



## Cindra & the Bounty Hunter

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Beautiful Cindra Mallory is determined to become an interplanetary bounty hunter and has set her sights high for her first job. She tracks a major organized-crime figure halfway across the galaxy, only to run out of both leads and money. Facing the possibility of going home empty-handed, she decides to enlist the services of more-experienced bounty hunter Bladen Sloan. Unwilling to share the glory – or the bounty – with the ruggedly handsome Bladen, however, Cindra fabricates a convoluted story that has her posing as a jilted bride-to-be, with her bounty as the fiancé she needs Bladen to track down. But when Bladen discovers she has no money to pay him, he agrees to do the job only in return for some extremely special compensation.

Before she knows it, Cindra finds herself signing a contract that has her agreeing to provide ten sexual favors to Bladen in return for his services. How difficult can it be? she thinks. After all, the man certainly isn't hard to look at. And besides, she can always skip out on the deal the moment they find her fugitive. However, things get complicated when she discovers that she not only enjoys being Bladen's sex toy, but is starting to fall for him as well. But is there a way to tell Bladen the truth, get her bounty, and still keep the man she's falling in love with?

### Chapter One

Cindra Mallory stared down at the salad she had ordered and miserably pushed the greens around on the plate, not really hungry anymore. She had already spent almost every credit she had trying to track down her quarry, a big-time fugitive named Marek DelCour. The money hadn't been wasted really. She had been hot on his trail for weeks, following each and every lead from one planet to the next. But then he had come to Pendari, and there, the trail had gone cold. She had no doubt DelCour was still on the planet, but unfortunately for her, he was both rich and well-connected, which gave him unlimited resources. She, on the other hand, was flat-broke and didn't know a soul on this planet, which meant she had come to a dead end. And if she stayed on Pendari much longer, she wouldn't even have enough credits to afford a transport ticket home.

The job hadn't gone at all how she had expected. Of course, her father would probably say it was just another example of why she shouldn't be in this line of work. But she had wanted to be a bounty hunter for as long as she could remember. Growing up listening to stories her father had told about his own adventures had naturally made her want to follow in his footsteps. She had thought her father would be proud that she wanted to be a bounty hunter like him. She had fully expected him to be thrilled to be able to teach her everything he knew. After all, he had the reputation as being one of the best in the business. But unfortunately, her father was also the most stubborn, male-chauvinistic bounty hunter in the galaxy, too. When she had told him that she wanted to be a bounty hunter, Kellen Mallory had actually laughed in her face.

"Bounty hunting is a man's job," he'd told her firmly. "No daughter of mine will ever be caught chasing down some common, runaway criminal!"

That was crap, of course, and she'd told him so. There were a lot of female bounty hunters out there. Her father was just too firmly entrenched in his old-fashioned ways to ever want his daughter to be one of them. Well, she

had a stubborn streak too, and when her father had refused to teach her, she had decided to go out and prove to him she could do it on her own.

Cindra had worked with another female bounty hunter for a time, bringing in a handful of small-time criminals, but her father had been less than impressed. That's when she had decided to go after bigger game, someone as big as Marek DelCour. Not only did the fugitive come with a huge bounty on his head, but his capture would give her the recognition and respect that would finally get her father's attention.

She wouldn't get either of those things however, if she couldn't pick up DelCour's trail again. Cindra sighed and regarded her salad once more. She really should eat, she told herself, because with the few credits she had left, it might be awhile before she could afford another meal.

Spearing a bright red tomato and a piece of Anovian sweet lettuce with her fork, Cindra let her gaze wander over the restaurant as she ate. She had chosen the restaurant mainly because the menu posted on the holo-screen outside hadn't been too pricey, but she was pleased to discover that the food was actually pretty good. The décor was nice too, she thought, taking in the illuminated hover-bar in the center of the room. If she was going to travel the galaxy while being a bounty hunter, she might as well enjoy the scenery.

She had just turned her attention back to her salad when she heard the bartender call out across the room.

"I got a call for you, Sloan!" he shouted, holding up a thin communicator. "Why don't you tell people to stop calling here, Bladen?"

Cindra jerked her head up at the name, recognizing it immediately. She remembered her father mentioning the man several times. According to him, Bladen Sloan was one of the best bounty hunters in the galaxy. She could hardly believe her luck! What were the chances of running into another bounty hunter – and a good one at that – just when she needed some help? But this was his home planet, she remembered, which meant he probably had an office somewhere near here. That would explain why he got calls at the restaurant so often.

Her pulse racing, she leaned forward in her chair, making sure she had a clear view of the bar so she could see Bladen Sloan when he approached it. However, she was surprised when she saw the man that made his way across the room to the hover-bar. Because of his reputation, Cindra had naturally expected Sloan to be near her father's age, complete with graying hair and a slightly thickening middle, but the bounty hunter was neither gray-haired nor out of shape. On the contrary, he was somewhere in his mid-thirties and very well-built. Not to mention incredibly hot looking.

Dressed in brown leather breeches, a tan-colored shirt, supple-looking leather boots, and wearing a pistol at his hip, Bladen Sloan made quite an impressive figure indeed, and Cindra noticed that hers were not the only pair of female eyes following him to the bar. Tall with broad shoulders, dark hair, and chiseled features, he was what she liked to call ruggedly handsome. Even the slight trace of beard, as if he hadn't bothered to shave for a day or two, was incredibly sexy. If she had seen him in a club back home, she would have hit on him without a second thought.

As she watched him take the communicator and hold it to his ear, her first thought was that she should go over to the bar and introduce herself as a fellow bounty hunter. She could explain her situation, she decided, tell him what she had already learned about DelCour, and then ask for his help in locating the man.

But then she frowned as she thought about what her father would have to say about that. She could hear him now. See, I told you that you couldn't do the job, he'd say in his best I-told-you-so voice. You had to go and ask for a man's help the first time you ran into trouble!

Suddenly, another thought occurred to her. She didn't know Bladen Sloan at all. What was to say he wouldn't take what she'd already learned about DelCour and use it to collect the bounty himself? Yes, there was a code of

sorts among bounty hunters, a part of it being that one hunter didn't poach another's bounty. But there was nothing to say Sloan lived by that code. It would be foolish to trust him, she thought.

Cindra mulled over the situation as she finished eating. Technically, her father couldn't criticize her for enlisting another bounty hunter's help if that bounty hunter had been tricked into giving it, she reasoned. Her father always said a bounty hunter had to be clever and even deceitful if the situation warranted it. And this situation, she decided, certainly warranted it.

So, how could she trick Sloan into helping her without him finding out who DelCour really was? Cindra sat back in her chair and chewed on her lower lip as she considered that. Abruptly, she remembered another one of her father's favorite sayings - a good bounty hunter knows how to improvise, girl. Almost immediately, a plan started to take shape in her mind. She could pose as DelCour's girlfriend or wife, she thought, tell Sloan that DelCour had left her and that she wanted to hire him to find the creep. She could take advantage of Bladen Sloan's knowledge of Pendari, get him to lead her to DelCour, and then give him the slip and bring in DelCour before he'd even realized what she'd done. That way, there was no way he could possibly poach on her bounty.

As inspired as the idea was, though, Cindra felt a twinge of guilt. She wasn't a dishonest person by nature and she didn't like the thought of deceiving the other bounty hunter. But then her father's voice intruded yet again. You can't be soft and be a bounty hunter, girl.

Firming her resolve, Cindra told herself she had no choice. If she didn't get Bladen Sloan's help, then she might as well forget all about capturing DelCour and just go back home with her tail between her legs. Her father would never let her live it down.

Across the room, Bladen Sloan grinned as he spoke into the communicator, showing a flash of white teeth, and Cindra's pulse skipped a beat. God, he was gorgeous, she thought. It was going to be hard to look him in the eye and lie to him. This whole deceitful scheme would be a whole lot easier if he were ugly!

Now that she had decided to go through with it, Cindra realized her biggest problem would be convincing Sloan to actually take the job. Asking him to find a missing boyfriend wasn't normally the kind of work a bounty hunter did. After all, there wasn't a bounty to collect, and she had absolutely no money to pay him up front. With a reputation like his, she doubted Sloan would come cheap, either. Maybe she could talk him into thinking she would pay him at the end of the job. Bounty hunters were used to getting paid after they'd completed a job anyway, so he might go for it. Heck, with all the money she'd make for bringing in DelCour, she might actually come back and really pay him.

Cindra sipped her sweetberry tea as she started working through the details of what she would have to do to actually pull off her plan. First impressions would make or break this whole scheme, she told herself. Which meant she couldn't walk into Bladen Sloan's office wearing her shirt, breeches, and a pistol at her hip. She was going to have to buy some new clothes, she thought. Of course, it would probably take the rest of her credits, but if she was going to play the damsel in distress, then she was going to have to look sexy enough to turn the handsome bounty hunter's head.

Cindra found a small boutique down the street from the restaurant. Judging by the clothing for sale, the women on Pendari obviously didn't have any hang-ups about showing off their bodies, and the outfit she bought was no exception. The sleeveless top with its plunging neckline fitted to her slim figure like a second skin, and the skimpy skirt with its side slits showed off her long legs almost all the way to her hips. A pair of strappy sandals and dangling earrings completed the look, and though her credit chip was considerably lighter than it had been when she'd walked in, the money would definitely be well spent if her plan succeeded.

She found a listing for Bladen Sloan's office at one of the computerized information kiosks located on each street corner. As she made her way there, she hoped he hadn't already left work for the day. But when she reached the

building in which his office was located, she was relieved to see the glow of a light coming from inside. Trying the door, she found it unlocked, and she quickly went inside before she could change her mind.

Though her job required the occasional untruth, she couldn't help but wonder if she could pull off a lie of this proportion. Being a bounty hunter himself, Bladen was probably quite good at recognizing a lie when he heard one, she thought, which meant she would have to be extremely careful.

Pausing inside the door, Cindra took a minute to look around the office. Being new to the business, she didn't have an office of her own, but she had been in others, and none of them were as nice as this one, not even her father's. Bladen Sloan must do quite well for himself, she thought.

There was a reception desk in the outer room, but no one was there, so Cindra made her way across the richly carpeted floor to the largest office, which she assumed was the bounty hunter's.

Bladen Sloan was sitting at his desk, intent on whatever was on his computer screen. He must not have realized she was there because he didn't look up right away, and she took the opportunity to study him. Up close, she saw he was even more handsome, and she felt her breath hitch when he finally lifted his head to look at her. In the restaurant, she had thought his eyes were dark brown, but now she saw that they were the most unusual golden color. Like the finest Bellorian amber whiskey, she thought.

He regarded her in silence, and she saw his gaze travel up and down the length of her body, taking in her tall, slender form, long dark hair, and short skirt. His eyes lingered for the longest time on her shapely legs before returning to her face. So, he's a leg-man, Cindra thought. She could use that to your advantage.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

Her lips curving into a smile, Cindra walked across the room to stand before the desk, careful to make sure a lot of leg showed through the slit in her skirt as she did. "I was looking for Bladen Sloan."

He returned her smile with one of his own that was so sexy that it made her heart flutter. "Well, you found him," he drawled, sitting back in his chair. "What can I do for you?"

Damn, he had the sexiest smile she'd ever seen. And up close, his looks were downright devastating. If a bounty hunter like him ever came looking for her, he wouldn't even have to bother putting her in handcuffs because she'd go along with him quite willingly. Then again, the cuffs might be fun too, she thought wickedly. Abruptly, she realized he was waiting for her to continue, and she forced herself to focus.

"My fiancé ran out on me before our wedding and I'd like to hire you to find him," she said simply.

He lifted a brow. "I'd like to help you, but I think you might have come to the wrong place. I'm a bounty hunter, not a private investigator, Ms..."

"Mallory," she supplied. "Cindra Mallory."

Crap, she thought as soon as the words slipped out. She couldn't believe she hadn't thought to come up with a fake name. But he was just so damn good looking that he had her tripping all over herself. Well, at least her name was totally unknown in the bounty hunter world. It wasn't like he would recognize it.

"Ms. Mallory," he repeated. "I track down missing fugitives, not cheating husbands. Or fiancés with cold feet. But I can recommend a private investigator that's very good, a friend of mine, as a matter of fact."

Cindra had been afraid he would say that. While she didn't want to come on too strong, too fast, she didn't want Sloan to dismiss her, either. She had to do something to get him to focus more on her and less on what she was asking him to do. Sitting down in one of the chairs in front of his desk, she crossed her legs so that her short skirt

slid up her thighs. As she'd hoped, the bounty hunter's gaze immediately went to the generous portion of leg she'd revealed.

She gave him a moment to get a good look before drawing his attention back to what she was saying. "But I've already hired dozens of private investigators, Mr. Sloan, and none of them have come up with anything," she said miserably. "They're good at spending my money, that's all. I need someone who's good at finding a person who doesn't want to be found. I've heard you're the best at that, and I just thought..." She dropped her gaze to stare down at the hands she had clasped in her lap.

He let out a sigh, and through her lowered lashes, she could see him fighting to keep his gaze focused on her face instead of her legs. "Ms. Mallory..." he began, but then stopped.

Sloan was still going to refuse her, Cindra thought incredulously. Why wasn't this working? She was attractive, so why wasn't he falling all over himself to help her? Maybe she wasn't as good at this seduction thing as she'd thought she was. Deciding she just needed to show off her assets a little better, she leaned forward in her chair to give him a better view of her cleavage. Though not ample, the push-up bra she wore made her modest breasts seem fuller than they actually were. As if drawn by a magnet, Bladen Sloan's gaze dropped to her breasts.

"Mr. Sloan, please just hear me out before you decide not to take the case," she entreated softly. "I need your help so badly."

He said nothing for a moment, and she could only hope that he was considering her words. Finally, he nodded. "Okay," he agreed. "Let me hear the details, Ms. Mallory, and I'll see if it's something I can help you with."

Cindra sighed, genuinely relieved he had agreed to listen to her. She had him exactly where she wanted him now. A few more come-hither looks and flashes of skin, she thought to herself, and she might actually have him going along with anything she proposed.

"His name is Yale Bron'ti," she said, giving him the alias DelCour had been using when she'd tracked him to Pendari. "A week before the wedding, he cleaned out my bank account and stole a collection of valuable family heirlooms. Then he just up and ran off on me. The last private investigator I hired tracked him to Pendari, but then he lost my fiancé's trail right after getting here. When I asked him to keep looking for Yale, he suggested I find someone local instead, someone who knew the area better than he did. I tried to hire other investigators, but none of them could discover where he might be hiding. Though I'm not sure how hard they really looked. When I asked around about someone who might be able to find Yale for me, everyone I talked to recommended you."

Bladen Sloan's mouth quirked. "I'm flattered at the reputation I apparently have, Ms. Mallory, but as I said before, I'm not in the business of tracking down wayward boyfriends..."

"But Yale's more than a wayward boyfriend, Mr. Sloan," she protested. "He's a liar and a thief, and if you don't help me, then I'm afraid I'll never get back what he took from me. I'm interested in the money of course, but I'm even more interested in the family heirlooms he took. They've been in my family for generations and they were entrusted to me for safekeeping. I have to get them back."

Cindra was surprised by how easily the lies were coming to her lips. But since she was on a roll, she didn't take time to think about it. Instead, she gave the bounty hunter a pleading look. "Please say you'll help me, Mr. Sloan. Please."

He was silent for so long that Cindra was afraid he was going to still refuse, but then he finally nodded his head. "All right, Ms. Mallory," he said. "I'll see what I can do."

She smiled and breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank you."

"I don't usually take any bounty work for less than ten-thousand credits," he continued. "And most bondsmen front me fifty percent of that to secure my services. I think a fee like that would be reasonable in this case."

Cindra stared at him, speechless for a moment. Ten-thousand credits? She'd thought he might ask for money, but she never even considered he would ask for that much. Or that he would ask for so much of it up front, either. Of course, five-thousand credits was a pittance compared to the bounty she would get for bringing in DelCour, but it was more than she could lay her hands on right now.

Sitting back in the chair, she shifted her legs, careful to adjust her short skirt so that the slit opened to reveal even more thigh this time. She was quite sure he could probably see almost up to her panties, and only hoped that would be enough. "I can't possibly give you that much up front, Mr. Sloan," she said. "But once we find Yale and get back the money he stole from me, I'll pay you in full then. Would that be all right?"

He regarded her silently for a moment. "I'm afraid I can't take a job like this just on the chance of getting paid at the completion of it. It's one of the reasons I don't usually do work like this. If you want to hire me, I'm going to need a deposit of some type up front, Ms. Mallory."

This was where it got tricky, Cindra thought. "I understand," she said softly. "But couldn't you make an exception, just this once? I'd be extremely grateful to you."

He gave her a rueful smile. "I'd like to help you, Ms. Mallory, but I have certain responsibilities, and I can't meet them if I'm not getting paid. I'm afraid the deposit is non-negotiable. I hope you understand."

Cindra chewed on her lower lip. What was she going to do now? she wondered. She really needed Sloan's help. But he wanted money, and she didn't have any. So, what else could she offer him?

Her body.

The answer didn't shock her as much as it should have. She certainly wasn't a prude by any means. And her father had constantly said that a bounty hunter did whatever it took to get the job done. Besides, just because she made the offer, it didn't mean she would have to go through with it. If she played her cards right, she could lead Sloan on until she got what she wanted out of him.

Wetting her lips, she looked at the bounty hunter from beneath lowered lashes. "Perhaps we could work something else out then," she suggested in a husky voice, hoping he would pick up on the innuendo.

He regarded her in silence for a moment, and then lifted a questioning brow. "Exactly what are you suggesting?"

Cindra chose her words carefully. "I could offer you the pleasure of my company," she said softly.

She had deliberately kept the offer vague, thinking it would be easier to string Sloan along that way. If she didn't commit to anything, then he couldn't trip her up later. It wasn't much different than batting her eyelashes at a guy in a club so that he'd buy her a drink, she thought.

"I'm not sure I understand," he said slowly. "What exactly do you mean by the pleasure of your company, Ms. Mallory? Are you saying that you'll sleep with me if I help you?"

Bladen Sloan was obviously too shrewd to let her get off with a vague commitment, she realized. She shouldn't have expected any less, really. He was calling her bluff. Now, the question was, what was she going to do about it?

As she considered the answer to that, Cindra took a moment to study the bounty hunter. She had already admitted to herself that she found him attractive. More than attractive, actually. If things had been different and Sloan was just a guy she had just run into back at that restaurant, she would have definitely slept with him if the opportunity

had presented itself, she thought as she let her gaze run over his broad shoulders and muscular chest, she knew the answer was yes. And if she would have slept with him then, what was so wrong with doing it now?

Realizing that the bounty hunter was still waiting for an answer, Cindra lifted her gaze to look him squarely in the eye as she gave him her sexiest smile. “Yes, that’s exactly what I’m saying, Mr. Sloan.”

Bladen was so stunned by the words that for a moment all he could do was stare at Cindra Mallory in astonishment. Had she really just offered to sleep with him in exchange for his help? He tried to tell himself that he couldn’t have heard her right, that it was only wishful thinking on his part because she was so beautiful. But the more he thought about it, the more he realized he had heard right after all.

He supposed he should do the gentlemanly thing and tell her that no matter how attractive he found her, it would be unprofessional of him to accept such an arrangement. But with those tempting legs, pleading, blue eyes, and pouty lips he found it almost impossible to say no to her. Hell, he found it almost impossible to speak!

So, instead he sat back and allowed himself to consider exactly what the gorgeous Cindra Mallory was offering. Just the sexy way she’d said she would sleep with him had made his cock go rock hard inside his breeches. He let his gaze travel over her hungrily, imagining what her full lips would feel like beneath his as he kissed her, what her perfectly rounded breasts would feel like filling his hands as he cupped them, what her long, shapely legs would feel like wrapped around him as he thrust himself deep inside her. The image was so erotic that it almost made him groan.

Bladen swore silently and told his lust to get a grip on itself. What the hell was he thinking? He had a good reputation, one he had worked extremely hard to get. As tempting as Cindra Mallory’s offer was, if people found out about their deal, it could go a long way toward damaging that reputation. Even if he didn’t have to be concerned with that though, he would still feel wrong about sleeping with her. Considering she was the one who had suggested the arrangement, he supposed it sounded ridiculous, but accepting her offer would make him feel like he was taking advantage of her.

Bladen lifted his gaze to her face and found her regarding him expectantly. “While your offer is very tempting, Ms. Mallory, I can’t accept it.”

Her brow furrowed beneath her long, sexy bangs. “Why not?”

He gave her a small smile. “Because for one thing, it wouldn’t be very professional of me. And for another, I would feel like I was taking advantage of you.”

She blinked, obviously surprised by the words. But then her lips curved into a smile. “You wouldn’t be taking advantage of me, Mr. Sloan, I assure you. I know exactly what I’m offering you, and I’m willing to do whatever is necessary to retain your services.”

Bladen said nothing for a moment. Damn, she must want to find her ex-boyfriend bad. And since she obviously wasn’t going to let Bladen bow out of this gracefully, he was going to have to try a different approach. “Don’t take this the wrong way, Ms. Mallory. I find you very attractive, but I don’t think that a single night of sex would be a fair trade for ten-thousand credits worth of my services.”

While he’d been careful how he phrased the words, he could tell by the color rushing to her cheeks that he’d clearly offended Cindra Mallory. Then again, maybe that might be a good thing, he thought. If she was suitably insulted, maybe she’d storm out of his office in a huff and he could forget all about her very tempting offer. But instead, she simply lifted a brow.

“Then I’ll sleep with you more than once,” she said. “Is there a particular number you have in mind?”

Bladen had to fight to keep his jaw from dropping. Shit, that hadn't gone like he thought it would. Cindra Mallory was seriously willing to sleep with him in exchange for his help. And the sultry look she was giving him right now was making his cock stand up and demand to be put in charge of the negotiations.

"I'd have no idea what the going rate would be," he said. "But even if I give you the benefit of the doubt and say that a single night of lovemaking with you is worth a thousand credits, that would still mean you would owe me..."

"Ten nights of unbelievable passion," she finished for him. "Deal!"

For the second time that night, Bladen stared at her in disbelief, stunned by what she had just agreed to. His cock however, was quite thrilled. "Let me make sure I understand this," he said slowly. "In exchange for my services, you're agreeing to provide me with ten sexual favors, of my design, and at the time of my choosing?"

"Yes, Mr. Sloan, that's exactly what I'm agreeing to," she told him.

What was she thinking, agreeing to sleep with Bladen Sloan ten times in exchange for his help? Cindra wondered. But she'd been so caught up in their sexy banter, not to mention mesmerized by his hypnotizing good looks, that the words had come out of her mouth before she even knew what she was saying. Was it too late to back out of it? she asked herself. But one look at the expression on the bounty hunter's face told her that he considered it a done deal. Maybe she should tell him that she changed her mind, and then make a mad dash for the door.

But she didn't. Instead, Cindra forced herself to take a deep, cleansing breath. Why was she freaking out? What difference did it really make if she agreed to sleep with Bladen Sloan once or ten times? It wasn't like she was actually going to have sex with him anyway. She'd flirt and lead him on just like she planned, then when Sloan found DelCour for her, she would be off Pendari before she'd ever have to honor their agreement.

Behind his desk, Sloan inclined his head. "Then I'll draw up a contract and we can make it official."

Cindra frowned at that. She found it hard to believe he was actually going to put something like that into writing, but she said nothing as he dictated the terms of their agreement into the computer. Well, she could only hope he was just as thorough when it came to looking for DelCour, she thought wryly.

Once the contract was printed, the bounty hunter came around the desk and held it out for her signature. Quickly reading it, she saw that he had simply put their agreement into words. There was something about seeing it on paper that made her blush though, and her hand trembled a little as she signed it. It wasn't as if the contract would hold up in any council of law in the galaxy anyway, she told herself. At least she didn't think it would.

"So, what do we do first?" she asked, handing the signed contract back to him.

He set the contract on the desk, and then turned to give her a grin. "You."

Cindra looked up at him in confusion. "Me?"

Taking her hand, he pulled her gently to her feet. She had known the bounty hunter was tall, but now that he was standing so close, she realized just how tall he really was. The top of her head didn't even reach his chin.

"I think it would only be fair for me to get a partial payment up front, don't you?" he said softly.

Her pulse quickened as she realized what the bounty hunter meant. He wanted to have sex with her. Right then! "Here?" she asked, looking around the office.

Bladen released her hand to lightly run the tips of his fingers up and down her bare arm. The touch sent the most delicious little shivers up and down her back. "Why not?"



His nearness was making it difficult to think. Or speak, for that matter. She hadn't expected to have to make good on her side of the bargain quite this soon. "B-but anyone could walk in," she stammered. Damn, he smelled good! Not like cologne either, she thought, just pure, unadulterated masculinity.

He reached behind him to press a button on his computer. A moment later, a lilting female voice confirmed that the doors had been locked and the office was now secure. "Not anymore," he told her.

Cindra chewed on her lower lip, trying to come up with some excuse she could use to avoid having sex with him right that minute, but for some reason, nothing would come to mind. Maybe it was because she was flustered, she told herself. Then again, maybe it was because with Bladen standing so close to her, she was suddenly thinking that sex with him wasn't necessarily something to be avoided. Before she could really decide if that was a good thing or not, the question became moot as Bladen lowered his head and covered her mouth with his.

While the kiss wasn't rough, it was all-consuming and Cindra automatically kissed him back, melting against the hard wall of his chest as he wrapped his arms around her. At her show of acquiescence, Bladen deepened the kiss, his mouth moving more insistently over hers, and she parted her lips beneath his with a soft sigh of pleasure. Bladen's tongue immediately invaded her mouth to find hers and she moaned. She'd been kissed a lot, but never quite so thoroughly or so passionately before, and she was breathless from it.

Just when she thought she might not be able to take any more, Bladen lifted his head to trail kisses down the curve of her neck to the sensitive spot where it met her shoulder. His lips were warm on her skin and she couldn't stifle the soft sound of pleasure that escaped her lips. She ran her hands up the front of his shirt, tracing the hard outline of the muscles beneath as she worked her way up to his broad shoulders. She couldn't remember ever getting so turned on this quickly before, but there was no mistaking the tingling between her thighs. And all Bladen Sloan had done was kiss her so far! What was she going to do when he actually touched her?

Cindra found out a moment later when she felt his hand glide up her midriff to lovingly cup her breast through the thin material of her top. Taking her suddenly hardened nipple between his thumb and forefinger, he teased the turgid little peak until it grew even harder and Cindra heard herself gasp.

Still concentrating on her nipple, Bladen slid his other hand underneath her skirt to give her panty-covered bottom a gentle squeeze before moving around to the juncture of her thighs. She held her breath, waiting for him to slip his fingers into the skimpy panties, but instead he began to slowly caress her pussy through the silky layer of material. She moaned again and clutched his shoulders. Maybe this deal she'd worked out wouldn't be quite so laborious after all, she thought dizzily. Sloan really knew how to make love to a woman.

All of a sudden, Bladen lifted his head and took a step back. Cindra's eyes fluttered open and she gazed up at him in confusion, wondering why he'd stopped nibbling on her neck. She was just about to ask when he gently spun her around so that her back was to him.

Behind her, Bladen reached one hand around to cup her breast again while he slid the other beneath her skirt and into her panties to lightly caress the moist opening of her pussy. Cindra let her head fall back on to his shoulder with a little sigh of pleasure, only to moan when she felt him bend his head to kiss her neck once more. He pulled her back more firmly against him then, molding her body to his, and she felt his hard cock press insistently against her ass. He felt extremely well-endowed, she thought.

Bladen continued to run his finger up and down her wet slit for the longest time, refusing to go any further. Just when she was at the point of demanding he stop teasing her, he slid a finger deep into her pussy. She gasped out loud, not just from how good it felt, but in amazement at how wet she was already. Oh God, she thought as his finger began to move rhythmically inside her. A few more moments of that and she was surely going to come!

But to her dismay, Bladen slid his finger out of her pussy and moved up to tease her sensitive, little clit. For a

moment, she was torn between wanting him to slide his finger back into her pussy and rubbing her clit faster and faster until she came.

Bladen however, obviously had other ideas. With a groan, he took his hand away to gently bend her over the desk. Pushing up her skirt, he urged her panties down over her hips to leave them at mid-thigh. Cindra gasped as he slid his finger into her pussy once again, this time from behind. There was something so completely decadent about being bent over the desk of a man she'd met less than an hour before while he had his way with her. Perhaps that was why she was so excited, she thought. Perhaps it was because she was experiencing the pure rush of fulfilling some sexual fantasy she didn't even know she had before this moment. Or maybe it was because Bladen was just so damn hot. And so damn good at getting her primed for sex. Whatever the reason, she just wished he would stop the teasing and foreplay, and finally slide that hard cock of his inside of her!

As if in response to her silent yearning, Cindra felt Bladen slid his finger out of her pussy. She glanced over her shoulder to see him undoing his belt, and she wet her lips with anticipation. She couldn't remember ever wanting a man this much!

Her eyes widened a little as he pushed his breeches down and his hard cock came into view. She'd been right; he was well-endowed. Her pulse quickened as he stepped up behind her to grip her hips in both hands. A moment later, he was slowly sliding himself into her.

Cindra gasp quickly became a moan of pleasure as she felt his hard length fill her completely. It was as if they were made to fit together like this, she thought.

She held her breath, waiting for Bladen to move inside of her, but to her dismay, he didn't. Instead, he stood like he was, his hands gripping her hips, his hard cock deep in her pussy. What was he doing? she wondered. Why wasn't he thrusting? Couldn't he see she needed him to take her now?!

Too impatient to wait any longer, Cindra began to rock back against him, slowly at first and then more quickly, only to jump suddenly when she felt a light smack on her ass. Her eyes went wide. Had Bladen just spanked her? She turned her head to give him a questioning look over her shoulder.

"Behave and let me set the pace," he growled. "Otherwise, we're both going to come way more quickly than I think either of us wants."

Though the softly spoken words were clearly an order, Cindra wasn't affronted by them. In fact, she felt exhilarated by them. It only meant that Bladen was as hot for her as she was for him! And the knowledge that she could make him come whenever she chose made her feel extremely powerful.

Suddenly wondering if Bladen would spank her again if she didn't do as he said, Cindra gave into her inner bad girl and rocked back against him again. To her delight, she was rewarded with another set of spanks this time, first on one cheek and then the other. These smacks were a little harder than the first ones had been, but she wasn't about to complain. The sensation of Bladen's firm hand connecting with her asscheeks while his hard cock filled her pussy completely was absolutely mind blowing. And she wanted him to keep doing it. Bracing her hands against the desk, she began to rock back against him as hard as she could.

Bladen must have gotten the idea because he gave her ass several more well-placed smacks before finally grabbing her hips and beginning to thrust. The feel of his hard cock plunging in and out of her pussy pushed her over the edge within seconds, and Cindra cried out as she felt herself start to come. It was like Bladen was touching her in places she'd never been touched before, she thought, and only hoped he wouldn't come too soon himself because she wanted this to last forever.

To Cindra's immense pleasure, Bladen didn't come right away, but continued to thrust in and out of her as wave after dizzying wave of orgasm swept through her body. Only then did she hear him groan in satisfaction as he

found his own release.

Afterward, Cindra lay across the desk, completely spent. She had never experienced an orgasm so intense, and that she had done so with Bladen Sloan, a man she'd known for all of an hour seemed utterly incredible.

After a moment, Bladen slowly pulled out of her, and Cindra could hear him doing up his breeches. With a little sigh, she pushed herself upright, and then balanced on trembling legs as she pulled up her panties. Smoothing her short skirt back into place, she turned to find the bounty hunter regarding her with a roguish grin.

"Well, if that's any indication of the kind of payment I'll be receiving, then I'd have to say I underestimated your talents," he said.

Cindra felt herself blush, and quickly looked away, not knowing what to say in reply. God, this was so strange, she thought. No matter how much she had enjoyed their lovemaking, it didn't change the fact that she'd just had sex with Bladen Sloan in exchange for his services. Part of her felt more than a little uncomfortable with that, especially since she was tricking him into helping her. But if she really felt that badly about it, she asked herself, then why was she already looking forward to doing it again?

## Chapter Two

"I'll get started on finding your fiancé in the morning," Bladen said, interrupting her thoughts. "Where are you staying so I can get in touch with you?"

Cindra flipped her long hair over her shoulder. "The Galactic Daily."

She groaned inwardly as she thought of the seedy motel. Though it wasn't her first choice, it was cheap, which was important considering she was broke. Then again, she thought, perhaps she could make the whole thing work for her. She needed a way to stick close to Bladen while he tracked DelCour, and this just might do it.

"The thing is," she added. "I really can't afford to stay there now. Could you recommend someplace less expensive?"

Surprise flickered on his face for a moment, and then was gone. "If you can't afford the Daily, then there isn't going to be any place on Pendari you will be able to afford."

"Oh." She caught her lower lip between her teeth. "Do you know of a city shelter where I could stay then?"

Bladen frowned, but said nothing, and his silence made her nervous. God, she hoped he didn't recommend a shelter. Besides being even seedier than the motel she'd been staying, a shelter wouldn't let her keep an eye on Bladen. Then another thought occurred to her. What if he offered to pay for a hotel for her? While that was better than a shelter, it still caused the same problem. She'd really been hoping he would just offer to let her stay with him. That way, she would definitely be able to keep an eye on him.

"The shelters are all full of druggies. You'd be lucky if you didn't get attacked in one of them," he finally said. "You can stay with me, if you want."

Cindra almost sighed with relief. That had certainly been easier than she'd thought it would be. Remembering the role she was playing, she reminded herself not to be too eager and instead looked up at him from beneath lowered lashes. "Are you sure? I wouldn't want to put you out..." she said, purposely letting her voice trail off.

He shrugged. "We'll be seeing each other a lot over the next several days, so it makes sense, doesn't it?"

Cindra was surprised to feel a blush heat her cheeks. Since when did she blush? "You're right," she said. "I suppose it does."

They left his office shortly after that, stopping by the Galactic Daily only long enough for Cindra to pick up her things before going to Bladen's apartment.

Cindra couldn't help but be impressed by the spacious downtown loft. He lived several blocks from his office, which put it within easy walking distance of everything the city had to offer. And also made it very expensive, no doubt. Just another indication that the bounty hunter did very well for himself, she thought as she looked around the sleekly furnished apartment. Compared to her tiny place back on her home world of Teldar, it was a mansion.

In addition to the huge, open room that served as Bladen's kitchen, living room, and office, there was a bedroom, which was separated from the main loft by two steps. There was another smaller room off to the side of that room, which she assumed was the bathroom.

"This is nice," she said as she walked into the living room.

"The view from the window is pretty amazing, too," Bladen told her. "It's one of the reasons I bought the place."

Curious, Cindra wandered over to the window and peered out. The view from the loft was indeed breathtaking. From her vantage point, not only could she see the city and the bay that it was built on, but the distant snow-capped mountains as well.

"It doesn't feel like you have much in here," Bladen remarked.

Cindra turned to see him placing her small travel bag on the bed. When they had left the hotel, he had offered to carry the bag for her, and now she hurried across the room to take it from him.

"Just a few changes of clothes," she said, avoiding his gaze as she nervously tucked her hair behind her ear.

It wasn't a lie, really. The bag did have clothes in it, including some things she'd picked up at the boutique, but it also held her pistol, handcuffs, and a lock pick set, all of which would only make him ask questions if he were to mistakenly see them.

But Bladen must not have thought her behavior odd because he changed the subject. "The bathroom is through there," he said, indicating the smaller room she had noted earlier. "I'm going to be doing some work on the computer, so just make yourself at home."

Cindra watched his retreating form as he left the bedroom, surprised by how easily Bladen accepted her presence in his home. He seemed genuinely comfortable with having her stay with him. Of course, that probably had something to do with the fact that he wanted her readily available whenever he felt like having sex with her again, she thought wryly.

The thought of having Bladen inside her again made her pussy start to tingle in a way that was almost embarrassing and Cindra felt herself flush. Get a grip on yourself, girl! You're in this to bring in a bounty, not for the sex.

But just because she told herself that, it didn't mean her body was listening. She couldn't deny that the deal she had agreed to just might turn out to be more fun than she had ever thought it could be. She was even more embarrassed to admit she was already looking forward to sleeping with the other bounty hunter again. Cindra lips curved at that. It wasn't sleeping with him that she was looking forward to; it was the pure, unadulterated sex.

Okay, she told herself. There's nothing wrong with that. You can have as much fun as you want, as long as you keep focused on the real objective.

Realizing she must look odd just standing there, Cindra abruptly grabbed her travel bag and headed for the bathroom.

"I'm going to take a shower," she called over her shoulder as she went, but if Bladen had heard her, he made no comment.

As the door slid closed behind her, she took a moment to look around before setting her bag down on the floor. Like the rest of the apartment, the bathroom was state-of-the-art, with a huge glass-enclosed shower, an immense marble soaking tub, a mirrored wall, and shiny new fixtures, all of which were illuminated by the soft glow coming from the colorful lighting on the ceiling.

She could definitely get used to this, Cindra thought as she slid her feet out of her sandals and began to undress.

Bladen was so busy staring at Cindra's ass as she walked toward the bathroom that by the time he thought about acknowledging her words, she had already closed the door. Damn, but she was amazing! They'd had sex in his office not an hour ago, and he already wanted her again. If he weren't careful, she would have her end of the bargain paid off before tomorrow morning.

Ignoring his hardening cock, he walked over to his desk and was about to sit down when he heard the shower turn on. Wondering if she had found everything she needed, he turned and made his way to the bathroom. He tried to tell himself that he was going in merely to she needed help finding some towels, but he knew that was a lie before he even opened the door. As the steam billowed away, his gaze was drawn to the glass-enclosed shower, and he stared at Cindra Mallory's naked form as if transfixed.

Even though they'd already had sex, this was his first opportunity to actually see her naked. And he definitely liked what he saw.

She had her back to him, and was soaping her breasts and shoulders, and Bladen went rock hard as he watched her hands caress her body. She had put her long hair up so that it wouldn't get wet, and he could see that she had a butterfly tattoo on the small of her back. Because it was one of those expensive holographic tattoos, it gave the illusion of motion, and every time she moved, it looked like the butterfly's colorful wings were moving as well.

His gaze slid lower, lingering on the curve of her bottom. Damn, she had a gorgeous ass, he thought, remembering how she had looked bent over his desk. Of course, he hadn't been able to resist giving her bottom a smack. An ass like that was just crying out for a good spanking. And like a dream come true, she had responded to his hand like he'd been yearning for it all along.

While the main purpose of the spanking really had been to get Cindra to stop rocking back against him, it had instead gotten him so hot that he'd been close to coming within moments of starting to move inside of her. Of course, it didn't help that her pussy was so tight and wet. Or that those perfectly reddened cheeks simply refused to stop wiggling.

While it seemed unbelievable, he had to admit that quickie in his office had been the best sex of his life. He couldn't wait to see how good it would be the next time.

In the shower, Cindra's tanned skin glistened as the water sluiced down her body. As much as Bladen wanted to strip off his own clothes and join her, he found that watching her came with an excitement all its own. God, he thought to himself, there wasn't a part of her that wasn't perfect. And the way the water highlighted her curves was truly breathtaking. He promised himself right then and there that before their business was concluded, he would make love to her in the shower.

Wow, that shower had felt great, Cindra thought. She hadn't had the nerve to climb in the communal shower back at the Galactic Daily, so she hadn't done much more than take sponge baths while she'd been staying there. Shutting off the water, she turned to reach for a towel, and gave a start of surprise when she saw Bladen standing in the doorway. He was leaning against the doorjamb, lazily watching her, his arms folded across his broad chest and just the barest hint of a smile on his sensuous lips.

Her first instinct was to snatch the towel off the rack and cover herself, but that inner bad girl of hers took over again, and she surprised herself by slowly reaching for the towel and wrapping it around her body. She was careful to keep her movements unhurried, giving him an eyeful in the process. God, she thought to herself, when had she turned into such a femme fatale?

“I didn’t realize you were there,” she said, stepping out of the shower onto the plush bathmat.

He gave her a long, lazy look. “I came in to make sure you had found the towels, but I can see that you did.”

Cindra didn’t believe a word of what he’d just said, but she made no comment as she turned to face the mirror.

Behind her, Bladen continued to observe her, and as she studied his reflection, her gaze dropped to the outline of his arousal clearly visible in his leather breeches. Her pulse skipped a beat as she realized she was more than ready to provide her second payment.

Keenly aware of Bladen watching her every move, she began to dry off, slowly running the towel over her bare breasts and down her stomach to the downy curls between her thighs. Paying special attention to her legs, she bent over to dry off one, and then the other, making sure Bladen had a good view of her ass before returning to her upright position. God, she’d never done anything like this in her life! And she couldn’t believe how exhilarated it made her feel.

Cindra had always considered her bottom to be one of her best features, but after the spanking, she seemed to be more keenly aware of the effect it could have on the opposite sex. Or more precisely, the effect it had on Bladen. She had never had a guy spank her during sex before. Actually, she’d never been spanked before that night. Maybe she’d been missing out, she thought. She couldn’t believe how much of a turn-on it had been, and she couldn’t help but wonder if Bladen would spank her again the next time they had sex.

As she straightened, her eyes went to the mirror again. The bounty hunter was gazing at her ass as if transfixed by it. Was he thinking about spanking her again? she wondered. She was amazed at how fast her pulse raced at just the thought of him bringing his big, strong hand down on her ass again.

Drying off after a shower had never been an erotic experience for her before, but doing so in front of Bladen while at the same time fantasizing about a spanking was making her so wet she was surprised her juices weren’t running down her thighs. She could hardly wait for him to take her to bed and collect on his next payment! Or maybe they would do it right there in the bathroom, she thought wildly. She envisioned him lifting her up to sit on the counter so that he could plunge himself deep inside her while she wrapped her legs tightly around him. That sounded delicious to her and she was almost breathless as she anticipated his touch.

Much to her dismay however, Bladen only continued to watch her for a moment more before he turned and left the room without a word.

Cindra spun around to stare opened-mouth at the empty doorway. How dare he get her all hot and bothered, and then walk away? she thought in annoyance. Turning back to the mirror, she grabbed the bottle of lotion she kept in her bag, squeezed some into her hand, and then vigorously rubbed it into her skin. The nerve of him!

As she massaged the lotion into her legs, she had to fight the urge to slide her hand between her thighs. Having sex with Bladen was one thing, even posing nude for him like she’d just been doing was okay, but for some strange reason, masturbating with him close enough to watch if he wanted to was a step she wasn’t prepared to take. Ridiculous, she supposed, but she could just never see herself doing that in front of a guy.

Maybe it was just as well Bladen hadn’t dragged her off to bed, she told herself. She had warned herself to stay focused and already she was allowing him to distract her.

Though he had been sorely tempted to take Cindra right there on the bathroom floor, Bladen had resisted the impulse. After all, they had only agreed to ten sexual favors, and he didn't want to use them up too quickly. Besides, watching her dry off after her shower was almost as much fun and didn't count against the ten. When Cindra came out of the bathroom a few minutes later wearing nothing but a sexy bra and a skimpy pair of panties however, his resolve almost crumbled. If she walked over to him and sat down on his lap, he thought, there was no way he would be able to resist making love to her. But to his chagrin, Cindra didn't come over. Instead, she pulled back the covers, climbed into bed, and bid him good night.

With a sigh, Bladen turned his attention back to the computer on his desk and typed in the name, Yale Bron'ti. Now that he had taken the case, he might as well get started on it. And he had to admit, part of him was rather curious about the guy Cindra wanted to track down so badly.

The computer program was linked to the Inter-Galactic Registry, the database that listed everyone living within the galaxy. Though originally designed for official use, every bounty hunter had their own password to get into the system. Bladen's brow furrowed as he read the information on the holo-screen. He supposed it was possible he had the wrong Yale Bron'ti, but he doubted it. Only one entry came up under that name and when Bladen saw the rest of the file, those alarm bells that had been ringing in his office began to go off again.

Yale Bron'ti was one of several aliases for a wanted organized crime figure by the name of Marek DelCour. Wanted for smuggling, drug trafficking, prostitution, illegal arms sales, and conspiracy to commit murder, DelCour had a bounty on his head worth ten-million galactic credits.

So, Bladen mused, the beautiful Cindra Mallory had a penchant for bad boys then. Or did she? His frown deepened at that. Perhaps she didn't even know what her boyfriend had been up to, Bladen thought as he read more about DelCour. It seemed if it were sleazy or illegal, then the guy was into it. It looked like he had gotten his start in the prostitution and sex-trade business, most of his early arrests taking place in either brothels or sex clubs.

Bladen's gaze drifted over to where Cindra was sleeping in his bed. Even though he had just met her, it was difficult to picture her with a sleaze like DelCour. Suddenly, he got a sinking feeling in his stomach. What if she was somehow tied up in the sex-trade business and that was how she and DelCour had met? It bothered Bladen to think about that, but it might explain why she was so willing to trade the use of her body for his services. Deciding it was time to learn more about his client, he typed her name into the registry's search engine and waited for it to bring up her information.

Relieved when her name didn't come up as an alias too, Bladen began to read further, but then stopped and swore under his breath when he reached her occupation. It couldn't be, he thought. Cindra Mallory was registered with the Inter-Galactic Federation as a damn bounty hunter? Shit!

Suddenly, it all made sense to him. Her desperate desire to find her supposed fiancé, her willingness to sleep with him, her lie about being too poor to afford a place to stay, all of it. And to think he'd actually been feeling sorry for taking advantage of her. He couldn't believe he hadn't seen through her charade back at his office. And he would have if it weren't for her beautiful face and gorgeous body.

Bladen's gaze went to her sleeping form again, and this time, he clenched his jaw. He should drag her from his bed and throw her the hell out, he thought. But then he quickly reconsidered. He could benefit here, he told himself, and teach the beautiful bounty hunter a lesson at the same time. She had obviously intended to trick him into finding DelCour for her so she could collect the bounty, but two could play that game. Oh, he'd track down DelCour for her all right, but he would be collecting the bounty for himself.

Of course, that wasn't the only reason he wanted to keep her around, he admitted to himself. There was the sex. As much as he would have liked to, especially after what he'd just found out, he couldn't deny how good it had

been. The way he saw it, there was no reason to end that arrangement quite yet. But he was definitely going into this with his eyes wide open now. She was using her sex appeal to manipulate him, or at least she thought she was. If she could use their agreement to get what she wanted, then so could he. He certainly had a few sexual fantasies he'd always wanted to indulge in. The only question was how far Cindra would go to get him to do what she wanted?

### Chapter Three

The next morning, Cindra awoke as soon as she felt movement in the bed beside her. Bladen must have come to bed sometime after she'd fallen asleep last night, she realized. She was surprised she hadn't felt him slip into bed with her, though. Some bounty hunter she was, she thought wryly. According to her father, a bounty hunter should sleep with one eye open. She hadn't quite mastered that particular skill yet, she supposed.

From beneath half-closed lids, Cindra watched as Bladen threw back the blanket. The pajama bottoms he wore left his muscular chest bare and she took the opportunity to take a good look at him. Wow, she thought appreciatively as she let her gaze run over his well-developed pecs and washboard abs, he was really in great shape.

For a moment, she wondered if he might roll over and pull her into his arms to collect on his next payment. But to her surprise - and disappointment - he got out of bed and went directly into the bathroom instead without even giving her so much as a glance. A moment later, she heard the shower running. Her lips curving into a smile, she considered taking a page from his book and lounging against the doorjamb to watch while he bathed, but then thought better of it. Today, they were going to start looking for Marek DelCour, and she didn't want to do anything to distract Bladen.

Since she had already showered the night before, Cindra grabbed a dress from her travel bag and quickly put it on. She was just running a brush through her hair when Bladen came out of the bathroom.

"It's all yours," he said casually, gesturing toward the bathroom as he headed toward the kitchen.

Not wanting to linger too long in the bathroom, Cindra quickly brushed her teeth and put on her make-up, then gave her reflection a cursory glance before hurrying out to the kitchen. Bladen already had the coffee made and a steaming mug was waiting for her on the counter. Picking it up, she walked into the living room.

Bladen was checking the messages on his computer and he looked up as she walked over to his desk. She hadn't given the dress much thought when she'd put it on earlier, but judging by the way the bounty hunter's gaze lingered on her bare legs, it was obvious he must have liked it.

"You look like you slept well," he remarked.

She gave him a smile. "I did," she admitted. His bed was a whole lot more comfortable than the one at the fleabag hotel where she'd been staying, she thought.

Bladen made no comment, but merely continued to read his messages, and she wandered over to perch on the edge of his desk.

"You're going to start looking for Yale this morning, right?" she said.

He nodded, but didn't take his eyes off the computer. "Yes."

"So, where do we start?" she asked, sipping her coffee. It tasted good, she thought. Expensive, too.

He pushed back his chair and got to his feet. "I'm going to talk to some people I know. You can do anything you want," he said, turning to walk into the kitchen.



She frowned slightly at his less than polite tone of voice, but ignored it as she hopped off the desk to hurry after him. "I'd like to go with you."

He stopped in his tracks and turned to face her. "Excuse me?"

She lifted her chin. "You said you're going to look for Yale, right?"

"I'm going to check out a few places that he might have gone, see if anyone's seen him around, yes," Bladen said.

"Okay," she said. "Then I'm coming with you."

He frowned. "I don't think so. The places I'll be going today aren't exactly the kind of places you'd be comfortable in."

"Why don't you let me make that decision?" she said. It had come out sounding sharper than she had intended, but she tended to get a little miffed when people tried to tell her what she should and shouldn't do. It was just exactly what her dang father always did!

He lifted a brow. "You're paying me to do a job. Why don't you just let me do it?"

Her blue eyes flashed. "Paying being the operative work in that sentence," she reminded him. "And since I'm paying you, I see no reason why I shouldn't go with you. He is my fiancé, after all. It may help to have me along. I might have information that could be useful to you."

Bladen's eyes narrowed and she expected him to argue the point, but instead he just shrugged. "All right, you can come with me," he agreed. "But just remember, I warned you. A lot of my informants hang out in the shady side of town and some of the places we go might shock you."

Cindra smiled and politely thanked him. That had been easier than she'd thought. But then again, why shouldn't it be easy? She had this big, bad bounty hunter completely under her control, after all. She wouldn't be surprised if he found DelCour for her before the day was out.

Bladen wasn't crazy about the idea of Cindra tagging along, but he had expected it. He didn't know exactly what she had in mind, but she obviously intended to stay close to him and then give him the slip once they had located DelCour. Bladen couldn't believe she was naïve enough to think she could bring in a criminal like DelCour on her own. Hell, even with all his experience, DelCour would be a tough catch for him.

He couldn't help but wonder why Cindra would go after someone like DelCour anyway. She was obviously new at this and should have been going after small-time criminals until she got more experience. But he supposed she was like any other new bounty hunter he'd ever run into. They all wanted the fame and the fortune, and they wanted it right away. Why the hell hadn't she just come to him and asked for help? He knew what it was like to be just starting out and would have gladly had given it to her. Then again, he'd never asked for help from another bounty hunter when he was just starting out, so why should she be any different? Well, at least with Cindra following him around he could keep an eye on her, he thought. Bladen may have been pissed off last night when he'd discovered what Cindra was up to, but the morning's light made him realize he didn't want to see a woman as beautiful as Cindra hurt by a man like DelCour. And he had no doubt that was what would happen if she ever actually caught up to the man.

But if Cindra followed around behind him, she was going to be in for a shock. From everything he'd read about DelCour, the man was deeply immersed in the sleaziest parts of Pendari. Hell, DelCour was deeply immersed in the sleaziest parts of half a dozen planets. It would be interesting to see how Cindra handled herself in that type of world.

Since Bladen couldn't let on how much he knew about DelCour however, he told Cindra he'd done some digging last night and found out that Bron'ti had been running up some large gambling debts at several of the nearby casinos. They were as good a place as any to look for DelCour, Bladen reasoned. He had no doubt that the man would end up in the casinos while he was on Pendari, especially the ones that catered to his particular interests – sleazy women and drugs in addition to gambling.

He and Cindra started at the high-end section of the strip and worked their way down. The first several they visited yielded nothing however, and it was nearly mid-afternoon by the time they arrived at the Blue Hole Casino. Cindra was already looking a little bored with all the footwork and Bladen wanted to tell her that if she wanted to be a bounty hunter, then she was going to have to get used to pounding the pavement. But he noticed that her bored expression disappeared entirely when they walked into then Blue Hole.

The place was dark and smoke-filled, and featured a half-naked woman gyrating in a cage above every gaming table. If DelCour were looking for sex with his gambling, then this would be the place, Bladen thought.

Ignoring Cindra's wide-eyed look, Bladen led her over to a row of gaming tables in the back of the room. There was a tall man standing behind the craps table watching both the game and the dealers with a practiced eye. At Bladen's approach, he immediately left his post to walk over to him.

"Bladen," the man grinned, holding out his hand. "Haven't seen you for awhile. How've you been?"

Bladen shook the other man's hand. Dolvin Morry, the senior supervisor in charge of the dealers, had been one of Bladen's acquaintances and informants for years. "Busy, as usual," he said. "How about yourself?"

"Not bad at all," was the other man's reply. His deep blue eyes went to Cindra, and he regarded her curiously for a moment before returning his attention to Bladen. "You here looking for some action? We've got some private games going on in the back if you're interested. A little bit better clientele than the riff-raff out here."

Bladen shook his head. "I'm trying to find a guy named Yale Bron'ti," he said, taking out the photo he'd printed out from the computer the night before. "Seen him around?"

The man studied the photo for a moment, and then nodded. "He was in here a few nights ago as a matter of fact," he said, handing the picture back to Bladen. "Played cards for awhile, and then asked if I knew of a good sex club around. I recommended Purrfection over in Nu-Terva." He gave Cindra a charming smile. "Not that I've ever been there myself, you understand, but I've heard about the place. From a friend of a friend."

Bladen wanted to laugh. What a joke. Morry probably had a seat reserved in half the skin joints on Pendari. "Thanks," he said to the man. "If Bron'ti comes in again, give me a call, would you?"

"Sure thing," Dolvin said, and then grinned. "Come back when you can spend some more time. And some money."

Bladen chuckled and assured the other man he would. As he and Cindra left the casino, he glanced at her. "You should have mentioned your boyfriend likes to frequent sex clubs. We could have checked those out first and saved ourselves some time."

Even in the darkened casino, he could see Cindra's blush. "I...I didn't know that he did."

Bladen's mouth quirked. If Cindra was blushing now, just wait until they got to Purrfection, he thought. The naïve little bounty hunter was going to be in for the surprise of her life.

How was she supposed to know Marek DelCour was into sex clubs and stuff like that? Cindra wondered to herself as they drove toward the far end of the strip. It wasn't like that information was included in the Inter-Galactic Registry. Obviously, Bladen must have access to information that she didn't.

Purrfection, the club Bladen's friend had mentioned, was about forty-five minutes from the casino, and when they pulled up outside the large, non-descript looking building, Cindra automatically reached for the door handle, only to pause when she felt Bladen's hand on her arm.

"Are you sure you want to come in?" he asked.

Her brow furrowed. "Why wouldn't I?"

He regarded her silently for a moment. "Have you ever been in a sex club before?"

"Well, no, but..." She hesitated, chewing on her lower lip. Though she would never admit it, the thought of going into the sex club did make her a little nervous. But if she were going to be a bounty hunter, then she would have to get used to going into places like this, she told herself.

Bladen shrugged again. "Suit yourself, but if you decide you want to leave, just let me know," he said, opening the door and stepping out of the personal transport.

Cindra expected to walk into a loud, flashy place much like the casino they had just left. But instead, she and Bladen stepped into a small, tastefully decorated entryway with several couches and a large reception desk. The room was softly lit and it took her eyes a moment to adjust. Just when they did, a woman slipped quietly through an unassuming door at the far end of the room. Pretty with long, curly blond hair, she was dressed in a short skirt and a skimpy bra that showed more of her full breasts than it covered.

"Welcome to Purrfection," the girl said, smiling at her and Bladen. "What type of entertainment would you be looking for this afternoon?"

Cindra wondered if the carefully worded question was designed to ensure that people didn't just walk into the club without realizing exactly what type of place it was. Since there was nothing to give it away from the outside, she could easily imagine some unsuspecting tourist thinking the club was a museum or something. That would be embarrassing, she thought.

"We're actually here to talk to the manager," Bladen said.

The girl hesitated, regarding the bounty hunter thoughtfully as if wondering what he could possibly want with the club's manager. "Are you sure I can't help you?"

"I don't think so," Bladen said politely. "I really need to talk to the manager."

Cindra wondered why Bladen didn't just show DelCour's picture to the girl. Since she worked at the front desk, it made sense the blonde would probably have seen the man come in.

The girl's brow furrowed, clearly thrown off balance by Bladen's polite refusal. "I can tell him that you'd like to speak with him, but you'll have to wait until after the show. He won't be available until then. It would be easier if you'd come inside. Then I can bring him by your table, if you'd like."

Bladen glanced at Cindra briefly before giving the girl a nod. "That'll be fine," he told her.

The blonde smiled. "Right this way then," she said, leading them through the door.

The interior of the club was even more dimly lit than the entryway, but Cindra was still able to make out the small, intimate booths surrounding the stage area as she and Blade followed the girl through the club. As they passed by each of the booths, she noticed that though most were filled with couples, some held more than a single couple.

The blond girl had just shown her and Bladen to an empty booth when light illuminated the darkened stage. Realizing the show was about to begin, Cindra quickly slid into the booth and turned her attention to the dais. She had to admit, she was a little eager to see what went on in a place like this.

Soft, sensual music began to play, and Cindra watched curiously as a couple stepped onto the stage. The woman was wearing a sexy, black dress that wouldn't have looked out of place in a night club, while the man wore skin-tight leather breeches and a loose, flowing shirt. Never having been to a sex club, Cindra didn't know what to expect, but she was more than a little surprised when the couple began to dance.

But it wasn't just any dance, she quickly realized. It was actually a choreographed strip show. As the man and woman swayed to the music, each of them ran their hands over the other's body, slowly removing small pieces of their partner's clothing as they did so. Their costumes were cleverly designed to allow the dancers' bodies to be revealed a little at a time and as teasing bits of skin became exposed, each of them would stop to caress and kiss the area before moving on to the next piece of clothing. The whole thing was much more erotic than Cindra would have expected and she couldn't help wishing they would undress each other a little faster.

But the show was designed to tease the audience and even after they were both nearly naked, the dancing continued. As they moved, the man ran his hands over the woman's full breasts and down her body to the skimpy black thong she was wearing. While Cindra couldn't hear anything the couple was saying over the music, she could tell by the shape of the woman's mouth that she was moaning in pleasure.

Suddenly, the beat of the music changed, becoming even slower and more erotic. As it did so, a portion of the floor began to lift up, creating a raised platform in the middle of the stage. When the couple knelt on it, the platform slowly began to turn and as the last of their clothes came off, Cindra caught her breath at how incredibly beautiful they both were.

The couple's movements were less teasing and more sexual now. They were kissing and caressing each other hungrily, and as she watched, Cindra couldn't believe how turned on she was getting. She had always thought sex shows would be base and sleazy, but this had to be the hottest thing she had ever seen! If she weren't so interested to see what would happen next, she would have dragged Bladen out of the place right then. As it was, she couldn't help but slide her hand down the front of her dress to the juncture of her thighs. She would have slid her hand underneath her dress, but she wasn't quite bold enough to do that in front of Bladen, or anyone else who might be watching for that matter, so she settled for caressing her clit through the thin material.

On stage, the woman had positioned herself on top of her partner so that she could take his cock in her mouth while he licked her pussy, and Cindra shifted on the couch as she felt her own pussy getting even wetter. Suddenly, a movement beside her caught her attention, and she dragged her gaze from the performers to where Bladen sat beside her. Her eyes widened when she saw him undoing the buttons on his breeches. He surprised her even more a moment later when he freed his erect cock from the confines the material. Well, she was touching herself, so she supposed this was no different. But when she met his gaze, it was to find him regarding her with a raised brow.

Realization slowly began to dawn upon her. "Here?" she whispered.

He gave her a roguish grin. "That's why these booths are built for privacy. But if you're too shy..."

He was daring her, Cindra thought in amazement. He didn't think she would be bold enough to do it. She had to admit, she'd never done anything even remotely like what he was suggesting, but the idea of having sex right there, where the people on the stage could see them, was kind of exciting. And she could be bold, she decided, just as bold as he was.

Cindra's first thought was to simply pull up her dress and straddle Bladen's lap. Riding him would definitely be

fun. But when she stood up to move closer, a more powerful urge took hold of her and she found herself kneeling down between his legs instead. She almost smiled as his eyes widened in surprise. He obviously hadn't expected her to do that. She felt extremely powerful in this position, knowing that she was controlling exactly what was going to happen next. And from the look of anticipation on his face, he was more than ready to let her take charge.

Reaching out, she gently took him in her hand and rubbed her thumb up and down his length. Lifting her gaze, she found him watching her, which only turned her on even more. Without taking her eyes from his, she leaned forward to carefully take him in her mouth, then began to move up and down on his shaft over and over. As she did, she let her other hand drift down to lazily massage his balls in time to the rhythm of her mouth. She could already taste the pre-cum dribbling from the head of his cock and it was unbelievably delicious.

When she had first taken him in her mouth, Cindra had only intended to give him a quick lick before climbing on his hard length, but now she doubted if he was going to last that long. The ability that she possessed to get him so close to orgasm so quickly made her feel even more powerful, and she decided she was more than happy to let him come in her mouth. But that didn't mean she couldn't receive some pleasure herself. Moving her hand from his balls, she pushed aside her skirt and panties, and began to lightly caress her clit. She had to move her fingers slowly though, because she was extremely close herself and she wanted to time her orgasm with his.

Cindra was just establishing a slow rhythm when Bladen reached out and slid his hand into her hair. There was something very sexy about the way he threaded his fingers in an effort to control her pace, she decided. Changing up her style, she let his cock slide to the back of her mouth and then with a little nudge, took him all the way down her throat. The groan he let out at that was enough to almost trip her orgasm all by itself.

"Oh God, Cindra," he said hoarsely. "You're incredible. Don't stop. Don't stop!"

Cindra obeyed, wrapping her hand around the base of his cock and bobbing her head up and down faster and faster. A moment later, his cum filled her mouth, and she let out a moan of her own as it touched her tongue. It was hot and creamy and surprisingly sweet, and she moaned again as she swallowed all of it. Wanting to climax with him, she quickened her fingers on her clit and within moments, her own orgasm rushed through her. Lost in the throes of her own pleasure, she continued to glide up and down on his slippery cock until his hand tightened ever so slightly in her hair.

Lifting her head, she looked up at him. He was gazing down at her with a look of complete and total lust, and she waited breathlessly for him to pull her up and astride his still hard cock. But then he glanced up and his expression changed.

Following the direction of his gaze, Cindra looked over her shoulder and gave a start of surprise when she realized she and Bladen had had an audience of their own. It was the blond woman who had escorted them to the table along with a man whom Cindra could only assume was the manager they had been waiting to talk to. Apparently, she'd been so caught up in what they were doing that she hadn't realized the show had ended.

Though she had had an orgasm, Cindra was still incredibly turned on, and had been really looking forward to climbing on Bladen's amazing cock, but that would have to wait, she supposed. Still giddy with the excitement of what she and Bladen had just done, but also a little embarrassed at discovering they'd had an audience for it, she rose to her feet as he began fastening his breeches.

"Marnee said you wished to speak to me," the man said.

He was tall and thin with graying hair, and a straight, aquiline nose. He acted as if what they had just witnessed was the most natural thing in the world. Maybe in the world in which he lived, it was, Cindra thought.

Getting up to stand beside her, Bladen took out DelCour's picture and held it out to the manager of the club,

while at the same time placing one hand on her hip and giving it a gentle squeeze. Cindra wasn't sure if it was in appreciation, or whether it was a promise to reciprocate later. She hoped a little of both

"We're looking for this man," he said to the man. "Someone else we spoke with said they recommended your club to him and we're hoping he might have come in."

The man gazed at DelCour's photo for a moment before nodding. "Why are you looking for him?"

Cindra expected Bladen to come up with some convoluted story, but he simply glanced at her and said, "He owes my friend some money, and I'm helping her collect."

The man was silent as he seemed to be considering the words. He must have liked what he heard however, because he nodded again. "He was here last night as a matter of fact," he said, handing the picture back to Bladen. "One of the girls entertained him. Perhaps she could help you." Without waiting for an answer, he turned to Marnee. "Please ask Chantel to come over."

Marnee went off to find the woman named Chantel, returning a few minutes later with a petite dark-haired girl dressed in a lace bra and panties. The manager explained that Bladen and Cindra needed to find the man that she had entertained the previous evening. Bladen showed her the picture to jog her memory and after a moment, she nodded.

"I remember him," she said. "He asked me to go to some rave with him tonight, but I told him that I don't date the clientele."

"Did he say where this rave was?" Bladen asked, and Cindra held her breath as she waited for the girl's answer. If this lead panned out, then she could very well have DelCour in custody by this evening.

The girl nodded. "Some club on K'nev Street on the south side."

Bladen nodded, thanking the two women and the manager for their help before he and Cindra left the club. Once outside, she turned to him.

"So, do we go there now and just wait for it to open?" she asked excitedly. Now that they had a lead on DelCour, she was back in bounty-hunter mode and any thoughts of sex were pushed to the back of her mind.

He shook his head. "That would be a waste of time. The rave won't even get started until midnight. And anyway, we'd never get in dressed as we are. K'nev Street is known for its hot, hip clubs."

She looked down at her dress and frowned. "But I don't have any other dressy clothes with me other than what I had on last night."

"Don't worry about it," he said. "We have time before the rave starts. We'll go shopping."

She stared at him, speechless for a moment. "You're going to take me shopping?"

He looked at his watch. "Why not? Maybe we'll even have time for dinner."

Cindra said nothing. She'd never had a man take her shopping before, except for her father of course, but that didn't count. While part of her liked the fact that Bladen was being so nice to her, another part almost wished he wasn't because he was making it really tough on her to keep deceiving him.

## Chapter Four

As Cindra and Bladen had dinner in one of the restaurants by the bay that evening, she realized that the day had been nothing like what she'd thought it would be. When Bladen had said he was going to take her shopping, she

had assumed he would simply take her to whatever boutique was nearby, and then wait impatiently like most other men while she picked out something to wear to the rave.

Much to her surprise however, the bounty hunter took her to lunch first, and then out sightseeing before they went shopping. He took her to all of the popular tourist spots, including the pioneer museum, located at the exact spot where the first colonial ship had landed. Admittedly, the museum wasn't something she would have normally enjoyed seeing, but with Bladen pointing out the interesting parts of every exhibit, she couldn't help but have a good time. She had to keep reminding herself over and over again that this was just business.

Then later, once at the trendy boutique, he surprised her further by patiently waiting while she tried on outfit after outfit looking for the perfect thing to wear to the party. Bladen had said that getting into the raves on K'nev Street was sometimes the hardest part. She had been to a few raves in her life, so she knew what he meant. Raves were all about looking hot, and she was determined to find just the right thing.

It had been after nine by the time they had left the clothing store, so when Bladen suggested they have dinner before going home to change, she had eagerly agreed. Now, as she sat across the table from the handsome bounty hunter, she couldn't help but be amazed by how comfortable she felt with him. It was as if they had known each other for years. She was surprised at how much they had in common with each other, too. Besides sharing a love of adventure, they both enjoyed traveling and had even been to a lot of the same planets.

As they talked, Cindra found her gaze drawn to Bladen's hands. She'd never really looked at a guy's hands that much before, but after the spanking he'd given her, she couldn't help looking at his all the time. Nicely shaped, they were big and strong, but as she'd discovered back in his office, they could also produce the most gentle and arousing caresses she'd ever felt.

She suddenly found herself wishing that he would get it into his head to use those wonderful hands of his on her bottom again. That thought immediately had her thinking all sorts of naughty things and before she knew it, she was fantasizing about Bladen giving her a spanking right there in the restaurant! She fidgeted in her seat as she imagined exactly how the scene would play out.

She'd start by doing something sexy, like slipping off her sandal and running her bare foot up and down his leg. And each time she did so, she'd go a little higher until she was gently massaging his cock through his breeches. Even though she was sure he would be enjoying it, Bladen would probably remind her that they were in a restaurant, and not one of Pendari's many sex clubs. But Cindra wouldn't listen. Instead, she would continue to rub his cock through his breeches until she made him come right there at the table.

It didn't matter to Cindra if she could actually manage such a feat, it was a fantasy after all, and in it, Bladen was dragging her up from her chair and over his lap for being such a naughty girl and making him come in such a public place. Just the thought of his hand coming down on her upturned bottom was enough to get her pussy purring, and she felt herself blush hotly.

Stop that, she told herself firmly. They had a good chance of catching up with DelCour that night and she couldn't let herself get distracted just when things were starting to come together. But even though she told herself that, she couldn't seem to make her fantasy go away.

"So, how did you get into bounty hunting?" she asked Bladen, needing something else to focus on instead of her errant thoughts.

Bladen took a sip of the imported Dalucian ale he had ordered and shrugged. "Like anyone else, I suppose. I started out in law enforcement, and then made detective. I did that for awhile before deciding to go out on my own and become a private investigator," he told her. "I quickly discovered that the real money was in bounty hunting though, so I started doing that full time about ten years ago."

“Do you enjoy it?”

“I love it,” he replied. “I pick and choose the jobs I want, get to travel the galaxy, meet interesting people.” He flashed her a grin. “Get to rescue beautiful damsels in distress.”

She arched a brow at him. “Did I need rescuing, then?” she asked, taking a sip of the fruity wine she had ordered.

“All beautiful women need rescuing now and then,” he replied. “Sometimes, they just don’t realize it.”

She put on a mock look of surprise. “Why Bladen, that was positively philosophical,” she said, and then added, “And here I thought you were just in it for the money.”

He laughed. “No, though the money is useful, I’ll admit.” He paused for a moment, and then asked, “What about you? What do you do back on Teldar?”

Cindra realized abruptly how stupid it was not to have an answer to that question ready, but she honestly hadn’t thought he would ever be interested enough to ask. She had always been quick on her feet however, so she hastily concocted what she thought would be a convincing lie.

“I sell pharmaceuticals for one of the bigger companies on Teldar,” she said, and then smiled. “It’s not as exciting as being a bounty hunter of course, but it pays the bills.”

He nodded. “So, how did you meet Bron’ti?”

She hesitated before answering, wondering if she should say that she and DelCour had worked together, but then decided to stick with something closer to the truth. “He owned one of the dance clubs that I frequented. He asked me out, one thing led to another, and before I knew it, we were engaged. I just wish I’d known what a creep he was before I agreed to marry him.”

The lie sounded convincing to her and thankfully Bladen must have bought it because he nodded and changed the subject, asking what she thought of Pendari. At least that was a subject she could talk about at length without getting tripped up, Cindra thought. It was after eleven by the time they left the restaurant, and they hurried back to his place to change clothes before heading to the rave.

The outfit she had chosen consisted of a short, black skirt made of some shimmery material and a matching halter top. The skirt was really nothing more than two panels, one in front and one in back that were held together at her hips by a thin platinum chain. The top was designed the same way, but it had only one panel of material that draped across her breasts, leaving her back completely bare except for the thin platinum chain that held the garment in place. With it, she wore dangling platinum shoulder-duster earrings and strappy high-heeled sandals.

Surveying her reflection in the mirror one more time before leaving the bathroom, Cindra decided she had never looked sexier.

Bladen was already dressed and waiting for her in the living room. He was standing at the huge picture window, his back to her, and Cindra paused to admire the way his snug, black leather breeches fit his muscular legs and showed off his great ass. The mesh-like shirt he wore was almost see-through, and she could make out the broad expanse of his back through the thin material. Damn, he looked good! Why couldn’t she have found a guy like this back home?

Hearing movement behind him, Bladen turned to see that Cindra had just come out of the bathroom. For a moment, he said nothing, but simply stood gazing at her. Damn, she looked hot! he thought. If they didn’t have to go to this rave to look for DelCour, he would have stripped off those sexy clothes she was wearing and taken her to bed right then. He immediately went hard at the thought. Cindra was the only woman he had ever met who could provoke such an immediate response in him and he had to admit that he found the way he was so drawn to



her a little disconcerting.

The rave was across town and by the time they got there, a line had already formed at the door. Up ahead, people were occasionally turned away because they weren't pretty enough or handsome enough or simply didn't have the right look, but with Cindra at his side, Bladen didn't anticipate having such a problem. If that didn't work, he had a big wad of galactic credits that should do the job. But it didn't come to that. The hulking doorman took one look at Cindra and admitted them without hesitation.

Inside, the building was one huge, open room with various levels all opening onto the dance floor. Loud music played from a disc jockey stationed high above the room and colorful strobe lights bounced off the crowd of people as they danced. Smoke and fog drifted so thick that in some places it was difficult to even see, and the strobe lights bounced all over the place as their beams cut through the mist.

Taking Cindra's hand, Bladen led her through the throng to an empty table near one of the walls. Though they could see the whole room from there, the crowd was too big to be able to see everyone, and after a few minutes, Bladen leaned close to Cindra.

"I'm going to go talk to some people, show them Bron'ti's photo," he said, raising his voice to be heard above the music. "Stay here and hold the table for us."

She looked like she was about to protest, but he stood and quickly made his way through the crowd before she could do so. He decided to check with the bartender first, but the man took one look at DelCour's picture, and shook his head. Bladen thanked him and then went in search of the bouncers, figuring he'd probably have better luck with them anyway. But none of the bouncers had seen DelCour either, so Bladen slipped each of them a few credits, promising them more if they told him when DelCour showed up.

Knowing there was nothing to do but wait for DelCour to arrive, Bladen decided he and Cindra might as well enjoy themselves while they did so. Besides, they would stick out like sore thumbs if they just stood there staring at people. However, when he got back to their table, it was to find two men coming on to Cindra. As beautiful as she was, he couldn't blame them, but his first instinct was still to punch both of them out. He noticed that though Cindra was being polite, she didn't seem to be flirting with either man and that, oddly enough, cooled his temper.

Bladen was standing in front of the table for a few seconds before either man even realized he was there, and when they finally did, it was to regard him curiously.

"Thanks for keeping her company, but she's taken," Bladen said to them. "You can go now."

The men looked as if they were going to put up a fuss, but Cindra stood and quickly moved around the table to Bladen's side. Slipping an arm around his waist, she leaned up on tiptoe to kiss him lingeringly on the mouth before giving the men a smile. Bladen tensed, bracing for a fight, but the two men merely regarded them for a moment before leaving the table and disappearing into the crowd.

Bladen turned to Cindra and put his mouth close to her ear. "Bron'ti isn't here yet, so there's nothing we can do until he shows. Let's dance."

Though Cindra's brow furrowed, she allowed Bladen to lead her onto the dance floor. She wanted to ask if they should look around for DelCour themselves, but the music was even louder out on the dance floor and she figured that Bladen probably knew best when it came to this type of thing anyway.

The DJ was playing a fast dance track and Cindra automatically began to sway to the music. As she danced, she found herself moving closer to Bladen every once in a while so that her body brushed up against his. Perhaps it was the strobe lights, or the loud music, or simply the fact that she was so incredibly attracted to Bladen, but being so close to him was getting her unbelievably aroused. Then again, maybe it was because she was still turned

on from giving him that blowjob back at the club, she thought. Either way, she was getting hotter by the moment.

Just when she was really getting into it however, the music abruptly slowed. Cindra automatically slowed with it, as did Bladen. Gently taking her hand, the bounty hunter pulled her closer. She was extremely aware of his hand settling on the bare skin of her back and she found herself fantasizing about him sliding it down to give her ass a few playful smacks. But of course, he didn't. Instead, he pulled her tightly against him and she felt her breasts press against his chest through the thin material of the halter top. She couldn't help but notice the hardness of his muscles beneath his shirt. Or how hard another part of his anatomy was either, and she wondered how he could dance in that condition.

Bladen's gaze went to her lips then and Cindra caught her breath. Remembering how her legs had gone weak the first time he'd kissed her, she suddenly yearned to feel his mouth on hers again. A little voice in her head tried to tell her that they were at the rave to look for DelCour and that this was a distraction she didn't need, but she ignored the voice as the bounty hunter's mouth covered hers.

At first, his mouth was feather light on hers, barely making contact. But then the kiss deepened to become more insistent and she parted her lips under his with a moan of pleasure. Bladen tasted of the whiskey he'd been drinking. And something else too, she thought. She couldn't put a name to it, but it was something uniquely male, uniquely his. And it was more intoxicating than any drink.

Abruptly, Bladen lifted his head to gaze down at her, and in the lighting, his eyes glinted gold. Wetting her lips with her tongue, Cindra slid her hand up behind his neck to pull his head back down. Then he was kissing her again, deep, passionate, mind-blowing kisses that took her breath away, and she could barely think. Except to notice that her legs had indeed gone weak again.

One hand moved down her back to the curve of her bottom to fit her more snugly against him, while the other found its way underneath her top and up to her breast. Her nipple immediately hardened in response to his touch and she let out a moan as he began making slow, deliberate circles over the turgid peak. His movements were so slow and subtle that she doubted anyone in the club would know what he was doing. But she did and it was driving her so crazy that she almost screamed.

Lifting his head, Bladen trailed kisses along her cheek, tracing a line along the curve of her jaw to the sensitive area behind her ear. Cindra threw her head back, arching against him, only to gasp as he trailed hot kisses along her skin. His hand tightened on her ass, pulling her even more tightly against him, and she could feel his hard cock pressing insistently against her pussy through her short skirt.

Cindra suddenly wanted to forget all about the real reason they were there and leave the rave right then so that they could continue this somewhere more private. Bladen wouldn't refuse if she suggested it; the hardness pressing against her told her that.

But before she could give voice to the idea, the music picked up and the crowd began to jump up and down to the beat. As the strobes began to flash in time to the rhythm, she realized that Bladen had worked her toward a darkened corner of the dance floor where the back wall and a tall row of speakers created an alcove. Positioning her with her back to the table that was there, Bladen pulled her close with an arm around her waist, while his other hand glided underneath her short skirt. Because of the way it was designed, the skirt couldn't be worn with any panties, and she sighed with pleasure as his fingers found her naked pussy.

Cindra wanted him to touch her so badly that she thought she'd go mad if he didn't. He didn't keep her waiting. Moving his hand gently over the downy curls between her thighs, he delved into the warm folds until he found her clit, and she let out a soft moan of pleasure. He began rubbing his finger in a circular motion over the firm little nub, slowly at first and then faster as he kept time with the beat of the music.

She looked around, nervous that people might be able to see what they were doing, and what she saw surprised her. Not only were at least a dozen people watching them, but three other couples were making out as well, and they were just the ones she could see. None of them were trying to hide what they were doing, and none of the people watching seemed shocked.

Cindra abruptly realized she was coming to embrace her newfound exhibitionist streak even more than she'd realized. A week ago, she never would have dreamed of doing something like this. Now, however, having people watch only turned her on more.

Her attention was drawn back to Bladen then, and she let out another moan of pleasure at what he was doing to her. Sliding her hand underneath her skirt, she covered his hand with her own, not to stop him, but to guide his fingers where she wanted them, sliding them up and then down her folds before moving his finger back up to her clit. As their fingers moved round and around the plump little flesh together, she slowly felt her orgasm beginning to build.

Bladen must have sensed it too, because he bent his head to whisper huskily in her ear. "Come for me, baby. Come for me, Cindra."

She did.

The sensations started in her clit, right beneath their fingers, and then moved throughout the rest of her body in delicious little ripples. She felt her whole body shudder with the intensity of it and she had to bite her lip to keep from screaming. If Bladen hadn't had his arm wrapped around her, she was sure she would have slumped to the floor. Never had she had an orgasm as powerful as this. Never had a man made her feel such intense pleasure.

Cindra rested her head against his shoulder, her breath coming in short, quick pants as if she'd just run a race. She was barely aware of Bladen's hands on her waist as he lifted her up to set her on the table. Her eyes fluttering open, she lifted her head from his shoulder to see him regarding her intently. Without a word, he bent his head and kissed her. His mouth moved over hers gently at first, then with more urgency, his tongue finding hers.

Cindra moaned against his mouth, only to gasp when she felt him slide his finger into her tight, wet pussy and begin to move in and out. But then, almost as quickly as he had started, he pulled his finger all the way out.

"Don't stop," she breathed against his mouth, only to realize that he was already undoing his breeches. She looked around quickly. The crowd watching them had grown slightly, but still no one seemed outraged at what they were doing. Reaching for Bladen, she pulled his head down to kiss him again.

His mouth still on hers, Bladen slid the head of his hard cock up and down her slit until the tip found the opening of her pussy. He didn't slide all the way inside right away however, but instead, teased both of them with several short thrusts before plunging his full length deep inside her. She was wet and tight and ready for him, and even though she loved feeling his hard cock inside her, she loved hearing the groan that escaped his lips even more.

Bladen grasped her hips and she wrapped her legs around him as he pushed in and out of her to the beat of the music. Even though she was sure he was just as aroused as she was, he took his time, pumping completely in and out with each stroke, and she was amazed at his control. She'd have thought he would be coming in seconds, but instead he kept thrusting, slowly at first and then building up until he was moving faster and harder and plunging so deep into her pussy that she had no doubt he was going to come.

As excited as she was, Cindra couldn't keep her own climax at bay either, and when she came, it was harder than any orgasm she'd ever had in her life. Bladen's groan of pleasure told her that he was coming with her, and that knowledge only intensified her orgasm even more.

As his thrusts gradually slowed, so did her breathing, and she let out a little moan when she felt him slide out. She

watched through half-closed eyes as he fastened his breeches before reaching out to lift her down from the table. Sliding his hands in her hair, he bent his head to kiss her passionately on the mouth, and when he lifted his head a moment later, Cindra was dizzy with pleasure.

Bladen gazed down at Cindra for a moment, taking in her flushed cheeks and full lips. All he wanted to do was leave the rave, take her back to his loft and make love to her again. And again. And again.

But then he reminded himself of the reason they were at this rave in the first place.

“We’d better get back to our table,” he told her hoarsely, running his finger down her cheek. “I told the bouncers that was where they could find us if Bron’ti showed.”

Taking her hand, he led her along the edge of the dance floor and back to their table. It was occupied however, so he and Cindra simply stood in the general vicinity where they would be able to see the bouncers if either of the men approached.

Standing with his arm around Cindra, Bladen took a moment to examine his thoughts. After the electrifying sex they had just had, he had to admit he was going to miss it when this whole thing was over. Hell, a part of him even wanted to admit that he was going to miss her. Which was hard to believe considering he’d only know her for two days.

He wondered for a moment if he should let Cindra know he was on to her. Then maybe they could work this out and keep seeing each other even after this business with DelCour was over. But his practical side told him that it would never work. Even if Cindra was willing, she had been lying to him the whole time. How could he ever be able to trust her?

Still lost in thought, Bladen gave himself a mental shake when he noticed that one of the bouncers was making his way over to where he and Cindra stood. The big man glanced at Cindra briefly before focusing his gaze on Bladen.

“The guy you’re looking for just came in,” he said. “He’s at the bar.”

Bladen thanked the bouncer and gave the man the rest of the money he had promised him. After the man had left, Bladen turned to Cindra. Ever since he had discovered she was a bounty hunter, he had been wondering how she planned on getting him out of the way while she took down DelCour. Well, he thought, it was time to find out.

“Let’s go talk to your ex,” he suggested, and would have led her over to the bar, but Cindra hung back, tightening her grip on his hand. Turning to face her, he lifted a questioning brow.

She chewed on her lower lip. “I think we should wait until he leaves and then follow him to wherever it is he’s staying so we can approach him then.”

And then what? Bladen wondered. Did Cindra think she was going to be able to bring in DelCour without Bladen realizing who she really was? Though that seemed a little naïve on her part, Bladen was willing to let it play out. Even so, he wasn’t about to give in that easily yet.

“Why not confront him here?” he asked, as if he didn’t already know her true intent.

Again, she hesitated before answering. “Because it will be easier to talk without all this loud music and people jumping up and down,” she said. “Yale will be more willing to hear what I have to say without the distractions.”

Bladen said nothing, considering her words for a moment before nodding his head. “All right, but we better get close to him then. Just don’t let him see you.”

Working their way through the throng of people, they found a place at the bar that was across from where DelCour was standing. This was the first time Cindra had seen Marek DelCour in person, and though the Galactic Registry had shown a photo of him, she wasn't prepared for how big and muscular the fugitive really was. Tall and naturally slender herself, she worked out regularly to keep herself in shape, but she was beginning to have some doubts about how she would bring in DelCour if he resisted. Which he almost certainly would, she thought to herself. When the time came, she would have to take him by surprise, she decided, and with the first strike, if possible.

DelCour stayed at the rave for several hours, during which time he drank half a dozen different kinds of alcoholic drinks, smoked and snorted at least four different exotic drugs, and danced with a number of women. Bladen and Cindra shadowed him the whole time, sticking as close to him as they could without being obvious, which was actually easier than she would have thought. He was completely oblivious to anyone around him, and seemed only to be concerned with his alcohol, drugs, and women.

It was almost morning by the time DelCour left the club, walking out with a woman on each arm. Cindra hoped that meant he would be heading back to his hotel, or wherever he was staying. Surprisingly, however, he kissed both of the women on the sidewalk in front of the club, and started down the street alone. He paused and looked around as if for a cab, but at this time of morning, the streets were deserted. She and Bladen kept to the crowd milling around outside the door of the club until DelCour gave up on the cab and started walking down the street again.

She and Bladen followed at a distance, but it was difficult to look inconspicuous when the streets were so deserted. Cindra hoped DelCour didn't turn around to confront them because she had no idea what she was going to say to Bladen when it became obvious that the man she claimed to be her ex-fiancé didn't recognize her.

When DelCour suddenly turned down an alley, Bladen quickened his steps. "Come on. We don't want to lose him," he said to her as they hurried after the fugitive.

As they reached the corner, Bladen stopped, signaling for Cindra to do the same. Though she did as he instructed, she couldn't control the urge to peek around his shoulder. DelCour was nowhere in sight.

"Shit," Bladen muttered. "Where did he go?"

Before Cindra could hazard a guess, Bladen took her hand and slowly led her down the alley. Though the sun was just starting to come up, the alley was still dark, making it difficult to see if anyone was hiding in the shadows and Cindra's pulse began to race. If she and Bladen had lost DelCour, it could take weeks to pick up his trail again.

She was beginning to wonder if DelCour had gone in one of the doors to either side of them when a dark silhouette appeared at the far end of the alley. Beside her, she felt Bladen tense, but before she could think on it, a bullet suddenly whizzed past Cindra's head. She froze, startled, but Bladen was already grabbing her and pulling her into an open doorway just as several more shots rang out.

Cindra's pounding heart seemed to echo in the silence that followed and she leaned against the wall trembling. She'd never gotten shot at before and it was having more of an effect on her than she'd imagined. Bladen, however, looked visibly unaffected by the whole thing. He was standing just inside the door, his own weapon out and at the ready.

"Aren't we going to go after him?" she asked after a moment.

Bladen turned his head to look at her. "That depends. Can you explain why the hell your fiancé was shooting at you?"

Chapter Five

Cindra said nothing for a moment and Bladen turned away to stick his head out the doorway to look around. The alley was clear, which meant that DelCour had probably taken off. Holstering his weapon, he turned to focus his attention on the woman beside him again.

“I’d appreciate an answer, Cindra. Why was your fiancé shooting at you?”

She wet her lips. “I don’t know. He...he mustn’t have realized it was me,” she stammered. “He must have thought we were going to mug him or something.”

Bladen gave her a dubious look. “I doubt that,” he said. “He was standing close enough to have seen you clearly enough to recognize you. He was trying to kill you. Now, I want some answers, Cindra, or you’re on your own. What aren’t you telling me?”

Again, Cindra was silent for a moment and Bladen could almost see her crafty little mind working as she tried to come up with a logical explanation.

“I haven’t been completely honest with you,” she finally said.

Bladen blinked in surprise. Was Cindra really going to come clean with him? And if she did, what then? Did he simply forgive her and forget about what she’d done? To his shock, he realized he was fully prepared to do just that. By rights, he should to be furious at her, especially after she had almost gotten him killed, but for some reason, he just couldn’t bring himself to be angry with her. If anything, he was more pissed off at himself for what had happened. He knew better than to go charging down a dark alley after a scumbag like DelCour. Cindra had no experience when it came to hunting down a violent criminal like him. Bladen had to admit that part of him actually admired her for going after the guy though, even if it was foolish on her part. He sighed inwardly. This whole thing would have been so much easier if she had just been honest with him from the beginning. Well, maybe now she was going to be, he thought.

She reached up to tuck her hair behind her ear. “Those family heirlooms that Yale took were more than just costume jewelry,” she said “Some of them have been in my family for generations, including my great-great-grandmother’s wedding ring. It’s worth a fortune, even more than the money he stole from me. But the monetary value pales in comparison to what the jewelry means to my family. To me, that makes it priceless.”

Bladen stared at her in disbelief. He didn’t know whether he should be angry that she was continuing to lie to him, or be impressed that she had come up with such a story on the spur of the moment. “You’re doing all this for a ring?”

Her brow furrowed. “I told you, it’s extremely valuable, especially to my family.”

He snorted. “It must be. So, is that why you really didn’t want to approach him?”

She nodded. “Yes. I was hoping just to find out where he was staying so that we could sneak into his hotel room and get the jewelry back.”

“It’s a good plan, I suppose, but still rather dangerous, don’t you think, especially considering he just tried to kill you?”

“Not if he doesn’t see us coming next time,” she said and then glanced toward the door. “Shouldn’t we try to catch up with him so we can find out where he’s staying?”

Bladen followed her gaze. “No,” he said. “If you didn’t notice, he was shooting at us, and I’ve discovered in my line of work that it’s best to not chase after a guy with a gun, especially when he knows you’re coming. Besides, he’s probably gone already.”

Alarm shown on her face. "Then how will we...?"

"Relax," he said. "There are other ways to find him. Right now, let's go back to the club and see what we can find out. If we're lucky, your ex bought all those drinks on a credit chip. If we get that, we can track him anywhere he goes, including his hotel."

"But now that he knows I've found him, he'll take off!" she protested.

Bladen shrugged. "Probably, but then we'll track him down again."

Cindra's brow furrowed. "But how are we going to find him? He could leave the planet."

"And we can't?" he countered. "It's just more tracking, Cindra. That is what a bounty hunter does, you know."

She flushed crimson at his remark, but said nothing.

"Come on," he said, taking her hand.

Amazingly, no one seemed to have heard the gunfire, and the rave was just winding down by the time they got back to the club. The doormen weren't stopping people from going in now, and she and Bladen simply walked right past them. Once inside, Bladen led her over to the nearest bar.

The bartender, a tall lanky guy with spiky hair and tattoos covering his arms, barely glanced at them as he wiped down the bar. "We're done serving for the night."

"We don't want a drink, just some information," Bladen told him.

The man stopped what he was doing to regard them warily. "What kind of information?"

Bladen took out several large credits and held them up. "If a guy came in here and bought a drink with a credit chip over there," he said, indicating the bar across the room, "would you be able to pull that chip number up on our computer if I gave you his name?"

The bartender eyed the money for a moment. "Sure, All of the machines are routed through a central computer. It makes running a tab easier in here. But I could take a lot of heat for giving out information like that, you know."

Undeterred, Bladen took out a few more bills. "But you could also make a lot of money for information like that."

The man hesitated for only a moment before snatching the credits out of Bladen's hand. He looked around furtively, and then shoved the money in his pocket. "Who you looking for?"

"The name's Yale Bron'ti," Bladen said, spelling it for the bartender.

The man pulled a computer keyboard out from underneath the bar and pressed one of the buttons to pull up the holo-screen. When it appeared, he typed in the name Bladen had given him. After a moment, he nodded. "Yeah, Bron'ti paid with his chip. I'll print you a receipt."

Printing the receipt took only seconds and she and Bladen were headed back to his loft a few minutes later. Once there, Cindra perched on Bladen's desk and waited impatiently while he ran a check on DelCour's chip number. Within minutes, Bladen discovered that DelCour had used the chip at more than a hundred places on Pendari. But the only hotel was a high-priced one named The Stargazer.

Cindra hopped off Bladen's desk excitedly. "I'll go change. Wait for me."

She changed clothes quickly, slipping into the dress she'd worn yesterday. Bladen had changed as well, and was

waiting for her when she came out of the bathroom.

The Stargazer was a beautiful high-rise hotel in the central downtown area. On any other day, Cindra would have been impressed by its grandeur, but she was too preoccupied with what she was going to do about DelCour to take much notice of it. Her mind was going a hundred miles a minute. On the way to the hotel, Bladen had said they would wait until DelCour was out and then sneak into his room to look for the jewelry, but that plan posed a problem for her. For starters, what would she say when they couldn't find the jewelry? Moreover, how was she going to get DelCour with Bladen at her side?

She still hadn't come up with a plan as she and Bladen headed for the front desk. The tall, dark-haired man working there looked up as they approached.

"May I help you?" he asked.

"We're looking for Yale Bron'ti's room," Bladen said. He didn't even attempt to come up with a cover story. Instead, he just slapped a large credit on the counter.

The man smoothly palmed the credit without comment and typed something on his computer. He studied the holo-screen for a moment before returning his gaze to her and Bladen. "It seems that Mr. Bron'ti checked out of our hotel this morning. About an hour ago, actually."

"Dammit!" Cindra muttered, upset that he'd checked out, but at the same time a little relieved she wouldn't have to devise a plan to give Bladen the slip. She looked at him. "What do we do now?"

Bladen said nothing for a moment. "It's safe to assume he's back on the run again," he replied. "Since we have his chip number, we can track him that way. Or we can start checking with all the inter-planetary transport companies to see if he booked a flight with one of them."

Her brow furrowed. "If he thinks we're onto him, he'll probably get rid of that credit chip, so I say we go with the transport companies."

After they had grabbed a cup of coffee and a quick bite to eat at a café down the street from his office, Bladen got to work on checking with the various companies that provided transport between Pendari and the other planets in the star system. There were a lot of them, and it took some time. The first dozen he checked with had no record of Yale Bron'ti either booking a flight or chartering a private transport, which made Bladen suspect that DelCour had probably taken a new name. A few more com-calls later, he got lucky and learned that DelCour had indeed chartered a transport under the name Bron'ti. Not only had he used the same alias, but he had also used the same chip number. Either he was confident that they wouldn't be following him, or he was just sloppy, which was a little surprising considering the kind of man that DelCour was.

"Got him," Bladen said to Cindra as he closed the link on his communicator. "Bron'ti chartered a private transport to Telmalon this morning."

He had posed the question to Cindra back at the hotel about whether she thought they should check with the transport companies or follow DelCour's credit chip simply to see what she would say, and had been impressed with her answer. The transport companies would have been his suggestion, too. At least she was starting to think like a bounty hunter.

Bladen shook his head as he realized he'd just paid Cindra a compliment. What kind of hold did she have on him? Even when she was doing her best to manipulate him, there was still something so intriguing about her that he couldn't remain objective, no matter how hard he tried. It was more than how beautiful she was, or even how great the sex was. It was difficult to believe, but he was actually beginning to enjoy spending time with her. Hell, if he didn't know better, he'd think he was falling for her.



Cindra's brow furrowed at the name of the planet. "Do you think we can get a flight?"

He grinned. "Oh, I'm pretty sure we can get a flight."

She asked what he meant by that, but Bladen's grin only broadened as he told her to get packed. Thirty minutes later, they pulled into a parking garage belonging to a private space dock.

As Cindra stepped out of his transport vehicle, she took one look at the sleek spacecrafts docked there and lifted a questioning brow at him. "You have your own ship?" she asked incredulously.

He nodded. "It makes hunting fugitives a hell of a lot easier. Most commercial transports frown on dragging a fugitive on board locked up in cuffs and chains."

Cindra's brow furrowed. She had assumed she'd drop DelCour off with the local security bureau just like she had done with the other criminals she'd brought in. She'd never thought about possibly having to take him to another planet. She wasn't sure why she'd have to do that, but she'd better make some com calls when it came time to capture him, just to make sure there wouldn't be any problems.

"How did you afford to buy a ship?" she asked Bladen. "Is business that good?"

He shrugged. "Not really," he admitted. "I sort of confiscated it from one of the fugitives that I put in jail. I figured he wouldn't need it."

"Oh," was all she said, making no further comment as they walked down the dock.

Bladen's ship was docked halfway down the quay. A sleek looking craft on the outside, it was even more impressive on the inside. In addition to the cockpit with its comfortable-looking chairs and array of controls, the hold area had been converted into a passenger compartment complete with not only chairs and a holo-screen, but also a huge bed as well.

Seeing the luxurious looking bed prompted some rather sexy thoughts, but she put those aside for now. "How many hours is it to Telmalon?" she asked as Bladen took a seat behind the console and started the ship's engine.

"About fourteen," he replied.

Her brow furrowed as she tried not to think of the lead DelCour had on them. She consoled herself with the fact that he would probably think he was safe on Telmalon and therefore wouldn't be too difficult to track down. She just hoped he wasn't smarter than she and Bladen were giving him credit for. DelCour might very well jump to another ship on Telmalon just to throw them off his trail. She took a deep, claming breath and forced herself to stop worrying about it; there was nothing she could do but get to Telmalon and work from there.

To distract herself from thinking about DelCour, Cindra watched Bladen finish the pre-flight check and then taxied the craft to the short take-off line. There were only a few ships in front of them and within minutes, they were hurtling away from the planet. As Bladen prepared the ship for interstellar flight, she found herself watching his hands as they moved over the controls. Damn, what was it with her and his hands? Just watching them move in such a sure, confident manner was getting her really turned on and invoking some very interesting thoughts about what those hands could be doing to her during the long trip to Telmalon. Maybe she just might have to bring up the subject of spanking, she thought with a smile.

She almost shook her head at the thought. What the heck had come over her lately? She couldn't seem to be alone with Bladen for more than five minutes without thinking of sleeping with him, and every time she thought about sleeping with him, she started to fantasize about him spanking her. Not only had she never met a man who could excite her simply by doing something as innocuous as flying a ship, but she'd never ever met a man who could make her want a spanking. She couldn't say why he had that effect on her, and frankly she didn't care. All she

knew was that she liked it.

After they made the jump to light speed, Cindra relaxed back in her comfortable chair and crossed her legs and lazily dangling her sandal from her foot as she regarded Bladen. He was studying something on the hand-held computer screen, unaware of her observation and she watched as his fingers deftly worked the controls. She imagined those fingers on her bare skin, trailing up her arm and along her shoulder before moving lower to caress her breasts. She let the fantasy play out for a moment, and then decided that the real thing would be much better than her imagination.

“So,” she said. “Can you put this ship of yours on auto-pilot?”

He gave her a sidelong glance. “Of course,” he said. “Why do you ask?”

She gave him a sultry look. “Because I can think of a lot better things to do with our time than sit here and watch the stars go by.”

Without waiting for a reply, she got to her feet and sidled past his chair to walk in the direction of the bedroom. She undid the zipper on the back of her dress as she did so, and then paused in the doorway to look over her shoulder at him before letting it fall to the floor at her feet. Her skimpy bra and panties quickly followed, leaving her completely naked before him. Giving him a sexy smile, she slowly walked over to the bed. Sitting down, she settled herself back against the pillows and waited for the handsome bounty hunter to join her.

But Bladen didn’t join her right away. Instead, he stood in the doorway, regarding her with a smoldering look in his golden brown eyes. He was looking at the same way he had that night when she was in the shower and it was having a similar arousing effect on her now. She blushed at her own wantonness. God, what was it about him that made her so bold?

Almost without thinking, Cindra slid her hand along her body, over her breasts, and down between her legs. Her pussy was already wet and she slid her hand along the folds to moisten her fingers before beginning to gently caress the sensitive nub of her clit. She couldn’t believe she’d been too shy to do this that first night in the shower while he’d been watching her. Touching herself in front of him was incredibly arousing.

She didn’t know how arousing it actually was however, until she felt the first tremors of an approaching orgasm start to build between her legs. She was about to come already!

Deciding she wanted to draw things out a bit longer, Cindra quickly pulled her fingers away from her clit and began to lightly trail them up and down her thighs. Abruptly remembering that she’d planned to bring up the subject of spanking, she rolled onto her side and with one hand, slowly traced little circles on her bottom.

Bladen’s eyes narrowed with interest, and she smiled as she continued to play with her bottom. He quite obviously loved that part of her anatomy, she mused. Thinking it was time to really heat things up, Cindra lifted her hand and brought it down sharply on her ass. Where before the bounty hunter’s eyes had narrowed, now they went wide, and she spanked herself a few more times before giving him a wicked smile.

“I think you could do a much better job of this, don’t you?” she teased.

Cindra couldn’t believe she had just said that. Those words had to rank as the most forward thing she’d ever said to any man.

To her delight, Bladen didn’t need any further encouragement. He was immediately at her side, urging her up onto her hands and knees. Oooh, she thought. The position alone was enough to get her pussy purring!

She held her breath, waiting for that first spank, but Bladen tricked her, caressing her bottom instead. She didn’t mind that at all though, and when the first spank finally did come a moment later, it made it that much more

surprising.

“Oh!” she yelled.

He ran his hand over the offended area. “Too hard?”

She shook her head. “No, you just caught me by surprise, that’s all.”

Behind her, Bladen chuckled softly as he brought his hand down on her bottom again. Cindra bit her lip to stifle her yelp this time, afraid that if she didn’t, he might stop. And she definitely didn’t want him to stop!

Bladen more than satisfied her on that account, administering several dozen sharp smacks to first one cheek and then the other. This spanking stung way more than the one he’d given her in his office the other day, but she was enjoying it even more than she had then. She couldn’t believe how incredibly aroused she was getting just from the feel of his hand smacking against her ass. In fact, she was so turned on, she thought she might just come if he kept spanking her.

But to her dismay, Bladen chose that moment to stop. Brow furrowing, she glanced over her shoulder to see that he was once again leaning back against the door frame, his arms folded and a teasing expression on his face.

“Aren’t you going to join me?” she asked softly, abruptly longing to have his naked body on hers.

His mouth quirked. “In a moment,” he replied. “For now, I think I’d rather watch you touch yourself again.”

The request made her pussy tingle as if he’d just run his tongue along the folds of it. God, his voice was so sexy. She could come just from hearing him speak!

Moving gracefully onto her back, Cindra gave him a sultry look. “You mean like this?” she asked, spreading her legs wide so that he would have a good view as she ran her fingers along the folds and over her aroused clit.

Bladen made no reply as she slowly circled her fingers around her plump clit. She was driving herself crazy and she let out a little sigh of pleasure. She moved her free hand languorously over her stomach and breasts, caressing and teasing herself into a fever pitch. She knew if she quickened the rhythm even a little that she would be coming in moments. But she really wanted to save that for Bladen, so she forced herself to back off and go more slowly.

Bladen, however, must have sensed she was close to coming because he slowly began unbuttoning his shirt. The material parted to reveal a tantalizing glimpse of bare skin, and she watched hungrily as he stripped off the garment and dropped it to the floor alongside her dress. His chest was smooth and well-muscled, and she couldn’t wait to run her hands over his broad shoulders and down his taut stomach. His abs were so appealing that she had an almost irresistible urge to bite and nibble every lean, defined muscle there.

Unfastening his gun belt, Bladen dropped that to the floor as well, and her gaze followed his hands as they went the buttons of his breeches. Her hand on her pussy stilled and she watched transfixed as he unbuttoned his breeches, then pushed them down trim hips to reveal well-muscled legs. Fully naked now, with his cock hard standing erect, he walked over to the bed.

Cindra sat up, automatically tilting her head back as he bent to kiss her. His hands delved into her long hair, his fingers gently massaging as his mouth devoured hers, and when he lifted his head long moment later, she was breathless.

She gazed up at him from beneath lowered lashes, her lips slightly parted and eager for more of his kisses. When he closed his mouth of hers this time however, Bladen gently pushed her back against the pillows. His hand trailed down the long column of her neck to find her breast, and he rubbed his thumb round and around her nipple until she felt it grow hard and turgid beneath his fingertip. Oh God, no more teasing, she thought. She couldn’t

take any more!

Cindra moaned, arching up against him, and he dragged his mouth from hers to trail moist, hot kisses down her neck and over to her other breast. Taking her nipple into his mouth, he gently suckled on the little peak until it was as hard as its counterpart.

Abruptly, he switched to the other nipple, giving it the same amount of attention. Only when both were aroused and tingling did he move lower to trace kisses down her stomach to the soft womanly folds between her thighs. Grasping her hips in each of his hands, he slowly ran his tongue along her slick folds.

He teased her there for a few moments, and then pulled back to nibble and kiss the inside of her thigh, moving down to her knee, and then back up the other side. Each time, he stopped only for the barest moment to tease her pussy with his tongue, doing it over and over until she thought she would scream. Finally, he focused his attention on the place where she wanted him to touch her the most.

Cindra moaned with pleasure as he began to gently make slow, sensuous circles around her sensitive clit with his tongue. Round and round he went, sometimes delving into her folds, sometimes moving down to her pussy before going back to lick her clit again. He was driving her absolutely crazy!

When she felt her orgasm beginning to build, she reached down to thread her fingers in his hair, holding him in place in case he planned on teasing her some more. But he wasn't, and when she came, she writhed beneath him uncontrollably, crying out at the intensity of her orgasm. Wave after wave of pleasure rolled over her and she threw back her head and gave herself over to it. God, she wanted it to go on and on!

But eventually her orgasm began to taper off and for several long moments, all Cindra she could do was gasp for breath. But then the need to have Bladen inside became so powerful that she had no choice but to obey. Barely even realizing what she was doing, she tugged him up beside her and climbed on top of him.

Bladen tried to reach for her, but she grabbed his wrists in each of her hands and pinned them back above his head. Tonight, she thought as she lowered herself onto his hard shaft, she was in charge.

Cindra rode him slowly at first, not wanting either of them to come too quickly. Oh God, his cock felt so incredible in this position, like it was touching the very depths of her soul. She tried her best to control the pace, but with Bladen thrusting his hips, she soon gave up any pretense of taking her time. Giving in to the pleasure of having him inside of her, she began bouncing up and down on his cock faster and faster, meeting his thrusts, until they were both crying out with their release.

Afterward, too exhausted to do more than lay draped across his chest, Cindra found herself once again amazed by how fantastic the sex always was with Bladen. She tried to convince it wasn't Bladen that made it so great, but because they always did it in different and exciting places. But there was a little voice in her head telling her that she wasn't being honest with herself. That the reason the sex was so terrific was because it was turning into more than "just sex."

The realization alarmed her. The only reason she had been able to use Bladen at all was because he was just a means to an end for her. But how could she keep telling herself that if she was starting to feel something for him? Just the thought of deceiving him any more made her squirm in her skin. But how could she possibly tell him the truth? Would he even be willing to listen long enough for her to get to the part where she admitted she was starting to feel something for him? She very much doubted it.

But as Bladen wrapped his arm around her and pulled her close, Cindra began to think it might really be possible to tell him the truth. Her lips curving into a smile, she let herself fall asleep in the warmth of his arms.

Chapter Six

Cindra was still curled up against Bladen when she awoke the next morning. She glanced at the holo-clock and saw to her surprise that they had slept for more than ten hours. She supposed they needed it, considering they'd been up all night. And she couldn't deny that it was definitely comfortable sleeping snuggled up against him. As she lay there luxuriating in the feeling, she abruptly remembered the decision she had made to tell Bladen everything. It had sounded so simple in the afterglow of their lovemaking the night before, but now it seemed so much more complicated. While there was a part of her that yearned to tell him exactly who she was, there was another part of her that knew if she did, she would almost assuredly lose him. Even if by some chance Bladen forgave her for deceiving him, she couldn't imagine he would ever want her hunting down someone as dangerous as DelCour. And if he didn't forgive her, he'd take off and she'd have no way to find DelCour after that. It seemed she was screwed either way.

Beside her, Bladen stirred and at finding her curled up against him, he gave her a lazy smile.

"Morning," he said, tilting her chin to give her a tender kiss on the lips. A moment later, he lifted his head to glance at the holo-clock and his eyes widened. "Wow, we slept a long time. We'll be in Telmalon airspace in less than an hour. I have to go take the controls."

As Cindra watched Bladen pull on his breeches, she debated again as to what she should do. Knowing it was the coward's way out, she finally decided to let things go on as they had been for a little while longer. If she thought about it some more, she might be able to figure out a way to capture DelCour and still keep Bladen.

After landing on Telmalon, they caught a hover-cab and headed straight to the resort Bladen had booked for them. Set on a stretch of white, sandy beach, Cindra found herself wishing she and Bladen were there on vacation instead of tracking some fugitive. She shook her head. Right now, she had to focus on finding DelCour. That was what mattered. Once she found him, then everything else would take care of itself. She was almost relieved when Bladen suggested they start canvassing hotels after checking into their room.

They went to all the big, expensive hotels first, figuring DelCour wouldn't stay at any of the smaller, cheaper places anyway, but after several hours of showing his picture around, they still had no leads on his whereabouts.

"We're never going to find him like this," Bladen said in disgust as he crossed another hotel off the list they had made. "There must be at least seventy-five more places on here. And that's just on this main island."

Since it was getting late, they had stopped for dinner at a small restaurant on the coast, and Cindra considered his words as she poured dressing on her salad. "Well, he does seem to like hanging out at sex clubs, so maybe we should try some of those," she suggested after a moment. She told herself that she was simply being practical, that it had nothing whatsoever to do with the incredibly hot sex she and Bladen had had the last time they'd been to one of those places.

He thought a moment before nodding his head. "It's worth a shot," he agreed and then wryly added, "Let's just hope there aren't a hundred of those around here, too."

The first several clubs they went to had nothing to offer either in the way of information or entertainment, but Sexcapades, a club that overlooked the beach, was a different story – at least when it came to the entertainment, Cindra thought. Unlike the sex club they had visited on Pendari, Sexcapades was more of a nightclub. No one greeted them at the door and inside there was not only one sex show, but several shows all going on at the same time on various stages around the room. There were no booths either, but small tables throughout, and as she and Bladen made their way around the room, she couldn't help but be distracted by each show as they walked by.

Bladen stopped at one of the tables and as he looked around for a server, Cindra found her gaze drawn to the stage behind him. On it, a beautiful woman was draped over her partner's knee while he spanked her upturned bottom with an oval-shaped wooden paddle. Each time the paddle slapped against her bare skin, the woman

would let out a moan, and Cindra watched transfixed as her asscheeks went from creamy white to a cherry red under the man's ministrations.

Though the paddle obviously had to sting, the woman didn't look like she minded it. If anything, she looked like she was in the throes of ecstasy. As she watched, Cindra couldn't help but wonder how it would feel to get spanked with a paddle like that.

Abruptly, she imagined herself in the woman's position, being held down across Bladen's knee while he paddled her bare ass. Remembering how much his hand had stung, Cindra imagined she would probably be squirming and kicking a lot more if he were using a paddle, and yet the idea of him spanking her with one was incredibly arousing. Beneath her short skirt, her bottom began to tingle and she felt her pussy start to get wet. Before she had a chance to explore the fantasy further however, a voice intruded on her thoughts and she reluctantly dragged her gaze away from the couple on stage to see Bladen showing the photo of Marek DelCour to one of the waiters.

The man studied it for a moment. "Naren LaRay. Yeah, he's been in before, but he doesn't come here that much."

Bladen slid several hundred galactic credits across the table toward the man. "Would you by any chance know where we might find him?"

The waiter palmed the money smoothly and then explained, "We're a little too tame for him. Our club caters to a wide variety of interests and Mr. LaRay tends to enjoy some rather specific hobbies. He also likes to take an active role in the entertainment and we only permit our clientele to watch."

"Do you know what clubs he might go to then?" Bladen asked.

The server nodded. "You might want to try the Strap and Cuff." He paused. "But I should probably mention that if you go there, you'll be expected to take part in what goes on."

Cindra's brow furrowed. She'd never been to one, but from the name, she assumed that the Strap and Cuff was some kind of S&M club. It sounded like the kind of place that would be right up DelCour's alley.

As the server left to walk over to a nearby table, she turned to Bladen. "Should we go over to that club he was talking about?"

Bladen lifted a brow. "You sure about that? You heard what he said. If we go there, we're probably going to have to take part in what they're doing, especially if we expect people to talk to us. I don't want to put you in a situation you're uncomfortable with."

Cindra said nothing for a moment as she shifted her gaze to the stage behind him. The woman was still getting spanked, but now she was wiggling around in such a way that made Cindra think she might actually be having an orgasm. There would obviously be a lot of spanking at the Strap and Cuff, she thought. But while it still looked intriguing, she wasn't sure if it was something she could do with a bunch of strangers watching. Then again, considering how exciting all the sex she and Bladen had been having in public had been, getting spanked in front of someone might make it even that much more exciting.

She turned her attention back to Bladen. "We've come all this way, we can't turn back now," she said, and then smiled. "Besides, I'm always up for trying something new."

Since neither of them felt their current attire would prove adequate for the Strap and Cuff, they were forced to go shopping again, not that Cindra minded. Though she saw a lot of things she liked, she decided on a black leather mini-skirt that was made up of panels which showed off her legs all the way to her hips when she walked. She paired it with black leather above-the-knee boots and a black leather bustier that showed off more than a little cleavage. To complete the outfit, she wore a leather choker. It had a small heart-shaped lock on it that dangled in

the hollow of her throat, and though she thought it might be a bit over the top, she still couldn't resist buying it.

Bladen was wearing a snug-fitting pair of black leather breeches and boots with a loose-fitting white shirt that billowed when he moved, and as they took a hover-cab to the club, Cindra kept picturing herself draped across his knee while he reddened her asscheeks. She was so turned on by the time they arrived at the Strap and Cuff that she could hardly wait to go inside.

Bladen, however, paused outside the door. "Are you sure you want to do this?" he asked her. "We can always wait out here and then follow him if he shows up."

Her brow furrowed. "Bladen, that's crazy. We could wait forever for him to show up. And what if he doesn't show up at all?" She shook her head. "Inside, we can ask around. If he comes here a lot, someone's bound to know him. They might even know where he's staying."

Bladen said nothing for a long time, but then he finally nodded. "Okay. It's your call. But if you start feeling uncomfortable, just give me a sign and we're out there."

Cindra didn't know what to expect, but the Strap and Cuff was nothing like she had pictured it. After Bladen had paid the exorbitant cover charge, they were shown into a room that reminded Cindra of a library. There were shelves full of books and paintings on the walls, even a huge antique desk and chair. Though everything looked innocent enough on the surface, as she and Bladen moved into the room, she saw that the paintings were a bit on the erotic side, as were the titles of the books.

She let her gaze run casually over the small group of men and women in the room. Though some of the women had on leather skirts and bustiers similar to hers, Cindra noted, most of them wore simple cocktail dresses. The men were dressed either in leather breeches or suits. Much to Cindra's chagrin, not a one of them was doing anything even remotely kinky.

She leaned close to Bladen and whispered in his ear. "Are you sure we're in the right place?"

He shrugged. "That's the name that's on the door. Unless the waiter gave us bad information. Let's go look around."

Taking her hand, he led her past a group of men sipping after-dinner drinks and into the next room. This one was a little more like what she had expected. With walls of rough stone, it resembled a dungeon, complete with shackles on the wall and a whipping post in the center of the room. Secured to the post was a naked woman, her arms high above her head, her back to them. Her skin was so pale it looked almost ghostly and Cindra could just make out the faint crisscross of white scars on the woman's back and derriere. Cindra watched in astonishment as a big man brandishing a whip stepped up behind the woman. Giving Bladen a little push, she hurried him from the room just as the man drew his arm back and as they stepped through the doorway, she could hear the sound of the woman's scream as the whip lashed against her tender skin. While the thought of spanking might be arousing, what was going on in that room just looked too painful to even consider trying out.

Though there was also another dungeon room like the one they'd just left, the next several rooms they went into after that were much more to her liking. In some, there were plush velvet draperies and plump-cushioned couches where women were being spanked by men, and in some cases, other women. She hadn't thought about a woman spanking another woman, but as she watched a pretty blonde redden a petite dark-haired girl's ass, Cindra had to admit that she found the idea sort of intriguing.

Bladen tried to strike up a conversation with several people there, but was coolly rebuffed at every turn. Though he frowned slightly, he said nothing as he led Cindra into the adjoining room. Like the others, this one was decorated with luscious fabrics and plush furniture, but her gaze was immediately drawn to the odd-looking piece of furniture on the other side of the room. It resembled the saw horses she had seen at construction sites, but it

was heavily padded on top and had four leather cuffs attached to it, two on the top and one on each leg. It was both the oddest, and most intriguing piece of furniture she had ever seen. Of course, never having seen one before walking into the club, she probably wouldn't have known exactly what it was for if she hadn't seen a girl tied down over it and getting spanked in one of the other rooms.

Dragging her gaze away from the padded horse, Cindra turned her attention to the small group of people clustered around a cushioned bench in the center of the room. As Bladen led her over to them, she saw a pretty blond girl being taken over a handsome man's knee. Even though her bottom was already bright red from the spanking she'd obviously just gotten, the girl didn't protest when her partner told their audience that he thought she needed "just a few more."

Cindra watched in fascination as the man began to spank the woman's upturned bottom again. He worked in a methodical fashion, smacking first one cheek and then the other, going back and forth, back and forth until her cheeks positively glowed. Though the girl kicked and squirmed and even squealed in protest for most of it, it was obvious she was enjoying herself. When he was done spanking her, which wasn't until a good ten minutes later, the man turned his partner over to sit on his lap and pressed his lips to hers.

After the performance, the crowd dispersed and moved to other areas of the room where they sat down to chat and enjoy their drinks. Bladen tried to insert himself and Cindra into the small group of people talking with the couple that had just given the show, but anything he said was again met with cool, but polite replies, and after a minute, the group simply dispersed to join another, leaving her and Bladen standing there.

Cindra could tell from his clenched jaw that Bladen was getting frustrated. "Maybe they'll talk to us once they get to know us," she offered quietly.

He snorted. "And how are they going to get to know us when they won't even talk to us?"

She was trying to come up with an answer to that when a male voice intruded on their conversation.

"They're waiting to see if you're really in the scene or whether you're just here to watch."

Cindra turned to see a distinguished-looking older gentleman dressed in an impeccably tailored suit standing behind her.

"Pardon me?" Bladen said.

The man smiled. "Members of our club are a rather tight-knit group," he explained. "Especially around tourists who gawk at us as if we were the paid entertainment. They'll open up to you once they see you perform."

Cindra felt her pulse skip a beat at the word, "perform." Her pussy immediately went wet at the thought!

Bladen glanced at her. "I see," he said. "Since we're new here, do you mind if I ask what the protocol is when it comes to that?"

"Not at all." The man gestured to the room. "The floor is yours. Simply do whatever you feel comfortable with," he said and then with a nod, moved off to join the rest of the people clustered on the far side of the room.

Bladen looked at her. "Are you sure about this?"

She nodded wordlessly.

He gently ran a finger down her cheek. "I'll take it easy on you."

Cindra gave him a sexy little smile. "Not too easy," she said softly. "We have to make this look good, you know."



She leaned close to gently kiss him on the mouth and then before he could reply, she sidled past him to walk over to the padded horse. He probably could have simply taken her over his knee, she supposed, but she'd been drawn to the horse ever since they'd seen the girl tied down and getting spanked over one in the other room.

Stepping up behind it, she spread her legs so they were in line with the horse's wooden ones, and then bent over at the waist so that she was resting on the padded top. Balancing on her forearms, she placed her wrists in the padded leather cuffs, and then looked over her shoulder at Bladen. He was standing where she'd left him, a sexy smile curving the corner of his mouth, and she wondered what he was thinking. After a moment, he walked across the room to where she lay draped over the horse.

The first thing Bladen did was secure the cuffs around each of her wrists, and she felt her stomach do a cartwheel as he tightened first one and then the other. She couldn't believe she was actually doing this, and in a room full of people, no less!

After her wrists were securely bound, she expected Bladen to do the same to her ankles, but he surprised her by sliding his hand into her long hair and tipping her head back. She blinked up at him, wondering if he was going to ask her again if she was sure about what they were about to do, but instead, he bent his head to cover her mouth with his in a long, intoxicating kiss. Lifting his head, he gazed into her eyes for a long moment before moving around behind her. As he did so, he ran his hand over her hip and down her booted leg, and she let out a delicious little shiver as she felt him fasten the cuffs around her ankles. Now, with wrists and ankles both cuffed to the wooden horse, she could do nothing but wait in breathless anticipation for Bladen to begin.

Judging by the silence in the room, she was pretty sure they had finally gotten the rest of the patrons' attention. And as she had told Bladen, now they just had to make this look good. Though performing in front of a room full of people didn't come all that naturally to her, being with Bladen did, and as he reached out to run his hand over her bare thigh again, she forgot all about their audience.

Draped over the padded horse, Cindra trembled as she felt Bladen lift her skirt. She was wearing only a minuscule thong underneath and she heard Bladen's sharp intake of breath as he exposed her bare bottom. Then he was caressing the curve of her ass and it was her turn to catch her breath. His touch was light and teasing, his fingers gliding over her skin, and she let out a soft little moan of pleasure as he trailed his hand up the back of her thigh and over her naked ass.

Cindra gasped as Bladen's hand suddenly smacked against her bottom. The spank hadn't been all that hard, but it still stung, though in the most delicious way, and she could hardly wait for him to do it again. The next slap was to her other cheek, but this one was a little harder, and she let out a startled little "oh!" More spanks followed, with Bladen alternating from cheek to cheek until her bottom felt hot all over. With it, came a tingling in her pussy that would not be ignored, and she automatically began to grind her clit against the padded edge of the horse.

Abruptly, the spanking stopped and she looked over her shoulder to see Bladen admiring his handiwork. She opened her mouth to tell him not to stop, but as he walked around to the wall in front of her, she realized he had no intention of stopping. Instead, he was choosing which implement to spank her with next!

She watched as his gaze slowly moved over the array of paddles, crops, and straps, wondering which he would choose and waiting breathlessly for him to do so. After a moment, he reached for one of the straps and slapped it experimentally against his palm. On one end, it had a handle, and on the other was a thin, flexible piece of leather about four inches wide. She felt her pussy getting even wetter as she imagined how it would feel against her bare bottom.

Bladen's eyes held hers for a long moment before he circled around to take up a position behind her again, and Cindra found herself holding her breath. Instinctively, she tensed as she waited for the first lash and though she

was anticipating it, when it came, she still cried out in surprise.

The leather strap felt different than his hand, but no less intense, and she let out another yelp as he slapped her other cheek with it. Somehow, the extra-loud sound that the strap was making only added to the thrill she was receiving. He fell into an easy rhythm after that, sometimes alternating from cheek to cheek, sometimes concentrating on one cheek until it felt like it was glowing before moving to the opposite side. Sometimes, he'd even move lower so that the strap flicked against the sensitive area of her sit-spots or along the backs of her thighs, making her squirm and cry out. Which in turn only made her clit grind against the padded horse even more.

Her cries soon became moans of pleasure the more he spanked her however, and as she continued to writhe against the padded horse, the closer and closer she got to making herself come. Not so long ago, she would have been too shy to have ventured into a place like this, much less have allowed herself to be tied up and spanked while a group of strangers watched, and now here she was about to have an orgasm! And all she could think about was that she didn't want Bladen to stop what he was doing.

But apparently Bladen had decided she must have had enough because he stopped the strapping. He wouldn't dare! she thought. Her breath coming in quick, little pants, she gave him a desperate look over her shoulder.

"Don't stop," she pleaded hoarsely.

Bladen regarded her in surprise for a moment, and then lifted a brow.

"Spank me more," she begged. "Please."

The corner of his mouth edged up, but he said nothing as he tightened his grip on the handle. Lifting the strap, he brought the leather down hard on her ass again.

Cindra gasped, grinding against the padding as he spanked her over and over. The sensation of the strap connecting with her ass was more intense than anything she'd ever felt before. Her pussy clenched with every smack and within moments, she was having an orgasm so powerful she surely would have collapsed to the floor if it wasn't for the horse under her.

Afterward, she lay limply draped over the horse, only barely aware of Bladen releasing her from her bonds and helping her to her feet. Once she was standing before him however, she quickly regained her senses and reached up to kiss him lingeringly on the mouth.

Bladen reached out to gently brush her hair back from her face. "Were you really having that much fun, or were you just making it look good?" he asked softly.

Beneath her skirt, Cindra's ass was throbbing like crazy and she gave him a sexy smile as she reached back to rub her sore cheeks. "Well, put it this way, if it weren't for all of these people, I'd be begging you for more."

Before Bladen could answer, the group of people who had up to that point given them a cold reception now gathered around to welcome them to the club.

"That was quite impressive," one of the men said.

The petite brunette with him was nodding her head in agreement. "I do so love seeing a woman enjoy her spanking."

"Though I'm not sure I approve of a woman having an orgasm without permission," another of the men remarked.

“That’s because you’ve never been able to make a woman come just by spanking her,” the tall, slender blond woman standing beside Bladen retorted. With a smile, she leaned close to the bounty hunter. “Are you available to administer a spanking later?”

Cindra felt a stab of jealousy at the woman’s words. It hadn’t occurred to her that she and Bladen might have to play with others while they were at the club. She suddenly decided that idea didn’t appeal to her.

But Bladen’s mouth quirked. “I’m afraid not,” he told the woman as he glanced at Cindra. “We have an exclusive relationship.”

Cindra blinked. The tender way Bladen looked at her as he said the words made her feel like she was swooning all over again. It was amazing the effect five little words could have on her, she thought.

The light banter continued for several more minutes, and Cindra was amazed at how cordial everyone was being to them. After a moment, she and Bladen excused themselves to wander over to where the older gentleman they had spoken with before stood talking with another couple.

“We wanted to thank you for the tip,” Bladen said.

The man smiled. “Of course. I enjoyed the show.” His gaze went to Cindra for a moment before going back to Bladen. “It’s obvious that you two have a special connection.”

Cindra blushed while Bladen thanked the man for the compliment.

“I haven’t seen you here before,” the man continued. “Are you just visiting?”

Bladen nodded. “A friend recommended this club to us,” he said smoothly. “Perhaps you know him – Naren LaRay?”

The man nodded, his mouth curving. “I do, as does almost everyone who comes to the club. But he hasn’t been here in awhile. How did you meet him?”

“At a club on Pendari,” Bladen supplied without hesitation.

“So, you must be staying out on his island with him.”

Cindra felt her pulse leap. Finally, she thought, someone who not only knew DelCour, but knew where he was staying as well.

Beside her, Bladen chuckled casually. “We didn’t want to impose. When people say to drop in, they don’t always necessarily mean it.”

The other man laughed. “I understand what you’re saying, but in Naren’s case, he’s an exception to the rule. Springer Island is immense and he has guests there all the time.” He sipped the whiskey he was drinking. “You really should stop by. If you’re in the scene, that really is the place to be, you know. Naren puts on a party almost every night he’s here.”

Bladen nodded, as if considering the suggestion. “We’ll certainly think about it.”

Knowing it would look strange if she and Bladen simply left the club right away, they chatted with the man for a little while, but after he excused himself to talk with a pretty woman that had just entered the room, they slipped out.

“So, what do we do now?” she asked as they rode back to the hotel. She was absolutely thrilled they’d found such a solid lead on DelCour so quickly. The fugitive was almost in her grasp.

Bladen gave her a sidelong glance. "Tomorrow we'll find out where this Springer Island is and then get out there to take a look around."

She nodded. To tell the truth, she'd been half-afraid he would suggest they find the island and head out there tonight. While that suggestion wouldn't have been a bad one, she had to admit that after the spanking Bladen had just given her, the only thing on her mind right now was her bottom. Remembering the way the strap had felt on her ass made her squirm on the seat.

Bladen frowned as he caught the movement. "Does your bottom still hurt?"

"I wouldn't use the word hurt" she said, and then smiled. "But it does tingle like crazy."

He gently brushed her hair back. "I shouldn't have spanked you that hard."

"Trust me, you didn't spank me too hard," she laughed. "It was absolutely perfect."

At the hotel, Cindra practically ran to their room and once inside, she quickly hurried over to the full-length mirror to examine her bottom in the mirror. Lifting her skirt, she stared at her reflection and gasped.

"I can't believe my bottom is still red!" she exclaimed, and then looked at him. "Was it redder than this at the club?"

Bladen looked in the mirror, studying her reddened cheeks for a moment before answering. "Much redder."

A deliciously naughty idea came to Cindra as she continued to regard her reflection. Letting her skirt fall back into place, she turned to give him a sultry look. "Think you can make my bottom that red right now?"

## Chapter Seven

Bladen immediately went hard at her words. Cindra was absolutely amazing, he thought. He'd never met a woman who could get him so aroused so quickly, or so completely for that matter. He had to admit that her request surprised him, though. After the spanking back at the club, it was difficult to believe she would want another one so soon. Her ass wasn't nearly as red as it had been right after the strapping, but he had no doubt it was still tender.

When he didn't answer right away, Cindra looked at him uncertainly. "You do like spanking me, don't you?" she asked in a small voice.

Like it? God, he loved it! Mostly because it seemed to turn her on so much. He reached out to gently caress her cheek with his fingers. "Of course I do, but I spanked you pretty hard back at the club. Are you sure you're bottom can handle another one?"

She laughed. "Of course it can. I mean, I probably wouldn't want another one with a strap right now, but your hand would be just fine. In fact, it would be more than fine." She put her arms around his neck and leaned in close to kiss him on the mouth. "So, what do you think? Could I talk you into putting me over your knee?"

Bladen felt a smile tug at the corner of his mouth as he rested his hands on her waist. When she looked at him like that, she could probably talk him into anything, he thought. And the idea of having her over his knee was definitely a turn-on. "You think you'd like that position, then?"

"Mmm-hmm," she said in a throaty purr.

He gave her a lazy grin. "Then I think you need to do something about all these clothes you're wearing."

Looking up at him from beneath lowered lashes, Cindra stepped back and slowly undid the hooks on the bustier

she was wearing, then let it fall to the floor. God, her breasts were perfect! It was all he could do not to cup them in his hands so that he could nibble on their pert, rosy tips right then. But he forced himself to wait. It would only get better, he thought, watching as she wiggled free of her skirt. Standing before him wearing nothing but a tiny thong and her thigh-high, black boots, he decided he'd never seen a woman more beautiful. Her lips curving into a saucy, little smile, she reached for the waistband of the thong, but he stopped her.

"Leave that on. The boots, too," he said softly. There was just something so damn sexy about those boots that he couldn't let her take them off.

Taking her hand, Bladen led her over to the padded bench that was at the foot of the big bed and sat down. Giving her hand a gentle tug, he slowly guided her over his knee and held her in place with a hand on her lower back.

"You have a very spankable ass, do you know that?" Bladen asked, lightly caressing her bottom.

Draped over his knee, Cindra let out a soft, little giggle. "Thank you. I'll take that as a compliment."

"You should," he told her. "Your ass is absolutely perfect."

As he spoke, he continued to slowly rub and caress her cheeks, letting his hand trace every curve until he had Cindra moaning with pleasure. Only then did he lift his hand and bring it down sharply on her right cheek. She left out a little yelp and bucked on his lap.

"Too hard?" he asked.

Cindra only shook her head, her long hair brushing the floor.

Lifting his hand again, Bladen smacked her other cheek, harder this time, eliciting another cry. He worked back and forth from cheek to cheek, amazed at how quickly her bottom colored. It quickly turned a soft pink and then went to a dark rose within a few moments, and while she seemed to be enjoying it, he decided that it was time to stop and give her a break, at least for now.

Cindra immediately began to protest, but then let out an appreciative moan when he began to lightly caress her asscheeks again. Her skin was warm to the touch and he couldn't resist giving her bottom a firm squeeze. That elicited a groan of pleasure and he smiled at the throaty sound.

After a few more minutes of light caresses and gentle squeezes, Bladen decided she was ready for some more spanking. This time, though, he started with several sharp smacks on the backs of her thighs, which quickly had her kicking and squirming all over his lap. Feeling her wiggling like that was making his cock so hard he thought it might explode!

Since the backs of her thighs were more tender than her bottom, he didn't want to spend too much time there, so he moved back up to focus his attention on her ass again. He fell into an easy rhythm, applying a set of hard spanks and then following up with half a dozen lighter ones, knowing she could take more if he did it that way. Every once in awhile, he would stop to give her bottom a firm squeeze before going back to spanking her again.

It was while he was caressing her bottom that she lifted her head to look over her shoulder at him, desire in her blue eyes. "Bladen, touch me. Please!"

Bladen couldn't help but smile at the lust evident in her voice. Quite obviously, his spanking had gotten Cindra really hot. But while he was eager to slide his fingers underneath her thong to find out how excited she really was, he couldn't resist teasing her a little bit first.

"But Cindra, I thought you wanted me to redden your ass," he said, giving her ass a squeeze.

She let out a low, throaty moan. "I did. But now I want you to touch me. It's a woman's prerogative to change her mind, you know."

He chuckled. "You mean like this?" he asked softly, slipping his hand between her legs to lightly caress her pussy through the soaking wet thong.

"Oooh, yes," she breathed.

"And what about this?" He slipped his fingers underneath her thong to gently rub her clit.

She moaned, spreading her legs to give him more room. "Stop teasing!" she ordered.

His mouth quirked. "Whatever you say."

Deciding it was time to stop teasing her, Bladen slid one finger deep inside her pussy while reaching his other hand around to gently massage her plump, little clit. Cindra was so excited that it didn't take any time at all for her to start to come. Within moments, her whole body tensed and she was screaming out in pleasure.

Bladen could no longer contain himself, he had to have her now. Picking her up in his arms, he carried her over to the bed and gently set her down. She let out a gasp as her freshly-spanked asscheeks touched the bed, but he barely heard it as he yanked down her thong. He stripped off his own clothes just as fast, hurrying even more quickly when Cindra spread her legs in invitation. With his hard cock in hand, he knelt between her splayed legs and positioned himself at her moist opening. His first urge was to immediately plunge inside her, but instead he teased her by rubbing the head of his cock up and down her wet slit.

"Stop teasing me," she growled, reaching down to grasp his shaft and placing it exactly where she wanted it.

Finding that he could no longer wait himself, Bladen gave in to his excitement and plunged himself deep inside her. God, she was so tight and wet!

He claimed her lips with his own as he began to thrust in and out of her as hard as he could. She twined her fingers into his hair and a moment later, he felt her legs wrap around him. God, how he loved the feel of those boots against his skin. He was going to make her wear those twenty-four hours a day!

Bladen gave up any pretense at all of trying to take it slow. He didn't need to; Cindra was so aroused that she was practically coming the moment slid into her. He wasn't far behind and when his own release came, he groaned against her lips. It was as if he was pouring his entire soul into her, he thought.

After, all he could do was collapse back onto the bed and try to catch his breath, but to his surprise. Cindra jumped up to look at her asscheeks in the mirror again. "Wow!" she said in disbelief. "My bottom really is red."

After a few more moments of gazing at her reflection, she climbed back into bed to snuggle up against him. He held her in his arms, gazing up at the ceiling, his breathing still ragged. "Damn, that was good," he said. "Then again, it's always good with you. Everything is good with you."

Cindra said nothing in reply, but he could feel her smile against his shoulder and all at once, he realized what he'd just said. But there was no taking it back. Not that he wanted to anyway. It was true. He was having more fun with her than he'd ever had with another woman, and it wasn't just the sex. He couldn't deny there was a connection between them. And if it wasn't for the fact that she was lying to him, he would have been frigging overjoyed.

What the hell was he going to do now? Sure, he had some serious feelings going on for her - which was hard to believe, considering he knew she was using him - but how the hell could this possibly work out between them? At some point, either she was going to dump him so she could run off and capture DelCour, or Bladen was going to

have to do the same thing to her.

Unless he just came out and told her that he knew everything. Then maybe she might finally come clean with him and they could get past what she'd done. And then, if he had his way, they would just drop this whole idea of going after someone as dangerous as DelCour. Normally, Bladen wouldn't have a problem going after someone like DelCour, but the scumbag knew he was being chased now and that made him even more dangerous. Even if Bladen had been on his own, he probably would have backed off for a couple of weeks until DelCour's guard was down.

But the idea of Bladen just putting everything on the table like that with Cindra was naïve as hell and he knew it. If he confronted her, she would obviously try to deny it. And if he pushed her on it, she would probably just take off and go after DelCour on her own anyway. He definitely didn't want her doing that. But this was coming to a head whether he wanted it to or not. The only question was what he was going to do about it.

Bladen let out a sigh. He only wished he had some idea what was going on in Cindra's head.

Cindra was half asleep when she felt Bladen stir. She opened her eyes to find him propped up on an elbow beside her.

"Have you thought about what you're going to do after we catch up with Bron'ti and get your stuff back?" he asked.

She said nothing for a moment, too taken aback by the words to speak. Why was he asking her a question like that? she wondered. Could it be possible he was thinking about a future with her? How she wished that could be true.

Abruptly realizing that he was waiting for an answer, and that she didn't have one to give him, she gave him a small smile. "I don't know," she said honestly. "I've been chasing after him for so long that I really haven't thought about it."

It was all she could think to say. Even if Bladen did want a future with her, it could never work. There would be no happily ever after once he learned she'd lied to him about everything. So why was she even bothering to dream about it? The finality of that fact brought tears to her eyes and she fought hard to blink them back.

But Bladen didn't seem to notice as he gently brushed her hair back from her face. "Maybe you should think about it."

Cindra chewed on her lower lip. "I will," she replied, knowing even as she said the words that there was really nothing more to think about. Tears started in her eyes again and this time she didn't try to stop them as she and Bladen lay back on the pillows.

## Chapter Eight

She and Bladen discussed their next move over breakfast the following morning. Earlier, they had learned from the hotel's concierge that Springer Island was located just off the mainland. In fact, with binoculars, they could just about see it from the balcony off their hotel room. Since it was an island, Bladen suggested the best way to do any reconnaissance would be from a boat, so they rented a sleek motorboat from a place down the street. To make sure they looked the part of tourists, they stopped by the hotel boutique to pick up some bathing suits before going out.

Cindra chose a skimpy blue bikini that showed off her long legs and tanned skin, and when she took off the sarong skirt she'd bought with it, she noticed Bladen had a difficult time keeping his attention on the island. Which, when they'd first begun this whole thing, would have bothered her. Capturing DelCour was all that had

mattered to her back then. But now...

Now she was torn between wanting to tell Bladen the truth, and calling the whole thing off. So what if she didn't bring in DelCour? There were other fugitives to capture, other bounties to collect. But giving up on DelCour wouldn't necessarily fix everything. Sooner or later, Bladen would find out she was a fellow bounty hunter. And it would be better if he found out from her.

She looked up at a muttered expletive from Bladen. "Your ex has a lot of damn guards on that island. The place looks like a military compound," the bounty hunter said, holding out the binoculars so that she could take a look.

Reaching out to take them, Cindra held them up to her eyes, and then frowned. Men dressed entirely in black and carrying weapons, roamed the perimeter of the island. She moved the binoculars to focus on the huge house and her frown deepened when she saw the additional guards posted there. She hoped Bladen didn't ask why her ex-fiancé had such a large contingent of guards, because she wouldn't know what to answer to that. Seeing all of them was enough to make her realize her plan was never going to work, though. Her naïve idea of giving Bladen the slip and then capturing DelCour on her own would do nothing more than get her killed. Maybe she really should just drop the whole thing.

Lowering the binoculars, she looked at Bladen. "Maybe we should just forget the whole thing," she said quietly. "There are just too many guards."

It was the bounty hunter's turn to frown. "Forget...? What are you talking about?"

She looked away. "Even if they are family heirlooms, they're not worth getting killed for."

"No one said anything about getting killed, Cindra."

She sighed. "Bladen, those guards aren't carrying guns because they look good with their clothes. Sneaking onto that island is going to be dangerous, and I don't want you...either of us, I mean," she amended quickly, "getting hurt."

Bladen regarded her for a long moment in silence and then reached out to gently caress her cheek. "I'm a bounty hunter, remember? Dealing with dangerous criminals kind of comes with the territory. Besides, all I'm going to be doing is sneaking in to grab the jewelry. It'll be a piece of cake. It's not like we plan to confront your ex, right?"

She flushed. "Of course not," she said, even though that was exactly what she had been planning on doing. But not now. DelCour was dangerous. Of course, if it was just her safety she had to think about, then she might consider going through with it. But she didn't want to risk Bladen getting hurt. Which was exactly what would happen considering the bounty hunter didn't even know who Yale Bron'ti really was.

Beside her, she heard Bladen sigh. "You're right about one thing, though," he said. "Sneaking onto that island is going to be dangerous. Which is why I think you should wait at the hotel while I do it."

She blinked. "No!" she exclaimed. If she couldn't talk Bladen out of sneaking onto the island, then she would have to go with him to make sure he was safe. Taking a deep breath, she continued in a calmer voice. "I...I mean you can't. You wouldn't know what to look for."

He shrugged. "You can describe the stuff to me."

She wasn't going to be able to talk him out of it, she realized. "There's too much," she told him. "I'll have to come with you."

Bladen said nothing for a moment and she thought he would argue, but much to her surprise, he agreed.

"According to the guy at the Strap and Cuff, Bron'ti puts on a party just about every night, so I'm thinking that'll



be the best time to sneak onto the island.” Taking the binoculars from her, he held them up to his eyes again. “We can slip in without anyone noticing, get your jewelry, and then get back out.” He lowered the binoculars to look at her. “That sound good to you?”

Cindra sighed with relief. At least she’d be able to watch his back. Even more important, this would give her a way to get out of this mess without Bladen finding out who she really was. They could look around the compound for awhile and then when they didn’t find anything, she could simply say her ex-boyfriend must have already sold the stuff he’d stolen. She would tell Bladen she didn’t care about the heirlooms any more and then they could just leave Telmalon, and DelCour, far behind.

Once she and Bladen were back on Pendari, Cindra would come up with some way to come clean with him. Then again, maybe she would just claim that after spending so much time with Bladen, she had decided she wanted to become a bounty hunter, too. It would be a tough sell, but she might just be able to pull it off. All she had to do was make sure they didn’t get caught tonight.

“So, what do we do until then?” she asked Bladen.

Bladen set the binoculars down on the seat. “Well, it seems a shame to let this beautiful boat go to waste,” he said. Taking her hand, he pulled her to her feet and kissed her.

Now that she had come up with a plan to keep Bladen, Cindra let herself relax and just enjoy being with him. As his mouth moved over hers, his hands roamed over her shoulders and down her arms before moving back up to delve into her long hair. Cindra moaned and reached up to caress his bare chest, loving the feel of his hard muscles beneath her hands. She would never get tired of touching him, she thought.

Bladen’s fingers deftly untied the strings of her bikini top and she shivered in anticipation as it fell away from her breasts. Instinctively, she took a quick glance around. There were no other boats in the immediate vicinity and the ones that were out there were too far away to see they were doing. The same went for anyone on the island. But what if one of the boats just happened to move in their direction? Then whoever was on it was going to get one heck of a show. She smiled at the thought. She really was becoming quite the exhibitionist.

Then Bladen’s hands were on her again, gently cupping each round globe, and as she felt her nipples harden in response, she put all thoughts of a possible audience out of her mind. Let them watch, if they wanted to, she decided as Bladen lifted his head to trail kisses along her jaw line and down her neck. The trace of stubble on his face tickled her skin and she shivered again as he moved upward to nibble on her ear.

“Bladen...” she breathed.

His hands left her breasts to move lower, skimming over her rounded hips to slide her bikini bottom down her legs, and then up again to cup her firm, round bottom. He kissed her again before taking her hand and leading her over to the boat’s big bench seat.

Without a word, he pushed down his swim trunks and sat. She could have just straddled him and sat down right on his hard cock, but instead, Cindra dropped to her knees in front of him. Reaching out, she gently took his hard cock in her hands and bent forward to kiss the velvety smooth head.

Glancing up, she saw Bladen lean back and drape his arms over the seat so that he could watch what she was doing. She certainly didn’t mind; if anything, she loved having him watch her. Still looking up at him, she wrapped her hand around the base of his cock and let the entire length slide deep into her mouth.

With a groan, Bladen reached out and slid his fingers into her hair, urging her to take him even deeper. Cindra did, bobbing her head up and down on his cock, letting it go a little deeper each time. She could have enjoyed doing that for hours, but apparently Bladen had other things in mind because he gently tugged on her hair and

lifted her head. One look at the hungry expression on his face told her exactly what he wanted. Getting to her feet, she straddled him and lowered herself onto his hard cock in one smooth motion.

Cindra moaned as she felt him fill her completely. Holding onto his shoulders, she leaned forward to kiss him on the mouth as she began to ride his hard shaft. Bladen immediately grasped her hips, slowing her down and forcing her to move at a pace more to his liking. She already had him on the verge of coming, she realized with a surge of pride. But going slow was just as good for her. Pushing down hard so that his cock was as deep inside her pussy as it would go, she began to slowly rotate her hips in little circular motions. The movement caused her clit to rub against his groin in the most enjoyable way and she broke the kiss to let her head fall back with a groan.

“That’s it,” Bladen told her hoarsely. “Nice and slow.”

Cindra did as instructed, continuing to rotate her hips round and round slowly, bringing herself closer and closer to orgasm with each little circle. But while the concentrated motion felt incredible, it wasn’t quite enough to get her completely there. Sliding her hand down between their naked bodies, she pressed her fingers to her clit and made quick little circular motions with the tips.

Bladen must have sensed she was close because he tightened his grip on her hips and began to thrust into her slowly and methodically. Cindra’s breath came faster and faster the closer she got to orgasm, and she started to bounce up and down on him wildly. He must have understood her need, because he forgot all about taking things slow and began to move her up and down on his cock harder and harder. That was all it took and Cindra let out a scream as she began to come. Bladen was only seconds behind her, groaning as he reached his own peak. Cindra’s orgasm left her breathless and afterward, she could do no more than lay limply against his chest, gasping hard.

After their breathing had returned to normal, they both looked around, curious to see if anyone had noticed what they had been doing. It turned out that people in at least two other boats had binoculars trained on them and Cindra just laughed when Bladen pointed them out to her.

“Maybe we’d better put our clothes back on and get out of here,” she suggested.

## Chapter Nine

They spent the rest of the afternoon sightseeing. Though Telmalon had much to offer, Cindra was still so preoccupied with the decision she’d made earlier that she couldn’t really enjoy herself. Was she doing the right thing in keeping the truth from Bladen? It didn’t seem like the best way to start a relationship with someone. What if it all blew up in her face and he found out anyway? He’d never forgive her then. She vacillated back and forth the whole day, almost blurting out the whole thing a few times. But every time she opened her mouth, the words just wouldn’t come. It was like some type of perverse survival instinct telling her to just keep her mouth shut.

Several hours later, she still wasn’t sure what to do. They had come back to their room to get some sleep before going out to Springer Island later that evening. She knew if she was going to tell Bladen the truth, she would have to do it before they left. She was about to make another attempt when he nuzzled her neck and suggested they take a bath together.

Though Cindra knew she should have declined – at least until she had told Bladen the truth – the idea of taking a bath with him in the room’s huge soaking tub was too inviting to resist and she nodded. Chicken! she told herself.

While the bath filled, she and Bladen undressed, each hungrily eyeing the other as if it were their first time together. Naked, Cindra descended the few steps into the tub and took a seat, waiting for Bladen to join her. She had never made love in a soaking tub before and the idea was a huge turn-on. Once again, she was amazed at the effect Bladen had on her. She couldn’t seem to think of anything but making love when she was around him. She

was sort of glad actually; she didn't want to think about anything else right then anyway.

If the hard-on Bladen had was any indication, then he was obviously as turned on by the idea as she was and when he joined her, her hand immediately went to his rigid cock. Closing her fingers around his shaft, she leaned close to kiss him on the mouth.

Bladen groaned against her mouth, his hand diving beneath the water to find her pussy. He slid his finger into her for just a moment before gliding upward to find the hard little nub of her clit. Even underwater, the sensation was intense and she sighed with pleasure, arching against him as his fingers continued to work their magic on her. He moved slowly at first and then quickened his finger, only to then return to his slow teasing motion again. Every so often, he slid his finger along the folds of her pussy, driving her crazy in the process. She was just starting to feel the tingle of an approaching orgasm when she pulled away. She loved the feel of his fingers, but she wanted more.

She reached for him urgently. "I want you inside me," she breathed against his mouth. "Now!"

At her words, Bladen swung her up in his arms and stepped out of the tub. Much to her surprise, he didn't carry her into the bedroom however, but out onto the balcony. When she looked at him curiously, his mouth just quirked.

"A fantasy of mine," was all he said.

As he set her down on her feet, Cindra could hear the waves lapping against the beach, and in the distance, moonlight bathed the ocean in diamonds. This was even better than the tub, she thought as Bladen gently turned her around to face the balcony railing. Even though it was dark, she knew that anyone on the beach down below could see them if they looked up. That, coupled with the amazing breeze coming off the ocean, aroused her even more.

Bladen pushed her long hair aside to nibble at her neck while his hands roamed all over her body. Cindra moaned, grinding her bottom back against his hard shaft as his hands cupped her breasts. His thumbs and forefingers gently squeezed her nipples while the rest of his hand massaged her breasts and the combination was almost enough to drive her crazy. His teasing went on and on until she thought she really would go insane. She even tried to reach her hand back and put his hard shaft exactly where she wanted it, but he gently pushed her hand away.

"No, no," he whispered. "Unless you want another spanking."

Cindra certainly wouldn't have minded one, but Bladen took her hands and placed them firmly back on the railing. Sliding one hand over her ass and down to her moist cleft, he dipped two fingers into her pussy while his other hand slipped around the front to gently massage her clit. She was so turned on from being out on the balcony that she probably would have come immediately, but he kept backing off every time she got close. Finally, she couldn't take it any more and groaned in frustration.

"Damn you," she said hoarsely. "Stop teasing me."

At her words, he pulled his hands away from her pussy. Startled, she started to object, but her protests were quickly silenced when she felt him gently bend her over the railing. From her position, she could see down all the way to the ground fifty floors below. As she gazed down at the pool directly below their room, she was amazed how small the people seemed from up there. The sensation of being up so high should have been scary, but instead, it just added an extra tingle to the pleasure building up within her. The position pushed her bottom out just enough to put her pussy at the perfect angle and she felt Bladen grip her hips with both hands as he stepped up behind her. A moment later, he was sliding inside her and she let out a soft moan of pleasure.

He started slowly, sliding in and out of her pussy ever so gently. Occasionally, he would smack her bottom with his open hand, which excited her even more and she began to push back urgently against him. Bladen got the

message loud and clear and began to quicken his pace, his hips smacking against her ass as he thrust into her over and over. Suddenly, she felt his grip on her hips tighten and she knew he was getting close. It felt so incredible that she had to bite her lip to keep from crying out. She could just imagine what the people down by the pool would think if she started screaming out in pleasure. But then his thrusts started to come even faster and harder and she no longer cared about anyone hearing her. Gripping the railing tightly in both hands, Cindra shoved back hard against his cock and let herself go. All she cared about at that moment was their mutual pleasure as she and Bladen both came together.

After, Bladen turned her in his arms and kissed her, and as his mouth moved expertly over hers, Cindra felt herself melt against him. They stood like that for a long moment, kissing each other as the sea breeze cooled the sweat off their skin. After a few minutes however, she realized it was actually a little cold out on the balcony and she shivered involuntarily.

“I’ll go get us some robes to put on, so we can sit out on the loungers and listen to the sound of the ocean,” he said, rubbing his hands up and down her arms. “Wait here.”

Giving her another kiss, Bladen went inside to grab some robes he’d mentioned. When he was in the bathroom however, he caught his reflection in the mirror and stopped. What the hell was he going to do? In a few hours, they were supposed to go out to Springer Island.

He had given Cindra every opportunity to tell him the truth. He had talked around the issue and dropped hints all day, but she hadn’t noticed. If anything, it seemed like she was distracted with other thoughts. He could certainly imagine what they were. Since she was giving every indication she was still going to go through with her plan to capture DelCour on her own, she had to be devising some plan to get Bladen out of the picture while she did. And there were only two ways he could think that she might do it. Either she would have to put him out of commission in some way, or she would have to create a situation that would get him captured once they were on the island. Both of those ideas left him cold. After all the time they’d spent together, not to mention all the great sex they’d had, he found it hard to believe she could really do something like that. But apparently she didn’t feel the same about him as he felt about her.

So, what was he going to do about it? He could only think of two logical options. One, he could go with her to the island and hope she confessed everything to him at the last minute. Or two, he could go through with his original plan, give Cindra the slip, and capture DelCour himself.

He wanted to say to hell with it and just go get DelCour right then. He could get dressed and be out the door in five minutes with Cindra none the wiser. But he found that his feet wouldn’t move. He couldn’t do it, he realized, he couldn’t give up on Cindra just yet.

But as he grabbed the robes off the hooks, a logical part of his mind told him that he’d better be prepared for whatever she did. If she told him the truth, they could go after DelCour together. If she didn’t, he’d go after DelCour on his own. Either way, he would need to find a safe drop-off point for a major criminal like DelCour. Not every planetary security bureau would be equipped to take someone of DelCour’s stature and he would have to check to see if Telmalon did. Bladen had a contact at the inter-galactic security bureau who could give him the necessary information. It would only take a minute to call the man.

Cindra watched Bladen go back inside, her lips curving into a smile as she settled onto one of the plush loungers. Of its own accord, her gaze strayed to the island in the distance and she frowned. She had decided to tell Bladen the truth before they went out there, so when he back out onto the balcony, she would finally come clean. However, as she started rehearsing exactly what she would say to him, she discovered it was a lot more difficult than she’d thought it would be. But after a few minutes, she managed to come up with something she thought would work.

But the minutes passed and Bladen still hadn't come back outside. After a moment, she realized it was too cool out on the balcony to wait for him any longer. Getting to her feet, she padded across the balcony and back inside their room, only to stop in her tracks at the sound of Bladen's voice.

"DelCour, Marek DelCour," he was saying. "Yeah, I'll be bringing him in...that's right...probably tomorrow evening..."

Cindra couldn't believe what she was hearing. Bladen knew Yale Bron'ti was really Marek DelCour? And from the sounds of it, it looked like Bladen was planning to bring the man in himself. But how had he found out? More importantly, why hadn't he said anything to her? Her brow furrowed as a chilling thought suddenly occurred to her. What if Bladen had known the truth right from the beginning? What if he had simply been playing her all this time? Using her to get DelCour, while at the same time keeping himself entertained with all the sex they had been having. She felt sick at the thought.

Abruptly realizing Bladen had finished his conversation with whomever he'd been talking to on his communicator, Cindra quickly went back out onto the balcony and hurriedly took a seat on the lounge. Her first instinct was to confront him with what she had learned, but then realized that such an act would be useless. How could she call him out for lying to her when she'd been doing the same thing?

But Bladen's betrayal hurt so much. A rush of tears suddenly welled in her eyes and she brushed at them angrily, chiding herself for being so stupid. It had never been about anything more than sex for him. She and Bladen were good together in bed; that was all. Anything she had imagined between them was all in her head.

Bladen came back outside then, interrupting her thoughts. He had put on one of the hotel's complimentary robes, and she stood so that he could wrap the other one around her. She had never considered herself that good an actress, but as she sat down on the loungers beside Bladen, she realized she must have been pretty good after all because he didn't give any indication that he suspected anything was amiss with her.

They sat out on the balcony for only a little while however, before Cindra feigned tiredness and suggested they should both get some sleep before leaving for the island. To her relief, Bladen agreed, and a moment later, they were both settled in the huge bed.

Cindra didn't intend to sleep, though. Not that she could have if she had wanted to. Instead, she lay beside Bladen, waiting for him to fall asleep so that she could make her move. While sitting out on the balcony, she had come to a decision. She would slip out while Bladen was asleep, head to the island by herself, capture DelCour, and be out of there before the other bounty hunter even knew it. The particulars of how she would go about capturing DelCour were still a little vague, of course, but she was confident that she would figure something out. Her father always said that a good bounty hunter always thought on his feet, and Cindra was determined, now more than ever, to prove that she could, too.

Finally, after what seemed like hours, Bladen appeared to have fallen asleep. She listened for a moment to make sure his breathing was indeed even and only when she was certain that it was, did she carefully slip out of bed and head for the bathroom. She grabbed her bag on the way and once inside the spacious room, she quickly put on her breeches and pulled on her boots before tucking in her shirt and buckling on her gun belt. It felt good to be wearing something familiar again, she thought as she tied her long hair back in a tail.

Dressed, she cautiously opened the bathroom door and peered into the bedroom. Bladen was where he had been, lying on his side sleeping, the sheet down around his hips. Though she knew she should simply just go, Cindra found herself wandering over to the bed. She gazed down at Bladen for a moment, taking in his handsome features, and realized that after tonight she probably would never see the other bounty hunter again. Her chest constricted painfully at the thought.

Tears came unbidden to her eyes and she blinked them back quickly before heading toward the door.

## Chapter Ten

Bladen stirred the moment he felt Cindra get out of bed. He opened his eyes just enough to see her go into the bathroom, but he must have dozed off briefly because when he stirred again it was to see her coming out dressed in breeches and wearing a gun on her hip. He frowned, his first instinct to jump out of bed and demand what the hell she thought she was doing.

But he knew what she was doing. Hell, he had been waiting for her to do it ever since they had found DelCour. She was going after the fugitive herself! Damn her, why hadn't she trusted him enough to tell him the truth?

After the door had closed behind her, he threw back the sheet with a muttered oath and jumped to his feet. Reaching for his breeches, he pulled them on and buttoned them quickly. His boots came next and then his shirt, followed by his gun belt. When he reached for the keys to the boat and saw that Cindra had taken them, he swore again. Not only would he probably not be able to catch up with her before she left the mainland, but now he'd have to find another boat, too. Shit!

Bladen stopped suddenly. He had been preparing to head out the door after Cindra without even giving it a second thought. Should he really be doing this? he asked himself. It would serve her right if he just left her to deal with DelCour on her own. After all, that's what she seemed to want.

But even while he told himself that, Bladen headed for the door. Who the hell was he kidding? There was no way he could let Cindra go after DelCour all by herself. She might be a smart, resourceful, clever girl, but DelCour was out of her league. She had almost no experience bringing in major criminals, at least her record hadn't shown any. If she just marched onto DelCour's island, she would get herself caught. Bladen didn't want to think about what DelCour would do to her when that happened.

Clenching his jaw, he left the hotel room and headed for the elevator. From the hotel, he took a hover-cab over to the marina where he did a quick check for Cindra before renting another boat. By the time he sped away from the mainland, he was a good thirty minutes behind her; he'd never find her in the dark, he thought.

Bladen slowed as he approached the island, trying to figure out where Cindra would try and beach the boat. It was good he was moving slowly because Cindra's boat suddenly appeared right in front of him and he had to jerk the wheel savagely to the side to keep from hitting it. He swore under his breath, about to chide Cindra for sitting in the middle of the bay without any lights on when he realized that the boat was empty. Damn! Why the hell would she leave the boat and swim to shore? In some ways, it was a good idea, he supposed. It would reduce the chances that any of the guards would see her come ashore, but the down side was that she'd have a hell of a time getting DelCour back to the boat. Then again, maybe she had another plan to get the fugitive off the island.

Bladen steered his boat closer to shore, trying to think of the best course of action now that Cindra was already on the island. From the sounds of it, one of DelCour's nightly parties was in full swing and Bladen could only hope the noise would provide cover for whatever Cindra was trying to do. Then he heard shouts coming from the beach. That didn't sound right, he thought. Reaching for the night-vision binoculars on the seat beside him, he held them up to his eyes to scan the island and felt his blood run cold at what he saw.

On the island, lights and sirens were going off all over the place. Several vehicles full of armed men went speeding down the beach. He couldn't see where they went because of all of the buildings that were in the way, but he knew what the shouting meant. They had seen Cindra and were probably surrounding her even now.

Emotions warred within him. His first instinct was to head straight in and rescue her, but he knew that would be stupid. He would just get caught, too.

A few minutes later, the lights and sirens were turned off and the patrols began to move back up and down the beach, probably searching for additional intruders. He had no doubt now; Cindra had been captured.

Oh God, Bladen thought, He had to move quickly. Once DelCour found out Cindra was a bounty hunter, the man would kill her without hesitation. That thought twisted Bladen's gut so viciously he could barely breathe. His grip tightened on the binoculars in his hand as a sudden realization came to him. He didn't know why he hadn't recognized it before. He was in love with Cindra Mallory. Regardless of everything she had done or how she might feel about him, he had fallen in love with her.

But as much as he would have liked to just sit there and contemplate what loving her meant for him, he knew he didn't have the time right then. His first priority was rescuing Cindra and he was going to have to hurry if he was going to get to her in time.

Swearing under his breath again, Bladen turned the boat around and headed for the other side of the island. He would have to do a lot better job than Cindra had done of sneaking onto the property if he hoped to get her out of there.

Cindra couldn't believe she had been so stupid to let herself get captured. Maybe her father had been right, she thought bitterly. Maybe she really wasn't cut out to be a bounty hunter. She certainly hadn't done anything to prove him wrong. Hell, if it weren't for Bladen, she wouldn't even have been able to track DelCour to this island in the first place.

Thinking of Bladen made her realize again how foolish she had been to go after DelCour on her own. The other bounty hunter wouldn't have gotten captured so easily, she told herself. She had no doubt his plan to get on the island would probably have been much more complicated and subtle than hers had been. God, how she wished she could go back to the point when she had jumped off the boat to swim to shore. Scratch that, she thought. What she really wished was that she could go back and change everything she'd done since meeting Bladen. If she could do it all over again, this time she would start out with the truth. She would walk right up to him in that restaurant, tell him she was a fellow bounty hunter, and ask for his help. He might have turned her down, but at least if she had gone that route, she wouldn't be in her current predicament.

She couldn't go back, though. She had made a string of stupid decisions and this most recent one looked like it was going to get her killed. Deciding to go out and apprehend DelCour on his own island by herself had to be the worst idea any bounty hunter had ever had. Her big plan had been to simply sneak onto the island without anyone seeing her and just blend in with the party crowd. Which in retrospect had been pretty dumb considering how she was dressed. Not that it really mattered because the moment she had stepped foot on the beach, sirens had gone off and the whole area had been flooded with lights. DelCour's goons, dressed in black and loaded down with an arsenal of weapons, jumped out of every bush and from behind every tree. They had been on her so fast she hadn't even been able to take a step much less find a place to hide or draw her pistol. She had been terrified they would shoot her right then, but to her surprise, they had dragged her up to the main house instead.

The really scary thing was that the guards had led her past at least a dozen people on the way and not one of them had showed the slightest trace of concern for her. Maybe this sort of thing happened all the time here, she thought. She had kept asking the men where they were taking her, but they had kept silent the whole time. She'd thought they were taking her right to DelCour, but she'd been wrong. Instead, they had taken her to a dimly lit room and left her tied up and terrified.

As the minutes ticked by, Cindra forced herself to stay calm. DelCour hadn't come in yet and that meant she still had a chance.

With that thought in mind, Cindra tugged at the cuffs that held her arms imprisoned to the eye hook in the ceiling. This room made the Strap and Cuff look like a daycare facility, she thought wryly. Ropes, chains, and manacles

adorned every wall, and the tables that were within her sight held more S&M implements than she had every imagined existed. Judging from the reddish-brown stains on many of them, DelCour seemed like a man who liked to carry things too far. Just looking at them gave her motivation try to get herself free once again. Straining on her tiptoes, she first tried to yank her wrists out of the cuffs and then when that didn't work, she tried to get the chain to slide off the hook in the ceiling. Both resulted in chafed wrists and not much else. Frustrated, she swore and gave them another vicious yank, only to hear a mocking laugh coming from the doorway.

Cindra felt her blood go cold at the sound. She never knew that a laugh could sound so completely evil. If she had thought Marek DelCour had been intimidating when she'd first seen him at the rave that night, then he was even more daunting up close, and she couldn't help but tremble in fear as he walked across the room to stand in front of her. Despite her trepidation, she lifted her chin to meet his gaze levelly.

"Cindra Mallory, bounty hunter. An inexperienced one too, from the looks of it," he said mockingly. "Should I be insulted? I mean, I'm a little out of your league for your first big job, don't you think?"

She felt herself flush at his words, but before she could come up with some smart retort, he continued.

"Then again, you aren't working alone, are you?" he said. "Now, Bladen Sloan, well, he seems much more worthy of my time. The man does have a reputation for getting the job done. Though from what I read, he usually works alone. I can certainly see why he enjoys working with you, however." He trailed his fingers over the curve of her breast. "Where is your partner, by the way?"

Cindra flinched away at his touch, but said nothing. Like she would tell him anything! She was surprised DelCour knew so much about her and Bladen, though. How could he have known who they were? she wondered. Her astonishment must have shown on her face because DelCour chuckled.

"I've been onto the pair of you since you followed me from that rave back on Pendari," he told her. "Why do you think it was so easy for you to track me when I left that planet and came here? Because I made it easy for you. I wanted you to follow me."

Her brow furrowed in confusion. "Why would you want us to follow you?"

He grinned. "So I could kill you. Of course, I could have killed you back on Pendari, but it's just much easier to do it here."

Though Cindra knew DelCour meant to kill her, hearing him say the words still sent a shiver down her back. He seemed to enjoy her discomfort and took even more pleasure in explaining the details.

"You see, Ms. Mallory," he continued. "I run this whole planet. Every casino, resort, sex club, liquor dive, and brothel belongs to me, not to mention a good many of the security officers. As far as everyone on this planet is concerned, I can do no wrong. If I were to take you down to the city hall right now and put a bullet in your head on the front steps, no one would even so much as bat an eye. Hell, they'd even clean up the mess. So, when you and your partner arrived on Telmalon, I made sure you found me. I've been tracking your every move." He smirked. "In fact, I heard your performance at the Strap and Cuff was something to watch. Though I didn't get a chance to see it, I did have the opportunity to watch you and Sloan on the boat this afternoon and like I said before, I can certainly see why he'd want to work with you. It will be a shame to kill you, really. I could definitely have had some fun with you."

As he spoke, he reached out to trail his hand down her cheek and along her neck to roughly caress her breast through the material of her shirt before moving down to the curve of her hip.

Cindra flinched, trying to get away from him as much as he bonds would allow. "Don't touch me, you bastard!" she spat.



DelCour laughed, clearly amused by her reaction. “Then again, there’s nothing that says I can’t have some fun with you before I kill you. Maybe I’ll even take you out to the party so my guests can watch what I’m going to do to you.”

Cindra felt sick at his words. As he stepped closer, she jerked at her bonds, trying to get free, but it didn’t have any more of an effect now than it had before. When that didn’t work, she tried to kick out at DelCour instead, but he easily sidestepped her wildly swinging feet and grabbed her around the waist to hold her steady as he leaned close to her.

“Keep fighting, bitch,” he told her, running his hand up her side to give her breast a rough squeeze. “It just makes it better for me.”

Sickened, Cindra opened her mouth to retort when one of DelCour’s black-clad guards rushed into the room. The man didn’t even glance at her but focused all of his attention on DelCour.

“We have a report of a man spotted on the other side of the island,” he said, trying to catch his breath. “It could be Sloan.”

Bladen was here? Cindra thought. He had come after her! Her heart began to pound wildly at the knowledge, but then it plummeted just as quickly. Bladen may not even know she was even here, she realized. He may have simply come to capture DelCour on his own just like he had planned, which meant that he would have no reason to even look for her. While she was still feeling the ache of that thought, another concern immediately filled her. If Bladen didn’t know she was there, then he wouldn’t know DelCour was already on to him. He would be walking into a trap.

DelCour’s hand dropped from her breast and he took a step back. “Don’t even try to capture him,” he said to the man, his mouth quirked as he looked at Cindra. “Shoot him on sight.”

A whole different kind of fear gripped Cindra then as the guard hurried out of the room. Because of her stupidity, Bladen was now in danger too, and knowing she was responsible was almost more than she could take. Whether he had come to rescue her or not, whether he even felt anything for her or not, she couldn’t deny what she was feeling for him any longer. As incredible as it seemed, somewhere along the line she had fallen in love with Bladen. And she couldn’t bear the thought of him getting hurt, even if it meant she would be hurt herself.

Suddenly, DelCour moved toward her again, his hand reaching for the buttons of her shirt this time, but before he could begin opening them, the communicator at his belt rang, signaling an incoming call. Swearing under his breath, he yanked it free of its clip and held it to his ear.

“What!” he snarled into the com’s receiver and then grinned, his voice calmer as he continued. “No, it’s not a bad time. I’ve been expecting your call, actually. I was in the middle of a pleasant diversion, but business comes first, so it will have to wait. Can you hold?” Whomever he was talking to must have said they could, because he turned his attention to Cindra. “I hope you’ll excuse me, but we’ll have to continue this later,” he said to her.

Turning his attention back to the person on the other end of the com, he spun on his heel and strode out of the room. Left alone, Cindra let out a sigh of relief before struggling against her bonds with renewed determination. If Bladen were on the island, she had to find him and let him know that he was in danger.

But no sooner had she formed the thought when she felt a strong hand cover her mouth.

“You’ve gotten yourself into quite a predicament, haven’t you, sweetheart?”

Cindra’s eyes widened in surprise at the sound of Bladen’s soft voice. His mouth was close to her ear, his breath warm on her skin, and she felt her knees go weak at his nearness. Very slowly, he removed his hand from her

mouth.

“Bladen!” she breathed, still amazed that he was really there. She couldn’t believe he’d come for her!

He walked around to stand in front of her. “Expecting someone else?”

She shook her head. “No...I-I just didn’t realize you’d know I was here.” She had no idea how much he knew about who she really was and she didn’t want to say the wrong thing. “How did you...?”

“How did I know where you were?” Bladen gave her a wry smile. “I followed you when you left the hotel, found your boat anchored off shore, and saw you get captured. I landed on the far side of the island and then slipped over here while everyone was busy looking for me. After that, it was simply a matter of following DelCour and his entourage of guards.”

Cindra felt her face color. “How long have you known who he was?” she asked quietly.

“Since that first night at my place,” Bladen said. “Didn’t you think I would look up Bron’ti in the Inter-Galactic Registry? The name came up as an alias for DelCour.”

Crap, she hadn’t thought of that. How could she have been so stupid? She opened her mouth to explain, but Bladen cut her off.

“I looked you up, too. You really should have thought about giving me a fake name, you know.”

She felt her face redden. “If you knew I was a bounty hunter, why didn’t you say anything?”

Bladen lifted a brow. “Why didn’t you?” he countered. “I’ve been waiting the whole time for you to just come clean and tell me the truth. I gave you chance after chance, but you could never seem to trust me enough to be honest.”

Cindra bit her lip. His words wouldn’t have hurt nearly as much if it wasn’t for the fact that she had wanted to be honest with him for awhile now, but hadn’t been brave enough to do it. She wanted to confess everything right there on the spot, but her current position made that a little awkward. “Aren’t you going to untie me?” she asked.

But all he did was fold his arms across his broad chest. “In a minute,” he replied. “I’d like to get a few things straightened out first.”

Her brow furrowing, she darted a frantic look toward the door. “But DelCour could come back any minute,” she protested.

“Maybe, but I doubt it. That call sounded like business, which means he’ll probably be awhile,” Bladen said, seemingly unconcerned. “So, why the charade, Cindra? Why not just be honest with me?”

Cindra hesitated for a moment. Bladen had come to rescue her. That meant he had to feel something for her at least. But if she told him everything, she could be jeopardizing what little was left of their relationship. She desperately tried to think of another lie to cover up the others and was surprised when one easily came to mind. She opened her mouth to begin, but found the truth coming out instead.

“I wanted to tell you. I tried to a dozen times, but I could never get the words out. I guess was afraid you wouldn’t understand,” she said softly. “Then tonight, back at the hotel after we made love on the balcony, I finally figured out a way to tell you all of it. But when you didn’t come back outside right away, I went looking for you and overheard you talking to someone on your com about DelCour and I knew I couldn’t tell you.” She took a deep breath. “I didn’t mean for it to happen this way, but I had to bring in DelCour. I wanted to prove to my father that I could be a bounty hunter like him, so I went after the biggest, most dangerous criminal I could find. I managed

to track DelCour over half a dozen planets to Pendari, but then the trail went cold after he got into the city. I had already spent a fortune trying to find him, so I was completely broke and pretty desperate by the time I thought of enlisting your help. I came up with the story about being a jilted fiancé because I thought that if I told you the truth, you would have laughed me out of your office and taken the bounty for yourself.”

He scowled. “That was what you were planning on doing, wasn’t it? Apprehending DelCour and leaving me with nothing?”

She swallowed hard. “I’m sorry.”

Bladen said nothing for a moment, but then shook his head as he reached up to release her from the cuffs that bound her wrists. “I almost left you here, you know.”

Free of the cuffs, Cindra looked up at him as she rubbed her chafed wrist. “Why didn’t you?” she asked in a small voice.

He said nothing for a long moment, but finally shook his head. “Because I love you, you little fool,” he growled. Pulling her close, he kissed her hard on the mouth. “Now, come on,” he said, taking her hand and leading her toward the door. “Let’s get out of here.”

Cindra hung back, still trying to process what Bladen had just said. It felt like all the air had disappeared out of the room; she couldn’t seem to get her breath. “Did you just say that you love me?”

His brows drew together. “Yes, but we can talk about that after we get out of here,” he said and then gave her hand a tug. “Now, let’s go.”

She smiled, suddenly feeling giddy. But then a thought struck her. “Not yet,” she said. “We can’t leave without DelCour.”

Bladen’s frown deepened. “Are you crazy?” he hissed. “There’s no way we’ll ever get him off the island now that his security has been alerted.”

“Getting off the island is the least of our problems,” she said. “DelCour owns this entire planet. Even if we do manage to get off it, he’s going to have every security officer, government official, and low-life criminal after us in minutes. We’ll be lucky to get back to your ship, much less take off. But if we put DelCour out of commission, then he won’t be able to give the order to stop us. And since I don’t think either one of us would be comfortable with just killing him that means we have to take him with us.”

Bladen looked at her in bewilderment. “If he owns the whole planet, how are we going to get him off it?”

She chewed on her lower lip for a moment and then shrugged. “I haven’t figured that out yet. I was just going to leave that part to you. The important thing is that we won’t be up against the whole planet if DelCour’s not around to alert anyone.”

Bladen said nothing for a moment, considering her words. The girl was certifiable, he thought, but she did have a point. If they just escaped from the island, DelCour would have a thousand people after them, so they definitely needed to shut him up. She was right about something else, too. Bladen couldn’t just walk in and shoot the guy. He was a bounty hunter, not a killer.

He gave Cindra a nod. “Okay, you’re right. We’ll grab DelCour. If nothing else, we can use him for a bargaining chip if we get caught. But you follow my lead,” he told her as he took his weapon from its holster.

To his surprise, she agreed without hesitation. But when he started for the door, she tugged him back and then leaned close to kiss him. “I love you too, by the way,” she said with a smile.

Though it warmed him, her admission also took Bladen by surprise, but before he could say anything, she was out the door. So much for following his lead, he thought wryly as he went after her. In the corridor, he caught her arm.

“Here,” he said, handing her his back-up pistol. “You do know how to use one of these, right?”

Giving him an affronted look, Cindra took the gun without comment and then started down the hall. But he grabbed her arm again.

“This way,” he said softly, jerking his head in the opposite direction.

She frowned. “How do you know?”

His mouth quirked. “Because I followed DelCour to see where he went before I came back to get you.”

She really did have a lot to learn about being a bounty hunter, Bladen thought as they moved cautiously down the hallway. When he had followed DelCour earlier, the man had gone into a room at the end of the corridor. A closer look had revealed it to be an office and as they neared the room now, DelCour’s deep voice could be heard, much to Bladen’s relief.

Glancing over his shoulder, he saw that Cindra was looking at him expectantly. He realized then that he hadn’t worked with a partner since he’d quit being a security officer, but he was starting to think he might be able to get used to it again. Giving her a nod, he checked his gun to make sure the tranq he’d loaded was ready and then stepped into the room.

Completely engrossed in the com-call, DelCour was sitting with his back to them, which made it easier for Bladen to move into the room and aim the gun at him without being seen. A soft squeeze of the trigger and the tranq dart struck DelCour on the left shoulder.

“What the...?” DelCour began, getting to his feet and spinning around.

He stared at Bladen and Cindra in surprise for a moment before reaching into his suit jacket for what was probably a weapon. But DelCour slumped back into the chair unconscious before he could even get his hand near his weapon. Bladen really liked using tranquilizer darts. Not only were they completely quiet, but in most cases, they were also actually faster than a lethal pistol shot.

As the communicator in DelCour’s hand dropped to the floor, Bladen walked over to him and checked his pulse. The tranquilizer sedative was very reliable, but it was always possible that someone could have an adverse reaction to it. DelCour was fine though, and Bladen removed the weapon from the man’s inner coat pocket. With a grunt and a heave, Bladen picked up the unconscious man and tossed him over his shoulder. He staggered a little under DelCour’s weight, but turned around to look at Cindra, who was regarding him with a look of disappointment on her face.

“That’s it?” she said. “You just shoot him with a tranquilizer and pick him up?”

His brow furrowed. “What did you expect? That I would tackle him and beat him into submission?”

She looked at him in chagrin. “I thought we would lead him out at gunpoint or something.”

“That was your plan?” he asked and then shook his head. “Woman, you’ve got a lot to learn.”

Bladen headed for the door, Cindra behind him. “Now, what?” she asked

“Simple,” he said. “All we have to do is get him past the twenty or thirty guards and take him back on the ship. Then we’re home free.”

As he spoke, he peered cautiously out the door before heading down the hallway.

“Oh, is that all?” she said sarcastically, following him. “How are going to manage that?”

He gave her a quick glance as he strode down the hallway. “I’m not exactly sure right now,” he admitted. “But I’ll think of something by the time we get to the front door.”

Cindra stopped and stared at his retreating form for a moment. “You’ll think of something?” she said, but he didn’t answer. Instead, he just kept walking, and she had to hurry to keep up with him.

Bladen must have come up with a plan by the time they got downstairs however, because he moved purposefully toward the back of the house. The place was surprisingly empty, which meant that everyone must have been combing the beach looking for Bladen, much to Cindra’s relief. When they reached a set of double doors, he stopped and gave her a serious look.

“Through this door and around to the left should bring us to the garage,” he said. “My hands are going to be full, so if anyone tries to stop us, you’re going to have to shoot them. Can you do that?”

Cindra hesitated. She’d never shot anyone before, but if it meant keeping Bladen safe, she’d do whatever was necessary. She gave him what she hoped was a confident nod.

“Okay,” he said. “Then stay behind me unless we run into someone.”

Opening the door, Bladen stepped outside without hesitation. There was no one in sight and he walked quickly around the back of the house. Cindra followed close behind him, trying to look everywhere at once. She didn’t want anyone sneaking up on them.

The walkway led to another building and Bladen went straight to the door and opened it. He darted his head in for a quick look before giving her a nod.

“It’s clear,” he said and then maneuvered DelCour’s body through the doorway.

As she followed, Cindra thumbed the light switch to reveal a huge garage with at least half a dozen transporters inside.

“Which one should we take?” she asked.

Bladen looked around. “That one,” he said, jerking his head in the direction of a big limo with heavily-tinted windows.

Bladen wasted no time tossing DelCour in the back seat before joining Cindra in the front. A few moments later, they were out of the garage and heading down the driveway that led to the long causeway off the island. They had seen it before during their recon of the island, but had dismissed it as a way on to the island because there was a heavy gate and guard shack.

“What do we do if they stop us?” she asked nervously, glancing at Bladen.

“We’ll drive through the gate if we have to,” he said matter-of-factly and then advised, “Shoot only as a last resort. We don’t want to end up getting ourselves thrown in jail. Or worse.”

Both were equally unappealing and Cindra shivered at the thought. But she needn’t have worried. Getting past the guards was almost laughably easy. The black-clad men scurried to open the gate the moment they saw the vehicle. They even waved at the tinted windows as she and Bladen drove past. They obviously must have thought DelCour was in the limo, which was probably why Bladen had decided to take it, she thought.

“That was easy,” she said, sitting back in the seat.

“We’re not done yet,” Bladen reminded her. “We still have to get DelCour off the planet.”

Fifteen minutes later, they were back at the space dock and dragging DelCour onto the ship. Once aboard, Bladen disappeared into a back storeroom with him. When he came back a few minutes later, he was alone and Cindra assumed he had tied up DelCour and left him in the storeroom.

“Let’s get out of here before they figure out what we’re up to,” Bladen said as he moved past her and into the cockpit.

Cindra ran through the pre-flight checklist while Bladen called the tower for clearance. They were just seconds away from take-off when a voice came through the com demanding they shut down their engines and prepare for an inspection team.

Bladen swore under his breath and Cindra felt panic take hold of her as he reluctantly did as instructed. Seconds later, a heavily-armed team of men in security uniforms came aboard, followed by half a dozen men in suits. The man who was obviously in charge approached them with an angry look on his face.

“Where is Marek DelCour?” he demanded as the uniformed men started looking around the small ship.

Cindra tensed as two of them went into the small storeroom where Bladen had taken DelCour earlier. She held her breath, waiting for them to come back out with the fugitive, but when they returned they were alone.

“Who?” Bladen asked, answering the man’s question. “I don’t think I know anyone by that name.

“Naren LaRay!” the man snapped, clearly not buying the bounty hunter’s innocence.

“Oh, him,” Bladen said and then shrugged. “He’s not here.”

The man regarded him in silence for a moment and then took a step closer to Bladen. Cindra supposed the man did it to intimidate the bounty hunter, but it wasn’t having the desired effect, much to the man’s consternation.

“Do you deny that you and the woman are bounty hunters?” he asked Bladen. “And that you came here to abduct Mr. LaRay?”

Bladen looked completely calm and relaxed as he said, “We are bounty hunters, but we’re not in the habit of abducting people. Mr. LaRay is a fugitive wanted for multiple felony crimes on half a dozen planets. We had planned on apprehending him and turning him over to the authorities here on Telmalon, but when we discovered he had his own personal army protecting him, we thought it would be best if we left.”

The man frowned. “One of Mr. LaRay’s transporters was tracked to a parking lot near here. Did you steal it, then?”

“Of course not,” Bladen said. “We took a hover-cab from the hotel almost an hour ago. Maybe Mr. LaRay came here to pick up someone at the spaceport. Perhaps you should talk to his driver.”

Cindra was amazed at Bladen’s cool. She thought of herself as a pretty good liar, but she wasn’t sure she could be as convincing as Bladen in the same situation. It didn’t seem as if the man was going to buy Bladen’s story though, because his eyes narrowed suspiciously.

At that moment however, one of the uniformed men leaned over and whispered something in the man’s ear. Though Cindra couldn’t hear exactly what he was saying, she could just make out the words, “scanned” and “nothing here.”

Though his mouth tightened, the man said nothing. After a moment, he directed his attention to Cindra. “I don’t suppose you have anything to add?”

She shook her head. “No,” she said simply.

The man looked around the ship one more time. “Bounty hunters aren’t welcome on Telmalon,” he said to them. “But if you should be foolish enough to come back and try to apprehend anyone, you’ll need to register with the authorities first.”

Both Cindra and Bladen nodded their agreement and a few minutes later, the men were off the ship. Bladen wasted no time in getting them on their way and after they had finally taken off, Cindra found she couldn’t control her curiosity anymore. Jumping up from her seat in the cockpit, she walked into the storeroom. It wasn’t much bigger than a small closet really and none of the boxes stacked on the floor were big enough to hold anyone, much less hide a man of DelCour’s size.

Bladen sauntered in behind her.

“Where is he?” she demanded, turning to face him.

In answer, Bladen walked over to a panel on the wall that was labeled Oxygen Controls and pushed a few buttons. Cindra quickly stepped back as a section of the floor slid away beneath where she had been standing. Inside, DelCour was lying in a cushioned space just big enough to hold him. He was still unconscious.

“Like I said, the ship used to be owned by smugglers,” Bladen said. “This compartment has a lining that makes it impervious to scanners, which, as you can see, makes it pretty damn useful.”

She nodded in appreciation. “Slick,” she said and regarded DelCour for a moment. “So, how long will he be out?”

Bladen lifted a brow. “A few hours, at least. What did you have in mind?” he asked with a knowing grin.

“Not what you have in mind,” she said firmly. “Actually, I think we need to talk. We both have a lot of explaining to do.”

## Chapter Eleven

Cindra sighed with pleasure as the warm water cascaded over her bare skin. When she and Bladen had returned to his loft after turning Marek DelCour over to the authorities, she had announced she was going to take a shower. She had been secretly hoping the handsome bounty hunter would join her, so when she heard him come into the bathroom, she smiled to herself in anticipation as she turned to see him opening the shower door.

Bladen was gloriously naked and she couldn’t wait for him to join her. But he didn’t do so right away, instead he lazily looked her over for a long moment before finally stepping into the spacious glass-enclosed shower. Gently pulling her into his arms, he kissed her thoroughly on the mouth before lifting his head to gaze down at her.

“So,” he said softly, caressing her face. “Have you given any more thought to my proposal about going into business together?”

When Bladen had brought up the subject on the way back from Telmalon, her first instinct had been to agree, but something had held her back. As much as she would enjoy working with him, she wasn’t sure she had the qualifications for the job. She certainly never could have brought in DelCour on her own and the events of the past few days had made her take a good look at herself. As much as she didn’t want to prove her father right, she was starting to think he might have had a point.

Abruptly realizing that Bladen was waiting for an answer, she lifted her shoulder in a shrug. “I’m not sure I’m

really cut out to be a bounty hunter.”

His brow furrowed. “I don’t know about that,” he said, trailing his fingers down her neck and over the curve of her breast. “You lack experience, but you have good instincts and I could teach you the rest.” The corner of his mouth quirked. “For a small fee, of course.”

She laughed, arching against him as he cupped her breast and began to fondle her hardening nipple. Maybe under his tutelage, she might actually become a pretty good bounty hunter someday. “What kind of fee?”

It was his turn to shrug. “One sexual favor a day, let’s say.”

She moaned with pleasure as he gently cupped her other breast in his hand. “Only one? That doesn’t sound too unreasonable, I suppose.”

He kissed the corner of her mouth. “That would be in addition to the sexual favors you still owe me for engaging my services to help you find DelCour, of course. You did agree to ten and by my calculations that means you owe me four more.”

Cindra did some quick math in her head and then frowned slightly. “You mean three,” she corrected. “The first time was in your office, followed by a blowjob at that sex club.” He grinned at that. “Then there was the rave,” she continued. “After that, we did it on your ship…”

“That one doesn’t count,” he insisted softly, kissing the corner of her mouth. “You initiated the sex on the flight to Telmalon and as I remember, you did all the work. I was just a passive participant. I don’t think we can really count that as one of the agreed upon favors.”

She made a face at him. “That is so wrong.”

He grinned. “A deal is a deal”

She thought a moment and then shrugged. “Well, I suppose I’ll just have to make sure I don’t initiate any further sex of any kind then…”

Cindra turned to pick up the soap when Bladen pulled her back into his arms. “I see your point. Perhaps we should renegotiate the terms of the contract,” he said softly as she looped her arms around his neck. “How about you agree to go into business with me and we’ll forget about you owing me any sexual favors?”

She gazed up at him, trying to read his expression. “Are you really serious about wanting me to be your partner?”

“Yes, I’m serious,” he said. “I’d like you to be my partner. And more.”

Cindra’s pulse fluttered at his words. She definitely liked the sound of that, specifically the part about becoming more than just partners. “Okay,” she finally agreed after a moment. “But I get my name on the door, too.”

He considered that before nodding. “Done.”

“And I want an office with a window.”

His mouth quirked. “You drive a hard bargain, you know that?”

She smiled.

“Okay,” he agreed. “Your name on the door and an office with a window. Anything else?”

Cindra chewed on her lower lip as she gave it some thought. “I want my own tranq pistol and I want you to teach



me how to fly your ship,” she said after a moment. “While we’re at it, could you also teach me how to lie as convincingly as you do? You’re much better at it than I am, you know.” She paused as she considered something else. “And I want my father to know I’m your partner, but I don’t want him to find out from me. I’d rather he hear it through the grapevine. Could you arrange that?”

He lifted a brow. “I suppose I could,” he said. “Is that it?”

She looked up at him from beneath lowered lashes. “Actually, there is one more thing,” she said shyly. “Do you think you could spank me on a regular basis?”

Bladen chuckled and lowered his head to kiss her. “Oh, I definitely think I can handle that one,” he said. “So, anything else?”

She shook her head. “No, that’s about it. But enough negotiating. All the warm water is going to waste and there are better things we could be doing.”

The prospect of making love with him in the steamy shower had been turning her on since he had stepped inside and she suddenly didn’t feel like talking anymore.

Bladen grinned. “My thoughts exactly.”

With that, he took the soap from her and rubbed the scented bar between his hands. Satisfied he had enough lather, he set the soap down and then slowly ran his hands up and down her midriff before moving back up to her breasts. Cupping them, he gave special attention to her nipples, massaging each of them gently between his thumbs and forefingers until the sensitive peaks were as hard as little pebbles. He moved down to her hips next, running his soapy hands over her asscheeks and down her long legs, gently caressing her soft skin.

He repeated the process, moving up and down her body at a leisurely pace before carefully rinsing both of them off so that he could kiss her everywhere that his hands had so lovingly washed moments earlier.

Cindra’s knees suddenly went weak as Bladen’s mouth neared the juncture of her thighs. Holding onto his shoulders for balance, she lifted one leg to rest it on the ledge and offered her pussy to him.

Using his fingers to gently spread her pussy lips, Bladen slowly ran his tongue up and down her silken folds, first one side and then the other before finally concentrating on her plump clit. Cindra tossed her head back and clutched at his shoulders, her orgasm beginning to build almost from the moment his tongue had touched her clit. Bladen must have sensed she was already close because he immediately slowed his movements, keeping her on the edge with his teasing until she was practically begging him to make her come.

Bladen had fantasized about making love with her in the shower dozens of times since that first night she’d stayed at his loft, but even a wild imagination like his couldn’t compare to the real thing. The steam swirling around them made the whole thing sexier somehow, more primal. On top of that, Cindra was like some intoxicating drug he couldn’t seem to get enough of and he had to have more.

Deciding he had teased her enough, Bladen quickened his movements on her clit. As he did so, he felt Cindra thread her fingers into his hair. A moment later, she cried out her release, her body trembling as her orgasm coursed through her. Only when he was sure it had subsided, did Bladen stop what he’d been doing and get to his feet. Sliding his hands into her wet hair, he cupped the back of her head and gazed down at her for a long moment. Finally unable to resist any longer, he bent his head to claim her lips, his tongue tangling with hers. Damn, she tasted so good!

“Spread your legs for me, sweetheart,” he commanded softly against her mouth.

When she complied, he lowered his hand to the damp curls between her legs and teasingly ran his middle finger

along her slick folds to find her pussy. At the feel of her wetness on his finger, he felt his cock get even harder and he groaned. Unable to help himself, he slid his finger deep inside her.

Cindra let out a soft moan, her pussy automatically tightening around his finger as he began to move inside her.

“That feels so good,” she breathed, arching against him and tipping her head back. “Don’t stop, Bladen. Please.”

He kissed her neck. “I won’t, sweetheart,” he promised huskily. “I’m going to make you come with my finger and then I’m going to make you come with my cock.”

The vivid image his words painted, combined with the incredible things he was doing to her pussy, had her clinging to his shoulders and screaming out her pleasure in a matter of moments.

“Yeah, that’s it,” Bladen whispered hoarsely, holding her tightly around the waist. “Come for me, sweetheart. Come for me.”

He could feel her pussy squeezing his finger even as he said the words, and as she trembled with her second orgasm of the evening, all he could think about was how incredibly good it was going to be when he slid his cock into her. As it was, it was all he could do not to push her against the wall of the shower and thrust himself inside her right then.

Instead, using every ounce of control he possessed, Bladen slid his finger out and gently maneuvered her back against the wall. Cupping her bottom with both hands, he lifted her up and settled her down on his hard cock with a groan.

Bladen kept her pinned to the wall by the force of his thrusts, trailing kisses down her neck to her breasts as she tightened her legs around him. As the water sluiced down their bodies, he increased the speed of his thrusts, unable to hold back any longer. Cindra wrapped her legs around him so fiercely that he could barely move his cock inside of her, but he certainly didn’t mind. Her pussy was squeezing him so tight that it felt as if his orgasm was pulsing out of him in slow motion. He let out a ragged groan to match her sounds of pleasure as they came together.

Very slowly, Cindra slid down his body to find her footing on the slippery floor. They stood there for a time, kissing and nibbling on each other’s soaking wet skin until Bladen finally lifted his head to gaze down at her.

“So, what do you say we take this in the bedroom, partner?” he said softly.

Smiling, Cindra nodded and together they stepped out of the shower and walked into the bedroom.

The End