming from Trajan, confused him. He needed something to keep him grounded, to keep him from going crazy. He needed Trajan.

"Trajan?" Saris asked again.

"Yeah, I'll be right there," Trajan answered, but he didn't turn around to look at Saris, and he didn't sound happy about being disturbed.

Saris knew that he was being overly emotional again, and he should probably be ashamed of himself, but right now he didn't really care. He needed to feel Trajan's hands on his skin, feel their bodies pressed together.

Taking the few steps that separated them, Saris wrapped his arms around Trajan's neck and pressed his body against him. He felt a shudder pass through Trajan's body. Before he could wonder about it, two arms grabbed him and pulled him around to sit in Trajan's lap.

Saris inhaled deeply when he glanced up and saw Trajan's face. Tears glistened on his eyelids, his face filled with misery. He heard a low, choking sob and suddenly Trajan wrapped his arms around Saris's body, almost crushing him.

"I'll do anything for you to stay with me," Trajan whispered against Saris's hair. "We can go wherever you want, do whatever you want. I'll even sign a contract for you if that's what you want."

Saris was stunned. “You...you don’t sign contracts,” he said quickly. “It’s against your laws to own slaves.”

“I don’t care,” Trajan snarled as he lifted his head to stare down at Saris. The tears on his eyelashes slid slowly down his cheeks. “If that’s what you need, I’ll break the law. Or we can go somewhere that it’s not against the law, someplace outside of the Federation.”

“You’d leave Katzmann for me?”

Trajan’s brows drew together in a frown. “I’d do anything for you, Sari.”

Saris swallowed hard and bit back his own tears. “Trajan, I would never ask you to do something like that.”

“You’re not asking me, Sari,” Trajan insisted. “If that’s what you need to stay, we’ll do it. I can make arrangements for us as soon as we get back to Katzmann. I don’t have a lot of money, but it should be enough to set us up somewhere else.”

Saris’s eyes widened. He couldn’t think of anything immediately to say to Trajan. What could he say? Trajan was offering to give everything in his life, his people, his home world, his very belief system, just for him.

Even as he thought over Trajan’s words Saris knew that he couldn’t let that happen. If he took everything away from Trajan, he wouldn’t be Trajan. Being a Katzman warrior for Chellak wasn’t just a job for Trajan. It filled every fiber of his being.

Besides, Saris could be a doctor anywhere as long as that anywhere included Trajan. Saris reached up and cradled Trajan’s face with his hands. He pulled his face down for a small kiss.

“Then you agree? You’ll stay with me?” Trajan asked the moment that Saris released his lips.

Saris could see the apprehension in Trajan’s eyes. He could feel the tension in his body. He sensed the feelings of rejection pouring off of him. He just didn’t understand why. They had mated. There shouldn’t be any question of Saris leaving.

“Trajan, where do you think I’m going?”

Saris watched, confused, as Trajan squeezed his eyes closed. His body seemed to stiffen even more. When he opened them a moment later they filled with the misery Saris had felt earlier.

"I know you don't want to be with me, that you're only here because you think you have no other option," Trajan murmured quietly. "I know you don't want me, not really."

"Have you lost your mind?" Saris said harshly as he pushed himself away from Trajan. He felt Trajan's hands grasp at him, but he felt too angry to care, too angry to give in to the small whimper he heard come from Trajan.

"I thought we were mates. You told me we were!" Saris shouted. "Did you lie to me?" Saris's hands spread wide as if taking in the entire area. "Was everything a lie?"

"No, I never lied to you, Sari."

"Then why—" Saris stopped speaking, his lips pressing together. He took a deep breath through his nose. He swallowed past the lump in his throat before trying to speak again. "Then why are you saying all of these things to me?" he asked in a much lower tone.

"I saw the way you reacted when I asked you for a kiss," Trajan challenged as he stood to his feet. "I know that you don't want to kiss me, to be with me. I told you that I would protect you no matter what, and I meant it. You don't have to pretend with me, Saris."

Saris had no way of expressing how much it hurt to hear Trajan call him *Saris* instead of *Sari*. Trajan had never called him anything except Sari. It felt like an endearment. He wrapped his arms around himself to ward off the chill that suddenly started to set into his tired body.

"You were making fun of me," Saris murmured as he stared down at the ground. He kicked at the pebbles beneath his feet. "You laughed at me, at my concern for your safety. How did you expect me to act?"

"What are you talking about?" Trajan asked. "I never laughed at you."

“You did,” Saris insisted. “You had your eyebrow raised, and you laughed as if what I felt wasn’t important. I know I’m supposed to keep my emotions at bay, but I can’t seem to do that when I’m around you.”

“Keep your emotions at bay?” Saris looked up at the astonished sound ringing in Trajan’s voice. “When have I ever asked you to keep your emotions at bay?” Trajan asked.

“Isn’t that...well, don’t you...but you—” Saris suddenly sat down. He ground the heels of his hand against his eyes as he tried to make sense of his confusion.

“Saris.”

Saris dropped his hands to see Trajan squatting down in front of him. He looked concerned and just a little confused himself.

“Saris, if you need to express your emotions, either verbally or physically, then do so. I would never deny you that.” Trajan’s voice sounded so soft that Saris nearly didn’t hear him. “I just want you to be happy.”

“I am happy, I mean, I have been happy these last two days with you.”

Trajan smiled, but Saris could see that sadness still filled him. He reached over and caressed the side of Trajan’s face, then leaned in, and kissed him. “I like kissing you.”

Trajan’s hand covered Saris’s, holding it against his cheek. “I like kissing you, too.”

“I don’t want to leave you, Trajan,” Saris said. “I don’t want either of us to leave Katzmann. That’s where you belong, where you’re needed. I’m just hoping that you want me there with you.”

Saris tried to wait patiently for Trajan’s reaction. He felt as though he stood on the edge of a very high cliff waiting to either be rescued or fall over the edge to his death. The waiting almost killed him.

“You’re my mate,” Trajan replied. “Of course I want you with me.”

“Of course,” Saris said. He pulled his hand from beneath Trajan’s and stood to his feet. It surprised him that he could hide his emotions behind a cool smile when inside his heart crumbled into a million pieces at Trajan’s words. *Of course*. “We should go in before it gets too cold.”

He had only taken a few steps when Trajan stopped him. “Saris, what’s going on?”

“What do you mean?”

“A second ago you said you wanted nothing more than to be with me and now you can’t get away from me fast enough.” Saris jumped when he felt Trajan’s hand land on his shoulder. “I want to know what in the hell is going on with you.”

“Nothing is going on,” Saris said. “I just think we should go inside.”

Saris yelped when two large hands picked him up, swung him around, and pinned him to the rock face. He could see the anger burning in Trajan’s eyes but, strangely enough, he wasn’t afraid of him. Trajan would never hurt him.

“Don’t fucking say *nothing*!” Trajan yelled. “I won’t play these hot and cold games with you, Saris.”

“Hot and cold games?” Saris exclaimed, suddenly just as angry as Trajan looked. “Then stop playing them with me. First you say I’m your mate and you start calling me Sari like it’s some sort of endearment, then you start calling me Saris all of a sudden?”

“What do you want me to call you?” Trajan shouted, shaking Saris by his arms. “What do you want from me?”

“I want you to want me and not because of some fucked pheromone shit,” Saris shouted right back. “I want you to want me for me. I want you to want to be with me and only me. I want you to love me.”

The words came out of Saris’s mouth before he could stop them and there wasn’t any way he could take them back. They hung in the

air between him and Trajan like a razor sharp pendulum getting closer and closer to both of them.

He slowly lowered Saris to his feet but kept him pinned against the hard rock. His hands tangled in Saris's blond hair, tilting his head back. "What do you think this is all about, Sari?" Trajan asked in a low voice.

Saris didn't know what to think. Once again the emotions running rampant through his system seemed to be a mix of his emotions and Trajan's. And they slammed him so hard and so fast that he had trouble processing them.

"I don't know," he finally whispered.

"Well, I don't know what books you studied or who you talked to, but, clearly, you haven't learned the real truth about Katzmen and their mates."

"Then explain it to me."

Trajan was silent for a moment as if he considered what exactly to tell Saris. "Katzmen, me in this instance, wait our entire lives to find our mates. It's something we look forward to with great anticipation and not because of some so-called 'fucked pheromone shit.'"

Saris tried to drop his eyes from Trajan's intense gaze but Trajan wouldn't allow it. "Uh uh, I want you looking into my eyes when I explain this to you so that you will see that I am telling you the truth."

"Trajan," Saris said, but Trajan placed his finger over Saris's lips to stop him.

"When a Katzman finds his mate, it's a time of great celebration for us. We've found our other half, the one person in the entire universe that the gods fated just for us. Our mates make us whole. They give us back a part of ourselves that we don't know is missing until it's returned."

Little by little, with each word that Trajan spoke, warmth began to return to Saris's body. Trajan said everything right, but he had yet to say the most important thing. Saris was afraid that he wouldn't.

“It’s not a matter of will we love our mates but how long we have to wait before we can love our mates.” Trajan gave him a smile, the first real smile Saris had seen since the whole conversation had started. “My fucked up pheromones made me want you, Sari. They didn’t make me love you.”

Saris’s heart fractured.

“You did that all on your own,” Trajan said softly, “with your intelligence and courage, even when you’re afraid, your smile and your laughter. Even your anger. That’s what made me love you, nothing else.”

Saris’s heart started to heal. “You love me?”

“I wouldn’t have mated you if I didn’t love you, Sari.”

“You can do that?” Saris asked in confusion. “I thought you had to mate, well, your mate.”

Trajan shook his head. “Not exactly. You have to understand, Sari, when we find our mates we have a nearly uncontrollable urge to claim them—”

“But you just said—”

“I said *nearly*, not totally,” Trajan said. “If we really cannot love our mates, we are able to keep from mating them. Luckily, when the fates choose our mates for us, they choose the most perfect person for us.”

Trajan’s hand caressed the side of Saris’s face. His look was tender, loving, as he gazed down at Saris. “I know that for me, the fates chose the perfect mate. I couldn’t imagine being with anyone else, ever.”

Saris felt suddenly overwhelmed with emotions. His mind reeled with confusion. He felt a panic like he had never known well up inside of him. His eyes filled with tears of frustration. He couldn’t make sense of the emotions blasting through him.

“Shh, Sari, it’s okay,” Trajan murmured. He wrapped his arms around Saris. “I didn’t tell you all of this to make you feel obligated to

me. I just wanted you to understand. If you don't want to be mated to me, you don't have to be."

Saris shook his head frantically. He wasn't upset because of what Trajan told him. In fact, he was thrilled. He just didn't know how to process all of the emotions that bombarded him.

Saris tilted his head back and looked up at Trajan. "I want to be your mate. Don't ever think differently. And I want all of it with you, the mating, the kissing, even the crazy things that have happened to us in the last two days. I just—"

"Just what, my own?"

"We're taught from a very early age to suppress all of our emotions, especially our need for love and acceptance. An emotional brüter is not one best suited to contracting out." Saris shook his head, his mouth opening and closing rapidly as he tried to form the words jumbled in his head. "The emotions I've been feeling since I met you, the emotions I feel coming from you, I can't...I can't—"

"Now see," Trajan said, joy filling his voice and making it lighter, "that's why you're so perfect for me. Chellak always says I'm too emotional. I feel things too much. And you've been taught not to show emotions."

Saris chuckled. He sniffled, wiping the tears from his eyes. "I guess I balance you out."

"You do," Trajan replied. "Remember what I said earlier? When we find our other half we become whole."

Saris sniffled again. "Does that mean you don't mind me falling apart?"

"Not in the least, Sari." Trajan gripped Saris's chin and lifted it. "I think it would be easier on both of us if we were honest about what we felt, though."

"I'm not exactly sure what I'm feeling."

"Then tell me what you're feeling, and I'll help you work them out. I have a lot of experience being emotional."

Saris laughed for a moment then grew somber as he tried to sift through his emotions enough to explain them to Trajan.

"I know I want to be with you. I don't like it when you're gone. I can't tell if you're hurt or if you need me or anything. I can't be there to take care of you if something happens to you and that upsets me."

"So, I guess that means you'll be going with me the next time I go hunting, huh?"

"I feel funny being concerned. You're a warrior. Who's better to take care of you than you?"

Trajan shook his head. "My being a warrior has nothing to do with it, Sari. We worry about the ones we love. What? You think I don't worry about you every second that I'm away from you?"

"I guess."

"No guessing about it. You've already proven that you can handle yourself in a dangerous situation. You took care of me, found us shelter, and transferred all of our stuff while I was unconscious. You even patched me up. I'd say that makes you pretty courageous. Now, what else is confusing you?"

"What if I can't satisfy you?"

"You satisfy me just by breathing. Yes, sex is great, wonderful in fact, but it is not the be all end all of our relationship. Right now, I'd like nothing more than to fuck you where you stand, but I'd be just as happy cuddling with you for the rest of the night."

"Seriously?" Saris asked in surprise.

"Of course. Sex is not mandatory between us, Sari. It's highly encouraged, mind you, but it's not—"

"No, I'm talking about the fucking me part," Saris complained. "You want to fuck me right now?"

"There are a lot of things I'd like to do with you right now, Sari," Trajan replied. "Fucking you is just one of them."

Saris licked his lips. "Like what?"

* * * *

All of the blood in Trajan's head seemed to drain down and pool in his groin at Saris's husky words. While his cock seemed to always be hard around Saris, now it ached, needing his mate.

"Sari," Trajan groaned.

He knew this conversation with Saris was important, that they had a lot of things that they needed to work out. He just couldn't quite remember exactly what they were. The only thought that made sense to him at that moment was feeling Saris's naked body pressed against his.

Trajan's hands went to the hidden zipper on Saris's bodysuit. He worked the zipper down slowly until his knuckles brushed against Saris's abdomen. He chuckled when he heard Saris moan, glad that he wasn't the only one aroused.

He placed one hand on each of Saris's shoulders and pushed the bodysuit off his shoulders and down his body, baring Saris's naked skin inch by glorious inch. With the bodysuit down around Saris's waist, his arms still trapped in the sleeves, Trajan knelt on the ground in front of him.

"This is where the fun begins," he said just before he pushed the bodysuit down enough to free Saris's cock. Impressed, Trajan growled as it bounced up and nearly hit him on the chin. It was a beautiful cock.

Trajan leaned forward and blew across the purplish head, feeling the long shudder that passed through Saris's body. He glanced up. Saris had his lips caught between his teeth, his eyes closed tight.

"You ever have someone take your cock into their mouth before?" When Saris rapidly shook his head, Trajan chuckled. "Then you're going to love this."

Trajan leaned forward again and licked the drop of pre-cum gathering on the head of Saris's cock. He wasn't surprised the delicious taste of Saris mirrored his sweet scent. He licked again and again, savoring each taste.

Finally, he wrapped his lips around the tip and swallowed all of Saris's cock. His hands gripped Saris's hips as he began moving his head back and forth, lavishing Saris's length with his tongue.

He could hear Saris above him whimpering and crying out every time he moved up or down. It spurred him on to do more. As he continued to suck the cock in his mouth he grabbed the bottle of oil he began carrying this morning out of his pocket.

Quickly lubing his fingers, Trajan moved his hand between Saris's legs. He pushed against him with his shoulder, encouraging Saris to spread his legs. It worked. Saris spread his legs enough for Trajan to reach between them and find his hole.

He sucked Saris's cock into his mouth at the same moment he pushed his finger into Saris's puckered hole. Saris cried out above him. Trajan began a slow rhythm of moving his finger in and out of Saris at the same time he sucked his cock up and down.

Trajan wanted Saris so far gone that he would be thinking of nothing but Trajan fucking him. After a few minutes, Trajan added another finger. Saris started bucking his hips. Trajan moved faster.

A third finger made Saris's legs tremble. His cries had turned into one long continuous whine. Needing to feel Saris wrapped around him immediately, Trajan pulled his fingers from him and grabbed the edges of his bodysuit with both hands, ripping it down his body.

Trajan didn't care if it tore. He'd replace it. Right now, having Saris naked was more important. Getting to his feet, Trajan lifted Saris up in his arms. He pulled on Saris's legs until he got the idea and wrapped them around Trajan's waist.

"You ready for me, Sari?" Trajan asked, his voice sounding unsteady even to him.

"Yes, gods yes, I need to feel you in me," Saris groaned. "I need you to claim me."

Trajan didn't need to hear more. Grabbing Saris's ass cheeks, Trajan pulled them apart and guided his cock in. His long groan matched Saris's as he sank home. Trajan paused just a moment to

savor the feeling of being deep inside his mate. He doubted anything felt so good.

“Trajan,” Saris whispered against the soft skin of Trajan’s neck, reminding him of the gorgeous man he held in his arms. Saris’s hands kneaded Trajan’s shoulders. His hips moved frantically against Trajan’s.

Trajan chuckled at Saris’s impatience. He used a sharp claw to cut a small line in his chest just over his heart. “Drink, my own, drink and be mine.”

Trajan’s heart fractured into a million glowing pieces when Saris leaned forward and began to lap at the small trail of blood on his chest without a hint of hesitation. He felt blissfully happy, alive.

Pulling Saris away from his chest, Trajan pushed him back enough that he could lean in and sink his teeth into the soft flesh of Saris’s neck. Power and strength filled him, and his heart sang with delight as Saris’s sweet blood swept over his tongue.

A buzzing began in Trajan’s head. It grew louder and louder until it began to distract Trajan from loving his mate. Trajan lifted his head, giving it a small shake, but the buzzing grew even louder.

Trajan opened his mouth to say something to Saris when the sweetest sound in the world filled his mind and nearly brought him to his knees.

“*Tra, Tra, Tra,*” Saris cried out over and over again like a silent mantra, and Trajan could hear it all in his mind.

“*Sari,*” Trajan whispered back through their newly developed mind link. He felt Saris jerk, then his head fell back against his shoulders, and he stared up at Trajan in shocked amazement.

“Trajan,” Saris said, “I just—”

Trajan nodded. “*Just heard me in your mind?*”

Saris nodded.

Trajan grinned, delighting in the shared moment between them. “It’s called the mating link, my own. It means that we have finally accepted our mating.”

“Trajan—”

Trajan thrust his hips forward at the same time that he pulled Saris’s hips down. He showered kisses around Saris’s lips and jaw.

“*Love you, my own, my Sari,*” Trajan whispered. Between each word, he planted kisses on his shoulders, neck, and face. His hands caressed the gentle curve of Saris’s hips, his ass. His cock burrowed into Saris’s tight grasp over and over again.

His breath came in deep, soul-drenching drafts as he exploded in a downpour of fiery sensations. Waves of ecstasy throbbed through him. Saris cried out, filling the space between them with his hot seed, his inner muscles gripping Trajan until he couldn’t move.

“Sari,” Trajan roared as he yielded to the searing need building inside of him. His release came in a great rush that consumed him until the only thing that mattered in his world was the man in his arms.

Trajan leaned Saris against the rock face behind him. He rested his head on Saris’s as the knot inside of him took hold, locking them together. Saris’s exhausted eyes sparkled up at him.

“*I like this,*” Sari said.

“*What?*”

“*You not being able to leave me immediately.*” Saris tightened his hips emphasizing the way the knot connected them.

Trajan chuckled. “I like it, too. It gives me a good excuse to cuddle with you afterwards without seeming too needy.”

Saris wrapped his arms around Trajan’s neck. “You can be needy anytime that you want to.” He grinned, his eyes dropping down to Trajan’s lips. “I’m feeling needy myself, so you’d better kiss me.”

Chapter 9

Saris groaned, rolling toward the warm body next to him. It didn't seem to relieve the persistent ache in his side. He wiggled a bit trying to get away from whatever pressed against his side.

Rolling onto his back and opening his eyes, Saris gasped, realizing a fear of panic when he saw the man standing over him.

"Well, well, well," Toc Jerell smirked, "it's about time you joined us."

Saris's eyes batted around the cave frantically as he took in the scene around him. Toc stood over him and Trajan, the phase pistol in his hand aimed directly at them. Two more men stood at the entrance to the cave, the phase pistols in their hands aimed in the same direction.

"*Trajan*," Saris whispered hoping that their mental bond still connected them. Sheer, black fright swept through him when Trajan didn't move, didn't respond to him in any manner. He wanted to turn his head and look at his mate, to assure himself that he remained uninjured, but Saris was afraid to.

"*Trajan!*" Saris exclaimed through their bond, nearly shouting this time.

"*Shh, Sari, I'm awake.*"

Saris closed his eyes in relief only to open them a second later when a hard boot connected with his rib cage. He grunted, suppressing his gasp of pain. He wouldn't give Toc Jerell the satisfaction of knowing he had hurt him.

His mind worked overtime as he tried to develop a plan to get out of the dangerous situation he and Trajan found themselves in, but

nothing came immediately to mind. Keeping Trajan safe overshadowed every other thought racing through Saris's head.

"What do you want, Jerell?" Saris asked.

Toc Jerell brought the gun in his hand up to his lips, tapping it there several times. "What do I want?" he asked. "What do I want? What the hell do you think I want?" he shouted, pointing the pistol back at Saris.

The devious gleam in his eyes that told Saris that Toc Jerell had lost his ever-loving mind. He absently wondered if Toc Jerell was on some type of drugs. He didn't seem to be in touch with reality.

Toc kicked him again. "Get up!"

"Trajan?"

"Go ahead, Sari, do what he says."

Saris rolled to his side and climbed to his knees, all the while keeping his eyes on the gun Toc Jerell held in his hand. He grabbed the edge of the silver warming blanket and pulled it up with him as he stood, trying his best to cover all of his manly parts.

He realized a moment later that it didn't matter when he saw the lustful glint in Toc's eyes. It sent a cold shiver of fear up his spine.

"Drop it." Toc waved the gun at the blanket.

Saris could feel the heat of embarrassment building up in his body as he dropped the blanket, revealing his naked body to Toc's interested gaze. After Trajan had ripped his body suit last night, Saris hadn't bothered to find something else to wear when he went to sleep. Now he wished he had.

"Oh, you'll do nicely," Toc chortled. "You'll do very nicely indeed."

Saris had absolutely no plans to ask Toc what he would do nicely for. He didn't want to know. Shock filled Saris a moment later when Trajan spoke from below him. Apparently he had no qualms about asking.

"Why do you want Saris so bad?"

“Ah, the big warrior is awake,” Toc said, his grin big and toothy. A wave of apprehension swept through Saris when Toc waved his pistol at Trajan. “You can get up, as well.”

Saris glanced over his shoulder and watched Trajan get to his feet. He desperately wanted to throw himself into Trajan’s arms and pretend that they both weren’t standing naked before a crazy man with a gun.

Toc whistled low under his breath, bringing Saris’s attention back to him. “Well, Saris, if you’re going to be unfaithful to me at least you chose a spectacular specimen. I had no idea that Katzmen were so well made. I just might have to try him out before we leave.”

Fear, stark and vivid, filled Saris. Toc Jerell talked about forcing his mate. Saris knew he couldn’t let that happen, even if it meant sacrificing himself. With the single blinding thought of saving Trajan in his mind, Saris stepped forward.

“You never answered Trajan, advisor” Saris said, refusing to refer to the man by his name. “What do you want with me? I’ve never even met you before a few days ago.”

Toc’s head tilted to one side as if he considered Saris’s words. “But I know you, Saris. I’ve been watching you for ages, waiting until the time came to claim you.”

“Claim me for what?”

“To give birth to the next Elquone Dynasty, my dynasty,” Toc replied as if Saris should already know this.

“I never completed the brüter training program. I can’t give birth.” And for that, Saris would be forever grateful. It wasn’t that he didn’t dream of having children now that he had found Trajan. He just didn’t want to have children with Toc Jerell.

“So innocent, so naive,” Toc drawled. “So very wrong.”

Icy fear twisted around Saris. “What do you mean?”

Toc’s hand moved out to caress the side of Saris’s face. Saris quickly jerked away, not wanting Toc to touch him. A moment later, he felt a sharp pain in his face as Toc backhanded him.

“Don’t ever pull away from me,” Toc shouted, anger making his face red and muddled. “You belong to me. You’ve always belonged to me, you and your brother.”

“Karis?” Saris whispered in shock. “What does Karis have to do with this?”

“You both entered the Brüter Caste at the same time. You were both meant to be mine, but Karis became too emotional, too high strung. Even after he gave birth to my son he resisted the things I wanted from him.”

“You?” Saris whispered in horror. “You held Karis’s contract? You sent him home?”

“I had to,” Toc insisted. “He kept asking about the child, always the child. He didn’t understand that the boy needed special training, an environment meant to educate him for his future as the next High Ruler of Elquone.”

“What?”

Toc smirked. “Didn’t I mention that? How rude of me.” Toc began slowly pacing around the cavern. “The beauty and intelligence of your genetic makeup, of Karis’s genetic makeup, make both of you ideal candidates to unite with mine. Together, we will create the next ruler of Elquone. He will be a god!”

“I can’t give birth!” Saris shouted. “I’m not a brüter.”

Saris felt the earth beneath him shift and start to fall away when Toc grinned over at him. “Oh, but you can, my dear, you can.”

“I never finished the program,” Saris insisted.

“No, you didn’t, but even if you had it wouldn’t have mattered. I chose you to be my brüter because you were born with the ability to be a breeder. All brüters are. That’s why they are chosen as brüters.”

Toc laughed. It sounded sinister and twisted and chilled Saris to the very bone. “You don’t think you’re chosen because you’re pretty to look at, do you? While that is a plus in your case, I chose you to be a brüter because you can breed. You were born that way.”

“But I thought we underwent some sort of genetic manipulation that turned us into breeders.”

Toc shook his head. “No, that’s just the story that they feed you so that you won’t fight your training. Like I said, you were born a breeder.”

“*Trajan*,” Saris cried out silently as Toc’s words began to make sense to him. If what Toc said was true, then Saris could even now be carrying Trajan’s child. Brütters only needed to eat meat to be fertile, and Saris had eaten rabbit for dinner right before they had made love.

“*I know, Sari,*” Trajan whispered back. “*While I am overjoyed with the prospect, right now we need to concentrate on freeing ourselves from this mad man. We will explore the possibility of a child once this is over.*”

“*But how do we get away from him? He’s crazy.*”

“*I’m working on it.*” Trajan chuckled silently.

“*Work faster, damn it,*” Saris demanded.

“*Yes, my own.*”

Assured that Trajan had a plan to free them, Saris returned his attention to the man pacing in front of him. Toc looked a little too confident for Saris’s liking, as if he knew something Saris didn’t.

“Why are you doing this?” Saris asked. “Elquone already has a High Ruler.”

Toc shook his head. “Not for very much longer. I’ve been slowly feeding him whistle weed over the last five years. Yes, it’s time consuming and a slow way to die, but just a little amount can drive a man crazy.”

“You’re poisoning him with whistle weed? Why?”

“A ruler that is removed from his position because he is crazy is much better than one that is assassinated. By poisoning him slowly, I am also assured that he will die soon after being removed from his throne, thereby, not causing issue when I take over.”

Saris couldn’t fault Toc’s logic. It did make sense. No one would look into the death of a ruler removed from his throne because he was

crazy. If he was assassinated, however, there would be a huge investigation.

“What makes you think that you will be chosen as his successor?”

“I’ve already made arrangements for that. It seems that the High Ruler has a certain taste for bedroom games. I made myself available to play those games with him, thus, earning his everlasting love and esteem.” Toc gave a little shrug. “Once the drugs had entered his system, he looked to his lover, me, for guidance. It was easy to convince him to make me his heir.”

It seemed that Toc had thought of everything.

“And what about me?” Trajan asked from behind Saris. “What do you plan on doing with me because you know I will never let you take Saris.”

“You?” Toc laughed. “Why, you were killed in a horrible accident while using your escape pod.” He waved his hand in a dismissive gesture. “Oh, it will all be very tragic. My sensors picked up a distress beacon. When I came to investigate, I found poor Saris alive, beside himself because his big strong protector got killed in the landing. I may even let him attend your funeral.”

Saris growled, taking a threatening step toward Toc. No one threatened his mate. He took another step toward Toc, intent on attacking him and hopefully getting the phase pistol away from him, when strong arms suddenly pushed him to the side.

As he fell to the ground, Saris saw Trajan leap at Toc, taking him unaware. The men began to grapple for the upper hand. Saris wanted to help, but the two men standing by the door rushed in, and he knew he needed to stop them.

Grabbing two handfuls of sand from the floor, Saris jumped to his feet and leapt toward them, tossing sand at their faces. He knew he had distracted them for a mere moment. That’s all he needed.

Bending low, Saris dove for the knees of the closest man, knocking him to the ground. He heard the man grunt, then go still.

Saris glanced up to see blood welling on his forehead and dripping down his face.

One down, one to go. Saris glanced over his shoulder to the other man, his heart sinking when he found himself looking down the barrel of a phase pistol. The man gestured with the pistol for Saris to get to his feet.

His hands held out to his sides, Saris slowly climbed to his feet. A glance beyond the man's shoulder drove the breath from Saris's lungs. Toc, an almost exact match to Trajan in height and weight, had his arm around Trajan's throat. He slowly choked the life from him.

Saris's eyes met Trajan's for just a moment, but the whole world passed between them in that time. Saris could read Trajan's love for him, his sorrow that he wouldn't be there to see the birth of their child, even his regret that he wasn't able to protect Saris.

Saris shook his head in a silent gasp. His anger became a scalding fury. He didn't care if he died. He didn't care that he might never see Trajan again. He didn't care that emotions overwhelmed him. He didn't care about anything but saving Trajan.

"No!" He shouted as he dove at the man holding him at gun point. Saris felt a searing pain in his shoulder, but thoughts of Trajan spurred him on. He clawed at the man's face. He used his teeth to rip into soft flesh. He pounded on the man's body with his hands.

Saris's rage was ferocious, blinding him to anything but the need to get to Trajan. He didn't realize that the man he had attacked lay dead and bleeding on the floor until a low groan across from him soaked through his fury.

Saris looked up at the two men standing a few feet away from him. Toc had a look on his face of utter horror. Trajan looked proud and just a little worried. Saris could understand why. Toc stood behind Trajan, an arm held tightly around his throat. His other hand held the phase pistol pointed at Trajan's temple.

Saris took a step closer. Toc jerked the pistol in his hand, jabbing it closer to Trajan's temple.

“Not another step,” he ordered.

“Hurt my mate and I will kill you,” Saris growled.

“Your mate?” Toc asked in astonishment. “Your mate? You mated this Katzman?”

“I did.”

Toc suddenly began to laugh. Confusion filled Saris until he spoke. “I may have a better use for you than I thought,” Toc said as he looked down at Trajan. “I’m sure you’ll be very helpful in keeping Saris in line.”

“You let him go and I’ll do anything you want.”

“*Sari!*” Trajan yelled through their bond. Saris gave him a regretful look.

“*I’m sorry, love, but I can’t let you be harmed,*” Saris replied. He looked back up at Toc. “Will you let him go?” he asked out loud. “I swear I’ll do whatever you want.”

Toc watched him for several long tense moments then shook his head. “No, I don’t think so. If I let him go, then you have no reason to follow through on your words. No, I think we’ll keep him. Maybe we’ll send him to the Vergnügen Caste and then we can both enjoy him.”

The very thought of Trajan being some mindless pleasure slave sent waves of horror and disgust spiraling through him. Sent to the Vergnügen Caste, everything that Trajan was, everything that he knew, would be gone. He wouldn’t be Trajan anymore.

Saris tensed his body, ready to attack Toc and free his mate, when Toc suddenly got a strange look on his face. Saris watched in shock as Toc crumbled to the floor, the phase pistol falling from his limp fingers.

Trajan fell to the floor beside him, the stunned look on his face matching Saris’s. He pushed himself up to a sitting position, both he and Saris looking to the young man that stood there, a large rock in his hand.

“Got anything to eat?” the young man said as if he had not just knocked a man out with a rock. “I’m starved.”

* * * *

Saris sat on the floor next to Trajan as he doctored his injuries. There weren’t many, a few scratches and abrasions, nothing life threatening, but he’d be hurting for a few days. Still, Saris wished he had access to his own medical supplies.

The young man that had saved them both, Anjali, sat across from them eating the cream colored goo from the emergency rations like it was food fit for a king.

Saris would be forever grateful to Anjali for his timely rescue. He had saved both him and Trajan. Toc and the second man now sat against the far wall of the cavern, tied up, and ready to be transported.

“You know we’re going to have to talk about this, Sari,” Trajan said.

Saris nodded. “I know, but I’m not ready to talk yet. I just need a while longer to process all that happened, all that we learned. Then we’ll talk.”

“You know I love you, right?”

Saris nodded again, this time giving Trajan a smile. “I know, Trajan. I love you, too.”

Trajan’s hand covered Saris’s abdomen. “I won’t be upset if you do have our child.”

Saris placed his hand over Trajan’s. “I think a little warrior just like his father would be a wonderful thing, a little boy with your strength and—”

“And your courage?”

Saris chuckled. “That wasn’t courage, Trajan. That was abject terror.”

“Don’t fool yourself, Sari.” Trajan chuckled. He wrapped his arms around Saris and pulled him down to rest at his side. “That was

courage, and I am very proud of you. A little in awe, but proud nonetheless.”

Saris’s breath hitched in his throat when he felt Trajan’s hand caress his hip. A small yelp escaped his mouth when Trajan smacked him on the ass. “Still, I may have to punish you for being so reckless with my heart.”

“Trajan,” Saris groaned. He leaned up to kiss his mate when a chuckle sounded behind him. Knowing that Anjali sat across the fire from them, Saris turned to face whatever new adversary stood behind them.

“Only you, Trajan, could kidnap someone, escape undetected, get shot down, and still come out of it with a mate.”

Chapter 10

“Okay, Demyan, just one more small push,” Saris directed as he stood over the small Elquone, assisting in the birth of his child. “That’s it, that’s it. Oh, here he comes.”

Saris gently grasped the small shoulders pushing through the natural birthing slit in Demyan’s abdomen. He cradled the infant’s head in his hand as he guided him out. Suddenly, the baby slid free, and Saris held a wet, squalling infant in his hands.

“Oh, he is a beautiful little boy, Demyan,” Saris said as he placed the small infant farther up on Demyan’s chest. He carefully cleaned the infant’s mouth of mucus, ensuring his clear airway.

As Chellak repeatedly kissed Demyan’s face, murmuring soothing words of praise to his mate, the infant let out one lone cry, then stuck his fist in his mouth, fading back to sleep. Chellak quickly looked up at Saris in panic.

“Demyan wants to know if he’s okay. He’s not making any more noises. Shouldn’t he be crying or something?”

“No,” Saris replied, “that’s an old wives’ tale. He’s just sleeping. It takes a lot of energy for a little baby to be born, both from the baby and the one giving birth.” Saris nodded his head to where Demyan lay, his eyes closed.

The more Saris watched, however, the more concerned he grew. Demyan didn’t look like he slept. He looked to be in pain. Saris quickly cut the umbilical cord and lifted the baby. He wrapped him in a small blanket and handed him to Chellak before turning back to Demyan.

“What’s wrong?” Chellak shouted. “Why is Demyan still in pain?”

Saris shook his head. “I don’t know.” Saris quickly checked Demyan’s heart rate. It beat way to fast. Further examination of Demyan had Saris grinning. Chellak looked at him like he had lost his mind.

“What?” Chellak shouted.

Saris reached into the small birthing opening in Demyan’s abdomen and guided another infant out of his womb. He heard a small gasp from Chellak as he laid the infant on Demyan’s chest. He quickly cleared the baby’s airway and cut the umbilical cord.

Wrapping the infant in another small blanket, he held the child out to the High Ruler. “Chellak Rai, I’d like to introduce you to your daughter.”

“Twins?” Chellak whispered as he took the small bundle in his other arm. He looked stunned.

“Apparently so,” Saris replied, a wide grin on his face. “It seems your little mate is full of surprises.”

Chellak laughed quietly. “He always has been.”

Saris leaned down over Demyan and assured himself that no more surprise babies would pop out. Once he knew all the babies had made their appearances, he covered the small birthing incision with mucca cream.

Saris had discovered mucca cream quite by accident and now used it in all of the births he assisted in. Mucca cream would encourage the healing and closing of the birthing incision. Once the incision healed, there would be no sign of it until the next child came along.

One last check of Demyan found him sleeping peacefully. Saris knew he had to be exhausted. It took a lot of work to give birth to one child, let alone two. Demyan should sleep for the next few hours. Chellak seemed to be quite content to sit in a chair next to Demyan holding his twin children in his arms.

Saris patted Chellak on the shoulder. "I'm going to step outside for a little while and get cleaned up. I'll be right outside if you need me."

Chellak didn't even look up from the faces of his children as he nodded his head. "Thank you, Saris, for everything."

"That's what I'm here for, Chellak. Now get some rest." Saris stepped out of the room and quietly closed the door behind him. He leaned back against it, taking a deep breath, then chuckling to himself. Giving birth was hard on the doctor as well.

"How's Demyan?"

Saris glanced over to find Anjali standing by the window watching him. The young man intrigued him. Not because he looked drop dead gorgeous, and he did, but because he had an unusual personality.

Ever since Anjali hit Toc Jerell over the head, Saris tried to thank the young man. Anjali wouldn't hear of it. He insisted that he was just helping out, that he hadn't done anything that anyone else wouldn't have done.

"He's fine, sleeping right now." Saris grinned. "Chellak is currently being dazzled by his son and his daughter."

"Twins?" Anjali asked, surprised.

Saris nodded. "I can only assume the little girl hid behind her brother because I didn't see her. She's healthy, though, and a good weight even if she is a little small. I suspect she will take after Demyan in size. The boy, however, is definitely Chellak Rai's son. He's huge."

Anjali giggled, another thing that intrigued Saris. Anjali giggled, he didn't chuckle or laugh, he giggled. His mannerisms were often feminine as well. With his blond hair, unbelievably long eyelashes, and his delicate features, Saris wouldn't have even known he was a man if he hadn't seen him naked.

"Where's your shadow?" Saris asked, referring to Bogden Wuher, one of Chellak's warriors. Since the moment he had arrived with

Chellak to rescue them and took a single look at Anjali, Saris had yet to see Bogden leave his side.

Anjali rolled his eyes. "I sent him to get me something to eat. I swear that man won't let me breathe on my own."

Saris chuckled. "He likes you."

Anjali's face flushed as silence filled the room for a moment. "I like him, too. I just wish he'd give me a little space."

"Be careful what you wish for, Anjali, you just might get it."

Saris turned to see Yerik standing in the doorway. His mate, Ciprian, Chellak Rai's brother and right hand, stood beside him, an arm thrown around Yerik's shoulders.

"And that cryptic response would mean what?" Anjali asked.

"Chellak once wished Demyan would give him space, leave him alone. So Demyan left. Chellak almost lost him. If it wasn't due to their mating bond and Demyan feeling Chellak's pain, he might never have come back. You don't have that bond with Bogden. You won't feel his pain."

Anjali stayed quiet. After a moment, he nodded and turned back to the window. Saris glanced over at Yerik, an eyebrow raised in query. Yerik just shrugged.

"So, how are my niece and nephew?" Yerik asked as he walked over to stand next to Saris.

"You knew?"

"I had an idea," Yerik said. "Nothing I could put my finger on exactly, but you have to admit, he looked huge."

Saris nodded. "He had reason to be."

"Don't laugh, Saris, you'll be just as big," Yerik chuckled.

"I'll be just as bi—" Saris stuttered. "What are you saying?"

Yerik laid his hand over Saris's abdomen. He rubbed his hand in a small circle then grinned. "Twins tend to do that to you."

"Twins!" exclaimed a voice from the doorway. Saris looked up to see Trajan standing in the doorway where Ciprian and Yerik had stood moments before. His mouth hung open in stunned amazement.

Saris hesitated, apprehensive of Trajan's response. They had discussed the possibility of having children but at a later date, much later. Seemed they didn't have the choice now. Their baby, or babies, were on the way.

Saris had eaten nothing but fruit and vegetables since their rescue, just to be safe. Eating meat made him fertile. Considering that they had made love right after Saris ate the rabbit Trajan had caught, Saris now knew that he had been fertile then, and Trajan's seed had taken root.

"You do like to do things in a big way, don't you?" Trajan drawled as he walked across the room. He wrapped his arms around Saris. "Guess that rigid control you have on your emotions is going right out the window then."

"You don't mind?" Saris said mentally as he buried his head between Trajan's neck and shoulder. *"I suspect that my emotions are going to be totally out of control. I haven't figured out how to deal with them now and I haven't even hit the pregnancy mood swings yet."*

"We'll deal with it as it comes, my own," Trajan replied. *"As long as you and our children are safe, there isn't anything we can't deal with."*

"Thank you, Trajan, for everything."

"That reminds me," Trajan said as he wrapped one arm around Saris's shoulders and pointed the other one toward the doorway. "I have a little surprise for you."

Saris looked to the doorway and let out a cry. He ran across the room and threw himself into the arms of the blond-haired man standing there. "Karis!"

"Hey, brother," Karis replied. "I see Trajan wasn't lying to me when he told me that he had made it his mission in life to make you happy." His hand stroked the hair on the back of Saris's head. "I'm glad for you, Saris."

Saris pushed himself back from Karis, looking him up and down. “How did you get here?” His eyebrows drew together in a frown. “What are you doing here? I thought you were back on Elquone with our parents.”

“I was,” Karis replied. He looked past Saris to Trajan who stood across the room with a grin on his face. “But it seems your mate over there decided that you needed here. He kidnapped me.”

Saris laughed, turning toward Trajan. “He does that a lot.” Saris dropped his arms from around Karis and crossed over to Trajan to wrap them around his waist. “He does a lot of things that he really shouldn’t, but each one of them makes me happy.”

“Then this should make you ecstatic,” Karis said. He stepped to one side and gestured to someone right outside the door. “When he came for me, Trajan told me that he had something he wanted to return to me, something that I had lost.”

Saris’s mouth dropped open as a small boy stepped into the room and reached for Karis’s hand. Karis had the world’s widest grin on his face, tears in his eyes. “Saris, I’d like you to meet Torin, my son and your nephew.”

Saris felt tears well up in his eyes. He couldn’t remember being so overwhelmed with emotion, not even when he fought off Toc Jerell and his goons. The joy and happiness inside of him threatened to spill over and flood him.

Saris turned to Trajan, his mate, his safety from the world, and buried his face in his neck. He knew Trajan could feel his hot tears slipping down his neck. Trajan didn’t say anything. He just tightened his arms around Saris and let him cry.

“I know I’ve said this before, Trajan, but thank you. You’ve given me so much and I have given you so little. Why do you put up with me?” Saris whispered.

“You give me everything, Sari. Without you, remember, I am only half of what I could be. Half my soul, half my heart, half of

everything that I am,” Trajan replied out loud for everyone to hear. “I don’t put up with you, my own, I need you. You’re my dream mate.”

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stormy believes the only thing sexier than a man in cowboy boots is two, or three men in cowboy boots. She also believes in love at first sight, soul mates, true love, and happy endings.

Stormy lives in the great Northwest region of the USA, with her gorgeous husband and soul mate, six very active teenagers, two boxer/collie puppies, two old biddy cats, and three fish.

When she's not being a mother to her six teenagers or cleaning up after her two 70 pound lap puppies, you can usually find her cuddled in bed with a book in her hand and a puppy in her lap, or on her laptop, creating the next sexy man for one of her stories. Stormy welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website at www.stormyglenn.com.

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