

SPACEPORT



DAWN MONTGOMERY

PARADISE
RUN

Chengdu Press

Spaceport: Paradise Run

Dawn Montgomery

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Kaia has one mission: Get the dignitary to an exchange without letting him get killed. What she doesn't count on is the feral call to mate when they meet.

From the moment he sees the mischievous hellcat, High Elder Shon can't keep his paws off her. Now if he can just do something about that pesky relative trying to kill him, maybe he'll be able to convince Kaia to become his mate.

Dedication

To my husband: experiments are always fun.

To Kim Knox: you know why.

Michelle Hasker: beta reader and friend. Thank you.

To my readers for reminding me why I do this every day... you all are the best.

Chapter One

The stiff pale fur of a shyrah's pelt covered the sleek ebony body of High Elder Shon like a cloak. Kaia smiled at the newcomer with a wary regard, wondering what one of his race was doing so far from his icy home world, and how Jake got him on a Paradise Run cruise liner, no less.

"Straighten up, Kaia." The quiet growl through her earpiece jerked her to attention. "He is an important dignitary."

"Like you care about that, Jake." She stared at the com-link in front of her, looking for some mention of importance in his history. The docket stated his name, planet of origin, and title, but she'd imagined someone older with the title of High Elder. Less... delicious.

Her gaze tracked across the well-defined muscles of his arms, leaving an edge of feral lust spiking through her body. The furs he wore gave her little indication of his lower body's attributes, and that was a shame. She wondered whether her race was compatible with his.

Thinking about sex already? She was insatiable at the best of times. "We need to finish this job quickly."

"Why? Miss your escapades back at 'Port?"

"I have a sex drive, so sue me." Kaia regarded the High Elder again. He could be something completely alien to her species. Disappointment at that thought set the hairs on the back of her neck on edge. Their very masculine subject was stalking up the platform as they spoke, all fluid grace and predator at once. She never understood the need to keep your sexuality in check, but for a taste of this one, she might just try.

"Useless fact number twelve."

Kaia rolled her eyes. He was always spouting useless information during their jobs.

"He's a panthera splice from old Earth. His requests were simple. A public place, an easy exchange, and he wanted someone of his genus origin to make arrangements."

Kaia's tail stiffened in shock. That information wasn't quite so useless, especially since that would make them compatible. "Are you serious?"

"Your tail, Kaia! We need to keep a low profile, and you're the only one with a tail waving around."

"I'm also the only one with a tail, dimbulb."

"What?"

"Nothing, Jake. Just keep your virtual eyes open." Her tail flicked again. She winced and tried to calm it down, but it twitched in agitation, getting worse. In desperation she started running numbers in her head until her emotions were replaced with ones and zeroes.

"He's almost to you."

Two of the genus panthera splices, descendants of Earth's genetic splices with great cats. On Adana at once. She needed to be inside and away from prying eyes. A close inspection of her ID would show its forgery, and she couldn't waste time in the brig. She wasn't a Paradise Run cruise liner employee, after all.

High Elder Shon gave her a predatory smile with what appeared to be interest. Only the slightest hint of his fangs showed, but holy frek, was it enough. Her pulse jumped.

Feral heat slid through her veins, and she couldn't quite stop a purr from rumbling her chest. His eyes darkened to unfathomable amber liquid.

Her pussy tingled. Surely... her tail swished in the air, giving away her interest in the Elder. Jake's curses through her earpiece were for her ears only, but they still burned. She couldn't hide the blush that stained her cheeks, and kept her hands tightly clasped around the com-link to avoid grabbing her tail.

Elder Shon's amber eyes tracked her tail's movement. Fire slid along her suddenly too tight skin.

She cleared her throat. "Elder Shon, welcome to the final leg of your journey. We hope you enjoyed your stay on 'Port Adana. Your suite accommodations are ready. I hope you enjoy the outer rim Paradise cruise."

"You have a lovely tail." The heavy burr of his voice was laced with a thick accent, one that had her tailbone itching for a scratch.

Kaia froze and coughed out a thank you. She ignored her tail's response, willing her body to fall through the cracks in embarrassment.

"The beauty of a tail is a rarity where I come from. And yours truly is exquisite."

Kaia's nipples hardened under the silk of her tunic. Complimenting her tail was something that made her very shy.

His gaze never left her face, but she had little doubt he noticed every centimeter of her body, from the curve of her hip to the glint of her claws. He was not a man to allow one to sneak up on him.

A fight broke out in the bay and Elder Shon slid in front of her, partially blocking her view. Raw fire filled her veins, whether in anger or lust, she wasn't sure, but she didn't need anyone to care for her. She'd done it most of her life.

Elder Shon waited with muscles bunched, ready for something. The line of his jaw was strong, clenched. She admired the watchful way he scanned the surrounding area.

"Can we be away from the bay, if you don't mind?" His low growl slid across her skin, and she touched his arm with her fingertips to draw his gaze away from the commotion back to her.

She bit the inside of her cheek at the raw power she viewed there. "If you would, Elder, the trouble won't follow us to the cruiser." She gestured for him to precede her on the intergalactic cruiser.

"Just call me Shon. The title means little to me." She detected a bitter edge to his words. Curiouser and curiouser. His fingertips touched the back of her hand and she released her light hold.

He strode past her and she inhaled his scent, memorizing it so she'd be able to track him almost anywhere on ship. His scent wove around her. The flavor rolling around on her tongue reminded her of a fruit she'd stolen from the arboretum when she was a child. Full of rich flavor and a surprising heat explosion on the back of her tongue.

"I was told you would be my guide throughout my stay on the Paradise Run."

"Last call for Paradise Run docking. All passengers will board and scan into their rooms."

"Yes, that's true. Will it be to your liking?" She struggled past the knot of tension in her throat. They fell into step with one another.

"What do I call you, then?"

She hesitated. Her brain wasn't like Jake's. She couldn't just pull bullshit out of the air like he did. "Just call me hostess."

He flicked a glance her way before heading up the gangplank. The hair on the back of her neck stood on end. Something in the way he moved warned her. He spun them into the entrance, and around until her back slammed against the wall. Air gushed out of her lungs. Humiliation sent her into a momentary rage and she growled.

His knee pressed between her legs, hard against her pussy, and Kaia froze. Molten liquid pulsed through her veins, lighting her senses on fire. A warning *rowl* vibrated in her chest.

"Kaia!" Jake's voice roared through her earpiece and she winced.

"A little forward, don't you think?" She eyed one of the automatons locking the dock doors. "Every moment is recorded at the entrances."

"I need to make sure you have no weapons."

"That wasn't part of the agreement, Elder."

His lip lifted in a partial snarl. Her beast answered, and she arched against him. Kaia's throat went dry and she wondered where that itch of fear had gone.

His cloak hid little of the hard cock pressed between them. What was this, foreplay? *Yes, please!* "And what if I do have a weapon, Elder?" She loved the way his gaze sparked when she called him that.

"What are you doing?" Jake's incredulous voice brought a feral grin to her lips.

"Are you purposefully antagonizing me?" Shon grabbed her wrists and held them above her head.

Kaia blinked in surprise. Why wasn't she fighting? "What will you do about it? Punish me?"

Jake cursed quietly and fluently through her earpiece. She bit back a laugh. Nothing ever went perfect. He should know her by now.

Shon held her wrists in place with one hand, and ran the other down her arm. "I can do far more than that." Shon's fingers slid through her hair and tugged, hard, just the way she liked it.

"Why don't we be honest, then? Tell me why you have me against the wall."

"I don't trust easily."

She licked her lips. Blood pulsed under his skin and she wanted to taste. "Neither do I. So I'd move back if I were you."

A shadow of movement flickered behind Shon, and she pushed from the wall.

The shiny hand of the automaton came into her view and shots of blue electricity sparked from its fingertips next to the Elder's temple. Shon froze.

"Now that I have your attention." Jake's growl across the headpiece filled Kaia with relief. It wasn't an external threat, though she'd kick his ass later for this stunt.

"Don't move," Kaia warned Shon out of habit more than anything else. A caged cat was a dangerous one, but if he moved right now, his brain was toast. "I can take care of this myself." Her mutter was for Jake, but Shon's eyes narrowed to tiny slits of light.

"What's going on?"

"He knows who you work for, Kaia. You'll tell him everything I say."

She breathed a sigh and tension ebbed slowly from her body. "My employer has control of the automaton."

Tension had Shon's muscles straining, but he said nothing.

Shon stared at the exotic beauty, waiting. He noticed the way her body arched against his, the natural defiance of her character. The sexy way her lips lifted at the corner when she baited him. He wasn't a patient man at the best of times, but right now, her lithe body trapped between his cock and the wall left him aching for the hunt. Wanting to bask in the intensity of the chase. A reaction he'd have to explore later.

Electricity crackled next to his head. If there was a later. It was no small feat to hack into a secure system like the cruise liner, much less take control of their automated work crew without setting off a terrorist evacuation alarm. His respect for the mysterious Jake increased tenfold.

"He says you weren't the only boarder from your world to book passage."

The she-cat's stark green eyes shimmered at him before she slid her glance behind him. Her tail flicked, showing her irritation at being held. He had no doubts she could shred him with her claws at any moment. The only question was, why hadn't she?

"There are many travelers from my world. Why would that worry me?"

She licked her lips with a quick dart of a pink tongue. He could taste the heat coming off her body. Weapons or no, she'd make a lovely distraction for the voyage. His beast roared within. If she was willing to be hunted.

"He says it was from your blood. You'd know what that means."

Shon's libido ran to ice. It had to be his brother. The son of a spineless *argah* wouldn't let it go. He had to have blood on his hands. He released his hold on the hostess with a warning growl. "Then it seems I was correct to search out your employer."

The she-cat's tail flicked dangerously close to her face. She said nothing, but her chest lifted with slow inhalations. The silken clothing she wore left little to hide in the

way of her reaction. Hard nipples pressed against the cloth, and the rich scent of her lust intoxicated him.

"Please tell your employer to pull back. I won't touch you again."

Her gaze flicked up to his and Shon's breath caught at the feral heat in their depths. "Oh, you'll touch me again, I'm sure, but next time, you'll be the one with your back against the wall."

Shon's mouth dried and the slide of his beast against his skin brought him closer to the edge.

"I have no weapons, and you're late for registration in your suite."

"How long before the exchange?" It needed to happen fast. With regret he released his hold on her and stepped away. Control. He needed control.

"We don't talk business in public, Elder. So if you would follow me, then?" And just like that, his feral-clawed hostess turned into the perfect polite guide.

He cursed quietly. Her voice and emotion-filled expressions were more of a pleasure than he'd expected. Her polite conversation, however, gave him time to mull over the situation. Made him want to jerk her sudden control away.

But first their safety. His brother's arrival meant blood feud. Declan would stop at nothing to take the clan. Their father's warning still rang in his ears. The plan was perfect so how the fuck had Declan found him in the outer rim?

Her tail flicked in front of him, and Shon brushed his fingertips down the length. It was far softer than he could have ever imagined.

She smacked his hand and huffed. Her cheeks stained pink with embarrassment or anger, he couldn't tell, but he'd love to see what it did to her at the peak of ecstasy. Most of her skin was smooth in appearance. Was that true of her entire body? Her scent enticed him. Was she just a distraction or did she have more to her than she showed?

He touched her tail again, and she swiped at his hand. He caught her wrist and held it, careful not to bruise her skin. With gentle care he turned it over. Claws, long and wicked, stretched from her fingers.

"Despite your obvious interest, I'm not part of the deal."

"I asked for a cat splice because I needed something familiar, not for any other reason."

He could tell she didn't believe him. It was in the curve of her lips, the distrust in her eyes. So far removed from the passionate hellcat he'd almost had in his arms at Paradise Run's entrance.

"I don't like repeating myself." Her claws retracted, and she twisted out of his grip. "Don't bat at my tail. It's not a toy." She grabbed her tail and wrapped it around her body. Sharp disappointment ate at him. Why keep something so lovely hidden? His people couldn't grow tails, though they had centuries before.

"It's a lovely tail."

She swung away from him and gestured at a hand lock. "Please place your hand in the lock so it can identify you."

"Won't that allow my brother to find me?"

"Let Jake worry about that. He always has a plan."

Shon placed his hand on the lock and winced at the bright light of the palm scan. It turned green and the door opened. "Welcome to your suite, High Elder Shon."

"I'm not 'high' anything. Please stop using my title. It's Shon, for the last time." He glared at her. "I don't like repeating myself either."

"I'll leave you to get settled." She held up a hand when he would have spoken. "I'm sure you have many questions, but I have my own needs to attend to. If you'll excuse me." She eyed the corridor, and pressed her palm against a panel. It popped open and she stepped in. One glance back was all he had before she smiled. "I'll see you soon." The panel slid back into place.

Shon shook his head. All this cloak and dagger stuff was starting to wear on his nerves. He needed to release some of his frustration. Soon. And it would start with her name.

Chapter Two

Kaia growled low in her throat. Shon was getting under her skin in a way no other male ever had. Her body seemed to be in a perpetual state of lust for the guy. She was two standard months away from a heat cycle, so that couldn't be it.

Kaia pressed the earpiece, and listened for the click that told her Jake was listening in.

"Jake, you'd better be able to perform the miracles I promised our guy."

"I told you I can't make miracles happen. Tracking this other cat is proving far more difficult than I expected. From Shon's reaction, I'd say this is part of the reason he wants the new identity."

"What if someone overhears --"

"It's untraceable, and the crypto code is one I created. Don't worry. We'll continue as planned."

"I want to put him somewhere else. The suite is unsafe."

"You know how much I hate being away from 'Port Adana, kitty cat. Don't make this any longer than it has to be."

"Give me a place to go if things go south."

"What do you need?"

"Tell me when and where, hackerboy, and I'll get his ass to you."

"Three hours from now there will be a fireworks display on the upper deck. An impromptu party will erupt --"

"If it's impromptu, how do you know?"

"It's on the freking schedule. Damn, didn't you read the agenda?"

"Why should I? I'm not here for a vacation, Jake, or so you keep reminding me." She ground the last part through clenched teeth.

"Just get him to the jungle consortium on the third level by the first launch of the fireworks. I'll download the schedule, and the ship schematics to your com-link. You can hack into any of the comm lines if we lose touch."

"Jake, if this doesn't work --"

"Have a little faith in me."

She clenched the com-link in her hand. An updated message flashed on the screen. The schedule, likely.

"What do we do until the meet?"

"Keep him occupied. I'm sure you'll think of something. Don't leave the suite unless you have to, and make sure you take off the damned earpiece before you have sex this time."

"Jake!"

His laughing response was cut off, and she didn't bother trying to get a hold of him again. She tugged the earpiece from the curve of her inner ear with a carefully extended claw and put it in her hidden pocket.

Her thoughts turned to Shon. So what if she was interested in the Elder. Shon's strength was apparent, and her beast was ready to let a man force her to submit. Her pussy tingled in hard lust at the thought. Grabbing her hair, tugging her into place, fucking her until she begged. She ran fingers down her curvy body. Was he interested? Did he hunt? A growl of excitement threatened to erupt.

In a moment she had the panel back open, and was knocking on Shon's door. It slid open, and the greeting she'd planned died on her lips at the sight of him in nothing but white linen pants. Ebony skin stood stark against the material. It was thin enough that she had little doubt he entertained the same need she suffered from.

The breadth of his chest and the cut of his muscles brought an ache deep in her pussy. He was primal and delicious. "Hello."

"I really like that you purr for me."

Kaia arched an eyebrow. "Your ego is astounding."

He held out his hand. "I've piqued your curiosity."

Kaia tilted her head. One hand touched the curve of her throat. His eyes tracked the movement with sensual precision, leaving Kaia breathless. She strolled past him, letting her tail slide up and around his body.

"Has your Jake decided on a plan?" Was that a growl she heard in his voice? Her pussy slickened, and repressed feral appetites jumped again to the surface.

"Jake isn't my anything. And yes, he has. We move when it's time to attend the fireworks." Her pussy ached. Damn, this was insane.

"And?"

A purr rumbled from her chest. "Until then we keep ourselves secure in your room."

Her tail caressed his chest, and flicked away when he would have touched.

"Whatever will we do with the time?" Shon let the door fall shut. Kaia saw the subtle shift from host to predator, in the lines of his body, in the way he watched her. Shon locked them in with a quiet click of the mechanism. A sound that ricocheted through her heart, beating it into a rapid staccato.

"You play a dangerous game." His voice was a warning growl, likely meant to startle or warn, but left Kaia with moisture dripping from her pussy.

"Would you prefer I leave?" Kaia lowered her lashes and waited, body primed for lust.

"You're past that option now, sweet." His expression turned hungry, and his pupils dilated. A spicy scent filled Kaia's senses. "It's begun."

The hair on the back of her neck stood on end. "What has?"

"The hunt." His grin was primal, dark.

Kaia slowly backed away, keeping her hands in front of her. "Do you like the suite?"

"It's large and accommodating enough for my needs." Fangs gleamed with his smile.

"What needs would those be, Elder?" Her inner muscles tightened with repressed excitement. When would he --

He moved, faster than any biped she'd ever seen. Kaia sprang from her spot, and ran through the entryway to the large sitting room.

Kaia kept the furniture between them while they stalked each other in a circle, each movement keeping the other equidistant. Shon ran his fingers down his hard chest until they hooked under the waistband of his linen pants. In seconds they dropped.

Kaia's mouth watered at the sight of Shon's hard dick. Thick and round and just as delicious as the rest of him. She wanted to taste, to lick. And if he didn't do something soon, she was going to throw him down and fuck him. While her instincts protested that, she was human enough in her genome to want some satisfaction.

His palm stroked the length of his cock. A soft mewl escaped her throat, and she bit her lip to keep silent. His other hand touched his balls, rolling them around in his fingertips. What would her pale hands look like on his skin?

"You have no place to go. Why don't you give up?" His mocking smile brought a spark of anger to the surface of her lust-filled mind.

"You should know what happens when a cat is cornered, honey." She was tempted to strip as well, but stayed her hands. Soon enough.

"I might." He stalked and the slow dance began again.

Kaia licked her lips. His body was beautiful. Sweat slicked his skin. Each movement was like sex in motion. He moved forward and she backed away. Shit, he was changing his direction. Her pussy creamed in anticipation.

He stepped forward again and she backed up. Her thigh hit something hard. Pain shot down her leg and she hissed through her teeth. He pounced and she jerked away, using her other leg to spring from her position.

She dropped to all fours and her gaze slid between his cheeky grin and the table his hand now caressed. Ambushed by a table. Her pride smarted a bit.

"I can taste your lust in the air." His slow inhalation drew her gaze back to his cock. Fluid pearled at the tip and she moaned softly. Her hand touched the bruised muscle of her thigh, soothing the ache.

"I can see yours."

He grinned and rubbed his thumb over the head, spreading the fluid before palming his cock in a long stroke. "Can you feel it? The way my cock would slam into your wet heat. I'll take you, and make you beg for it."

"I'm no dog."

He raised an eyebrow. "I could never make that mistake. But you will beg."

She narrowed her eyes, and ignored the way heat flared through her core at the thought of being at his mercy. The room's communication line trilled an incoming call. Kaia jerked her attention away for just a moment, but that's all he needed.

Shon attacked, and they went rolling across the carpet in a tangle of limbs. Kaia's claws came unsheathed and went into his skin. He roared and shoved her arms away with his forearms. Kaia tore his skin and growled at the rich taste of his blood on the air. She didn't have to hold back for a change. Shon slammed her arms down on the ground and locked them above her head. Gentle was not on the menu today.

The comm line trilled again, and she arched against him. Shon bit the spot where shoulder met neck. Instantly Kaia went limp, boneless from the sweet ecstasy sliding through her skin. He *rowled* against her skin, and it sent sparks of pleasure to her pussy.

His tongue laved against her skin between his teeth, and she shivered under his body. Suddenly her clothes were too much of a barrier. She wrapped her leg around his body, wanting to ease the ache of her pussy.

He released her wrists and ran claws in light caresses down her arms. The rip of her clothing as he shredded them barely registered past the sensation of his skin touching hers. No hair on his body against the light fuzz of her own torso. He pulled the shreds of clothing from her, and pressed the head of his cock against her pussy.

She struggled under his hold. This wasn't what she wanted! Not like this. She needed...

Shon released his hold and flipped her over. "Is this what you want, kitten?"

His fingernails dug into her hips, locking her in place. Kaia *rowled* in warning. His tongue touched her spine in tiny rough licks. It shot heat straight to her core, and she lifted her hips higher. Her tail wrapped around his torso, pulling him closer.

He nipped at her shoulder blade. Kaia twisted, and he shoved her back down. "Oh no, hellcat, I've got you just about where I want you."

She dug her claws into the carpet.

He pressed his palm against her slick wetness. "You're almost ready."

"If I were any more ready, I'd be over the edge by now."

Shon leaned over her body, and with his cock ridge sliding over her slick flesh Kaia's thoughts scattered. "Let me show you what it's like to be at the edge, sweet." The whispered growl in her ear sent chills of sensual heat across her skin. His hips moved, and pressure from his cock rubbed her clit, sending sparks of pleasure to her already desperate pussy.

His tongue touched his mark. The sting fired along her nerve endings, flooding her pussy with darker heat. Her thoughts regressed to nothing more than need. Want. Each movement of his hips sent her spiraling deeper into desperation.

He nipped the back of her neck. "Your name."

She shook her head. What was he asking?

His fingers rolled her nipple with enough pressure to make her ache. "Your name."

He knew her name, didn't he? Hadn't she told him? His fingers worked their magic, dragging her attention back to need. To sex.

Shon growled and jerked her head back. His teeth nipped at her throat. Her sex flooded with moisture. She purred. "Tell me your name or I walk away now, leaving you trembling on my floor."

"You wouldn't."

He stroked the length of his cock along her slit. "Try me."

Part of her wanted to push, but she ached for a hard fuck. He understood so much of what she needed. "Kaia."

He pressed kisses against her cheek and throat. "Thank you."

She sighed and tried to bite back her disappointment. Was it over now? Just a game to get her to tell her name?

He grabbed her hips and pulled away. Before she could protest the loss of heat at her back, his cockhead pressed against her pussy. She shuddered. This was what she needed.

Shon drove hard into her and Kaia cried out in pleasure. His voice dipped to a litany of words in a language she'd never heard. Musical, rough, and guttural all at once. It brought her to a fever pitch. He thrust and withdrew, leaving her aching before entering her again. Shon wouldn't follow any pattern. He'd run her to the edge and back off until she became mindless. The bite at her shoulder ached. Her hips needed to move. Fire ran down her spine and muscles tightened in her core.

He withdrew again and she gasped, tears running down her face. She was beyond speech.

"I want you wild for me, hellcat. I want to mark you, make you mine." His hand gripped her hair, and he slammed deep in her cunt. She screamed and her senses exploded in arcs of orgasm.

Her cries became words, words she couldn't understand. Shon bit her shoulder again and fucked her harder. She didn't fight, just let him take her, tear away her sanity. The bite didn't pierce her skin, just held her, marked her. She begged, whimpered. Gods, she needed to go over the edge again. Just like this.

He growled against her skin and her hair rose on the back of her neck. Yes. This was what she needed!

Shon rotated his hips and the pressure against her clit sent her over again in a crash of fire and lust. He shuddered against her back, holding perfectly still before withdrawing his still hard dick.

She struggled against his hold and he warned her with a growl. Kaia stilled, but ached for him to finish inside her. His mouth pulled from her skin, and she wanted to cry from the loss of his touch.

Why, she wanted to ask, but the lump in her throat prevented any speech.

"I will not take you as a mate without your consent." His forehead pressed against her trembling back. "If I finish now, like this, you'll never belong to anyone else, and I won't have that without your agreement."

He turned her over and pressed light kisses against her throat. "What is it about you that drives me to the end of my control?"

She closed her eyes and tried to get her head straight. The euphoria from good hard sex was slow to dissipate. Part of her wanted to beg him to finish, and another part was terrified of being tied, mated.

"My people don't mate." She lifted her chin, defiant. Angry without understanding why.

"Mine do and whether you bonded to me or not, I'd never allow another to touch you." His growl and fierce glare sent that spark of heat back down her spine.

She narrowed her eyes. "How would you stop me?"

"I wouldn't have to. We are very territorial of our mates."

"What would you do, cage me?" The thought sent terror skittering along her nerves.

Shon blinked in surprise, all feral intensity gone in an instant. "I'd never cage you. It's why I stopped." He pulled her into his arms, pressing her head against the beat of his heart, and laid them on the floor. The plush carpet was like a cloud of softness. How different from the itchy stuff on 'Port Adana.

She wrapped her palm around his cock and he groaned. "You try my control."

"I don't like you not finishing."

"I'll have time later. Trust me, I wouldn't be able to come until the time was right. It's my nature."

So many questions popped into her mind. "You mate once in your lifetime? Or is this fleeting?"

"Once." His gaze was fierce with possession and heat.

"You don't want to be tied to me forever, Shon." Sadness lurked in her heart, left it aching. She couldn't leave 'Port Adana. It was her home.

"Let me be the judge of that, little one."

He pressed light kisses against her flushed skin. She put her hands against his cheeks and pulled him up for a slow kiss, one that told her everything about his taste, about how she tasted on him. He nipped at her lips and soothed with a rough tongue. She shivered delicately and pushed her doubts away.

"Your tongue is rough and mine isn't. That fascinates me."

"Different worlds, Kaia, sweet." The way he said her name made her chest ache with emotion. He had this odd inflection at the end of her name. It made her sound exotic. And that was the problem. They were from two different worlds and after this assignment, likely never to see each other again.

She pressed another kiss against his lips, savoring his taste, trying to imprint it on her senses.

His tongue flicked against her skin and his fingers pinched her nipple only to roll it just the way she needed it. Kaia's pussy clenched. "I'm glad you enjoy my tongue." He kissed and licked around her breast, leaving it tingling and aching for more.

Deft fingers slipped between her pussy lips, stroking deep. Kaia arched.

"So wet for me." His pleasure purred along her senses. "So hot and ready. A treasure."

She moaned. "I don't need sweet talk. Just fuck me already."

He pressed the pad of his thumb against her clit. "I think that's exactly what you need."

She opened her mouth to argue, but his lips chose that moment to latch on to her nipple. Teeth touched and nipped, and that tongue. Oh gods, that tongue!

His fingers began a slow rhythm, building pressure deep within until she was whispering curses against her fist. Her eyes clenched against the pleasure building until she trembled all over.

His lips and tongue slid lower until he reached the curve of her mound. "So beautiful." His gaze locked onto hers, shadows and fire in the dark depths of his eyes. "Your pussy is perfect. Gorgeous." He slid his fingers from her body and she whimpered at the emptiness in her pussy.

He brought her slick essence to his lips and tasted. A dark fierce change overcame his features and her ache increased.

He wrapped his arms around her thighs and spread them, bringing her hips up off the ground. Her tail swished against his leg. His mouth feasted on her pussy, sucking and licking with that wicked rough tongue until she writhed and screamed. His fierce gaze locked on her, prevented her from breaking eye contact.

The burn of orgasm tightened all her muscles until she thought she'd break. He knew how close she was. He had to. Gods, she was dying!

She begged. Pleaded. And he just continued his torturous attention. Just when she thought she had a handle on it, he purred against her clit. She screamed, bucking against him in fierce pleasure. Her core clenched and pulsed in release. Her head fell back against the floor, and she shuddered in pleasure.

The ground trembled.

Kaia blinked.

They weren't on the ground. They were on a cruise liner on the outer rim. Nothing but space around them for miles. This was not a good time for massive explosions. Shon eyed their surroundings with a wariness she could appreciate. If the ship fell apart she doubted they'd have enough life pods to send them back to Adana. And even then, the pirates would be on them in no time.

An explosion outside the room jerked her attention to the door. "What the frek was that?" Kaia launched from his arms and leapt across the room on all fours. The

floor trembled again, and she dug her fingers into the plush carpet. Were they losing hull integrity?

Cursing echoed behind her, but she didn't have time to focus on Shon. Jake would know what to do. Where the hell were her clothes? She needed to find her earpiece. Or her com-link. *Chui.*

A roar of challenge tore from Shon's throat, and the roots of Kaia's hair stood on end. She scrambled for her scraps of clothes. Nothing. An imminent evacuation alarm sounded from the hallway.

"We have to go!" Shon bound from behind the bed, fully clothed, damn him, tearing into the mattress with his claws, rending it.

Frek, that was going to cost a lot of credits. Mattresses were very expensive in the deep reaches of space. Especially on a cruise liner

He grabbed her around the waist and aimed a pistol at the far wall. She screamed, but he shot anyway, disintegrating part of the wall. His grin was feral and predatory. "Do you trust me?"

"No." She shoved him. "No! You can't shoot a weapon on a cruise ship!" Panic rose, tightening her chest. Her tail twitched and jerked.

An explosion rocked the room and a massive hole gaped where wall and a door had stood. She groaned. Would she ever be on assignment with Jake, and not have something blow up around her?

"Elder Shon!" A roar filled the room, and Kaia's gaze jerked to the massive cat bounding across the room.

"Too bad, you're coming with me anyway." Shon dug claws into her hip and launched them both from the open window. "Later, brother!" His two-fingered salute mocked their situation.

"What the frek are you doing?" Kaia pressed her face into his throat. Air rushed against them, and she narrowed her watering eyes so she could see what was coming. She hoped to all that was holy he wasn't relying on an anti-suicide drag to ease them

down thru the spacelock between the cabin walls and the outer hull to the hold. Paradise Run, as far as she knew, didn't have any such shit.

Chapter Three

Shon reached out and a thin cord shot out, from where, gods only knew. What the hell was he doing? She held him tight, praying for some good luck today.

"Whatever you do, don't let go." Shon kissed her forehead, and she dug her claws in his skin. The rope sprang taut and they jerked in midair, swinging around a support silo.

"Shit."

Shon slammed into the wall, taking the brunt of impact. Air whooshed out of their lungs, and he clung on a painter's ledge. "Not exactly the way I planned it." Mischief sparkled in his eyes, and she didn't know if she wanted to claw his eyes out or kick his ass. Either one would have been preferable to hanging out two levels above a safe drop. "Well, we have no choice, then." He glanced around.

"There's only down from here, hero. So what's the big bad plan?"

A rumble of a purr filled his massive chest. "We fall."

"What? That's your freakin' plan? Fall?" She moved slightly, easing her claws toward the painter's ledge. It wasn't quite close enough. She unsheathed her foot claws in Shon's legs.

"Do you have something better in mind? That hurts, if you don't mind."

She kissed his lips. "Sorry, love." Her claws dug into him as she launched from his body to the sill.

His grunt sent a jolt of guilt down her spine. She climbed up over the edge, and wrapped her tail around a support beam.

"Where the hell are you going?" His claws dug deep for purchase where there was little.

"Saving your ass." She rubbed her palms together and eyed Shon. "Do you trust me?" This is the one place her tail never failed.

"I guess I'll have to." The screech of metal tearing jerked her attention to his claws. "Would you mind hurrying, just a bit?"

She launched in the air and hit his body, knocking him off balance, and wrapping her arms and legs around him, hanging on with everything she had in her. "Let go." Her lips brushed his ear. The sill groaned. An explosion vibrated through the metal and her tail spasmed. He was too heavy to stay this way for long. So much for getting him up on the ledge.

He dropped the cable, and they swung away from the sill. "I'm going to swing you closer to the utility catwalk." She used their momentum to swing wide. His body took a hard hit, metal groaning under his weight. It didn't take long for her to realize he was hurt, but that would wait. The support beams groaned and screamed.

"Jump!" Shon held out his arms.

Kaia laughed. "Easy for you to say." She dug her clawed feet in the metal, gaining just enough purchase to take pressure off her tail. Her legs strained at the awkward position. The metal groaned and cracked. Another explosion echoed. She launched from the wall, grasping the edge of the gangway.

"I've got you." Shon's hand gripped her hand. He hauled her over the edge with barely a strain of his muscles.

She pressed her forehead against his. He grabbed the back of her head, and pulled her in for a hard, unyielding kiss. A dominating kiss. She shuddered, her beast rippling under her consciousness, ready to run wild.

An ear-shattering alarm went off. Kaia pressed her palms against her ears to dampen the effect. "We have to move." She raised her voice to be heard above the siren. "They're locking down this quadrant."

"I take it explaining everything would mean little to them." He took off his shirt and Kaia followed his movement like a woman starved. Probably not the best time to

lust after a man. Near death experiences must be what had her ready to pounce on him in the middle of a lockdown. There was no other explanation. "Where exactly are we?"

"We're next to the outer hull of the ship. This is the pressurized outer construction of the main living quarters."

"We're right next to space, then?" Was that a faint note of hysteria in his voice?

She was right; he was probably a dirtside cat. Rarely traveled space. "Yes. It's right outside the hull there." She nodded toward the other wall. "If we don't get back into the living areas, we're going to freeze to death."

"Again, why can't we just knock on the door and ask them to let us back in? You work for the cruise liner."

Kaia avoided his gaze and tugged on an access panel until it came loose. "I'm not exactly on the roster." She dropped the panel inside. Two seconds later it hit bottom with the thud of metal meeting plasteel. Perfect. She grinned up at him. "Besides, if I heard correctly, you seemed to know your attacker back there. I suppose that means you'd have a lot more to explain than I would."

Shon narrowed his eyes, but she could see amusement causing the corners of his mouth to twitch.

Kaia jumped in the darkness. Shon's curse followed, but by then she'd hit the bottom. The plasteel muffled her hit, but she could still hear the reverberation through the access tunnel.

Kaia's cat sense took over. Her eyes adjusted to the darkness. Shon dropped, soundless, lithe. If she hadn't watched him, she'd have missed his movement. Her pussy creamed. She wanted him to stalk her, to hunt. This time mate.

A low rumble from his chest set Kaia back. What danger was she missing?

"I smell your blood." His growl rolled with his cat just under the surface. She'd seen worse. Her claws extended.

"It's just a scratch." Hell, she didn't even know where the blood came from.

Shon's body pressed against hers. "The only one I want drawing blood from your perfect skin is me, and that's only when we mate."

Her beast roared for release, ached to be let free to fuck Shon until he begged her to stop. "You said I had to agree first." She licked suddenly dry lips.

"I said I'd wait for you to agree. You will be mine."

"Your ego is astonishing."

"I can taste your response in the air. The thought of being mine fills you with heat, and slickens your pussy with need."

Would he stop her if she bit his skin? Tore into him with her claws? Her pussy creamed in silken heat. Oh yes, he was definitely getting under her skin. What the hell was she going to do to keep her beast satisfied now? She stepped away to give herself a moment to breathe. They were still in danger, and Jake needed them to be at the fireworks display for the exchange.

His hand slid down her back to her hip. Pressure against her skin told her to move away from the open access, and Kaia closed her eyes in mortification. Why couldn't she keep her thoughts straight with him around?

"Here." He handed her his shirt and she arched an eyebrow. Chivalry was long dead. With a shrug she put his shirt on, and instantly regretted it. His scent enveloped her. She tied the billowy material around her stomach so it wouldn't get in the way of her movement.

She padded away, putting distance between her pheromone-crazed self and the object of her lust-driven thoughts. Her hip still burned from his touch. What would Jake think of all this? She couldn't stop the rumble in her chest before it escaped her lips. A hand touched her back and she *rowled* quietly. A quick glance told her Shon was keeping up with her. Impressive.

"Forgive me for keeping pace, but the peeks of your bare pussy while you run were too great a temptation."

She shuddered but kept racing. They matched in pace and breathing.

"Why is your brother after you?" She winced at the harsh edge of her voice. It mirrored the fight to keep her beast from rending Shon to pieces in lust. He might be part cat, but she could tear him apart if she wasn't careful.

Shon's heavy regard passed over her body for a moment before returning to the path. "I am the Elder."

Kaia snorted softly. "So you keep saying. It still means nothing to me."

"It's not just a title, Kaia. It's a birth order. As eldest, I am required to lead my clan."

Kaia had seen several dignitaries in 'Port Adana. Some were royalty, others were simply high rolling thugs. None were like Shon. "And your brother doesn't like that?"

"In order to be leader he has to become the eldest."

Brother against brother. Was there a story older than that among the races? The thought of Shon dead twisted her gut in cold fear. "Ahh. And that would be a problem for you, I suppose." Her tail curled around her thigh.

"What's the matter, Kaia, tired of me already?"

She chuckled. "It would be easier if I were." She eyed the corridor markings. They were heading the right way.

"Do you know why I hired your services?"

It ate at her, but in their line of work, it paid for Jake to keep her in the dark on some things. Her tail was just too honest. "I'm just the escort. We need to keep moving up."

"You're far more than that."

She ignored the warmth in his voice. He'd move on after the assignment, and she'd be frolicking among the 'Port trash, trying to find a man who could match this one's passion and fire. It was the way of things, no matter what her heart whispered. "Keep me in the dark. It's safer that way. I'll get you to where you need to be. You just keep up."

His quiet laughter rolled over her skin. "I'll do my best."

They came to a dead end, and Kaia perked her ears, listening carefully. The alarms had silenced, but how long did they have until the fireworks display?

"Where now?"

"We need to get to the upper decks for the fireworks display."

"Why? Wouldn't it be better to stay low? Besides, it's not like they'll run the fireworks after the explosion in our cabin."

"You don't know much about the outer rim if you think a little rough and tumble will keep them from entertaining the tourists. They'll likely call it a publicity stunt, or some such to keep everyone calm."

Shon eyed her like he thought she was crazy. He'd see. Things were different here. Far different.

"How did your brother find you?"

Shon shrugged a shoulder. "He's the best tracker I've ever seen. It would take death for him to stop coming." His lips lifted in a wry smile. Kaia had an almost overwhelming urge to bite him.

"The lockdown will prevent his movement." She found a ladder and began climbing.

"Kaia, gods." Shon's growl whispered pleasure over her skin.

She laughed, pleased and exasperated at the same time. "We'll find me more clothes when we get to the surface of one of the levels."

Shon growled again but followed her up. When they reached the top, she had a second to take in the dim lights of the corridor before Shon had her against the wall, his mouth slanting over hers in hard lust. She moaned and opened to his onslaught, taking and giving until their bodies shook with repressed need.

"Your blood. I can taste everything in the air." His hands trembled and she shuddered under his primal response.

"You can't mate with me here. There are people hunting you. Your brother. The Paradise Run security team will be sweeping for you."

He brushed his fingers through her hair. "My brother will never stop until one of us is dead."

She shoved him away with a groan of frustration. "You would mate with me knowing you're hunted to the death?" Figured. She sure knew how to pick them. "I'm not a tragedy romance kind of female."

This corridor was larger, and seemed to get non-automaton movement based on some of the refuse lining the walls. Her heightened sense of smell told her it was only old food and regular trash. "Keep your eyes open for a data ret unit."

Shon shook his head. Like he could keep his eyes on anything but her assets. The urge to mate grew stronger the more time he spent around her. He could still taste her blood on his lips, in the air, all around him. The ache from his landing still twinged in his knee, but it was nothing compared to the pain in his hard cock.

Her natural sensuality when she moved was more apparent when she was in this kind of element. Stalking. Hunting. Running. Shon growled at the feral joy in his heart and soul. She'd be his. His.

"Can you please stop doing that?"

He stopped moving and watched Kaia stand, her tail weaving behind her body. The perfect curve of her hips and stomach, slim and beautiful breasts with nipples hard and excited, barely covered with the dip of his shirt. For him. The small down of hair at her pussy slick with her own lust. "Doing what?"

Kaia looked to the ceiling. "Can you focus?"

"I am focused. Very focused." He snapped his irritation. "So if we don't get you into some clothes and out of this confined space, you won't get a choice anymore."

She reached for him, confusion and something darker, something he couldn't possibly see in the depths of her eyes.

"Don't touch me, or I'll lose what little control I have left."

She drew her hand back. "I think I found something over here." She remained upright, movement just as silent as before. Kaia untied his shirt and let it fall around her thighs. He wanted to roar at her covering herself, despite the fact he'd just mentioned it. It still bunched around her tail leaving him a very nice view of her perfect ass.

He leaned against the wall on the opposite side with arms crossed.

"I don't have Jake's skills with hacking systems, but I can at least get a map to the jungle consortium." She scanned through multiple maps until her voice made a small mewling sound.

Shon winced and pinched the bridge of his nose. She was going to be the death of him at this rate.

"I found it. We're close." She flashed him a grin and turned back to the screen. "The best part is that we haven't missed the rendezvous time."

"Can you get in touch with Jake?"

"This doesn't have a comm outlet, so no. I wish. He's got eyes everywhere."

An alarm went off, and Kaia jumped away from the screen.

"What did you do?" He stepped between her and the screen, scanning both sides of the corridor.

"Nothing. I didn't do anything."

Chui. He was willing to bet all the gold in Azray it was his brother. That meant they needed to be gone. Now. "I need you to make that map go away, Kaia."

She blinked and nodded. "Done."

"Let's move now."

"Right." She raced down the corridor with a launch of speed he'd never seen outside the games of his homeworld.

They turned corners, went up ladders, and ducked behind so many access panels Shon fought disorientation.

His blood pounded. They were being hunted. It was not a good feeling. Especially when he considered what his brother would do to Kaia. They had too few females left.

They paused for a moment, both gasping quietly in the darkness. "Do you want to kill him?"

He eyed Kaia's serious expression, the way her entire body stilled, waiting for his answer. "No. He's a far better leader of our people than I could ever be."

"Aside from hunting down his brother and killing him?"

Shon grinned at her acid comment. "I don't fault him for tradition. He's done his part to create a better world for our people. His methods, however, I sometimes don't agree with."

"Like killing you."

Shon laughed. "Yes. Like killing me. Definitely not agreeing with this method of ascension."

"We're almost there." She climbed up a ladder, and he followed, listening intently for noise of pursuit. Hearing nothing made him more uncomfortable.

"When we were children we would play stalking games."

Kaia grinned. "I used to run the tunnels when I was a kid. Did you ever win?"

"The only time I won was when I tricked him. It took months of planning and conniving, but I put him off my trail and then attacked him later. He never forgot that, and no other tricks would work."

"You admire him."

"I do."

"You're not angry?"

"I'm proactive, working on a plan as we speak, honey."

She turned a handle and pushed.

Instant heat and pressure pushed down on them, the air heavy and saturated. Shon blinked and followed his hellcat out of the darkness and into a lush green land the likes of which he'd never seen.

The reek of rotting vegetation assaulted his nose. His senses adjusted to light and smell, leaving him momentarily disoriented. "Is this where we were supposed to be?"

"Yes. Welcome to Paradise Run's jungle. Don't harm any of the animals."

A roar from behind them made Shon's primal instincts claw their way to the forefront.

"Don't hurt the animals. We are the invaders. I think they might take offense to that. It's mating season for them all. Stay out of their territories, and we'll be fine. They're marked off by each of these lines." She gestured to the static fence running beside them.

"So where are we then?"

"We're on the tourist path. If we follow this line it will lead us to the central office and a comm station."

"You got that from a map?"

"No." She pointed up. "I got it from the information banners. Rain is imminent."

Shon had a moment to open his mouth before water droplets pounded against them.

Kaia laughed and spread her arms, her face turned up into the downpour. His heart slammed against his chest. She was a goddess. Water plastered his shirt to her body like a second skin.

Fire slid under his skin, and the urge to mate, to force her to submit, to make her his, coursed through him.

"Kaia."

She glanced at him, and the smile died on her lips. The scent of her lust was like a beacon to his beast. "Shon?" There was no fear in her eyes or her voice, just a breathlessness that made him want to bury his dick so far in her slick heat he wouldn't know where he ended and she began.

Some part of him knew this wasn't natural, normal. Something had set him off. An idea struck him. "How can the entire jungle be on the same mating season?"

Kaia swallowed and backed away slowly. He wanted her to run. To be chased. "I don't know."

"I'm sorry." His mouth salivated, and his fingers ached from being clenched so tight in fists. She wouldn't get a choice, and it was tearing him apart inside.

"For what?"

"Run. Run for me, Kaia. Let me hunt you." The last of his words tore from his throat.

"If you mate with me, and then get yourself killed, I swear I'll hunt you down on the other side and kill you again."

"Run." He grinned, wanting her to race, needing it.

She took off the shirt and tossed it at him. The wet material smacked against his face, but his eyes never left her body. Kaia gave him one sensual smirk before running.

Shon admired the grace and strength of her legs, the way her ass moved when she ran, her tail. He stretched and popped his back. The beast roared through his body. Not yet. He needed to give her a head start.

The scent of her body faded and he ran, still gripping the sopping shirt in his hand. He could taste her on the humid air.

Her laughter echoed from the trees, and the beasts of the jungle responded with their own roars and cries. He stalked. Her sweet scent was perfect. She ran from tree to tree, and he pushed straight ahead, never wavering, only needing.

His cock ached to be buried deep in her heat. His blood roared. He began to run. *She is mine. Mine.*

* * *

Kaia's pulse pounded. Her senses were blurred with sensuality, the thrill of the hunt. He was hunting. Her nights of waking up, aching for this, needing this, were over. She'd be taken and bound, never to be alone again.

It both terrified and exhilarated her. She raced to the comm center. What would happen next she had no idea, but she needed him closer.

The jungle went silent, and she jerked to a stop.

"I've found you." His voice held a timbre so deep it sent her body into overdrive. She bound from the spot and he attacked, taking her down stomach first with her clawed hands behind her. "You're mine."

She bit her lip to keep from responding and he growled. "Tell me." He pressed against her, and she cried out. He was naked.

"No."

A loud smack followed by stinging heat shot pleasure/pain through her nerve endings to her pussy. He frekking smacked her ass. She hissed and he did it again.

She struggled, aching to turn, to bite. Rend. Tear.

He rolled her over and shoved her wrists above her head, pinning her with his hand. "I feel the beast inside you. It wants to destroy." His other hand skimmed down her side to her hip, caressing along the muscled ridges. "You are mine."

She groaned. His cock pressed against her, and she arched against him. "Tell me."

"Remember my oath?" She glared at him for stopping.

"You'll kill me if I die."

Her smile was backed by equal loads of anger and desire. "Yes."

He sheathed tighter in her heat and they both groaned. She clenched her inner muscles, and he pressed his forehead against her throat. "I'm barely holding back, woman. Don't force me to take you without consent."

"You can never leave me?"

"Never be with another."

Her heart ached to tell him how much he'd come to mean to her in a short time, but right then his cock slid deeper and her brain turned to mush. "I'm a demanding lover." She fought against his hold, but he rolled his weight against her, driving his cock against a sweet spot in her pussy.

"So am I." He drove deep and she gasped at the intensity.

"Please," she whispered against his cheek, not caring whether or not he heard her beg, but knowing one day she'd do the same to him.

"Say it."

"Make me yours." Her heart ached in a way she'd never imagined.

His throat made a primal sound, one of male pleasure. And then he became everything she needed. He thrust and arched, caressed and teased until she was wild in his arms.

His teeth scraped against her throat, across the mark he'd left on her skin earlier. She groaned low in her throat, wanting him to bite her there again, take her to the edges of ecstasy.

He purred against her skin, and she lifted her hips. He hit that spot again, and she whimpered. Electric shocks of pleasure shot to her pussy.

"You're so tight. So perfect."

She jerked her hands out of his hold and he chose that moment to strike, teeth sinking into her skin. It shot her over the edge. Kaia cried out and dug her claws into the ground beneath them, rending the jungle instead of his back. Through slitted eyes she could see the sheen of sweat on his shoulder, and she suckled his shoulder, mimicking his rough and sinful mouth.

Shon purred and his body began moving in a rhythm that blew her mind. She could only hold on, tension mounting again. She needed...

He fucked her harder, faster. She could taste her own skin, the pulse of her blood under teeth that weren't her own. Panic lit her soul and Shon's presence calmed her, soothed.

They were bonding. Psychically bonding. Gods. She could feel his body tightening with impending orgasm, feel the way her pussy clamped on his cock, the ache of his body for her. His heart. Oh, how lonely he'd been.

He chose that moment to tap her clit and she *rowled* against his skin. Orgasm tightened her body, and he tapped again. She arched and fought. Needing it to end, something was digging in, wrapping itself in her soul.

You'll never be alone again.

He pounded harder, and she pulled her mouth from his skin and arched back. "Mine."

"Yes, please." She whimpered her ache.

His soul meshed with hers, combining and strengthening until she felt wrapped in warmth. It completed her. Orgasm tore through her body, violent and full of love. Her inner muscles drew him over with her until they both shook in each other's arms.

"Never alone." Her voice held wonder. Something she hadn't held since childhood.

Never again. Never for either one of us.

"Never," she whispered against his skin.

"Hello, brother."

They both jerked as though shot.

"I'm sorry, am I interrupting something?" The sound of a weapon charging up jerked their attention to what he held in his hand. "I think you dropped this." He held it pointed straight at Shon's head. "Move away from her."

"No!" She tried to block Shon, but he pushed her gently away. "No, I just found you. He can't. You can't do this!" she screamed at his brother.

As unlike as any two siblings could be, his brother was light where Shon was dark. "My apologies for this." He nodded in her direction.

Shon launched at him and he shot. An arc of light splintered from the weapon, and Kaia screamed. Shon crumpled to the ground. "I will kill you!" She clawed and tore, but he blocked her, twisting her body so that she couldn't fight without dislocating a bone. The weapon was close, one red light glowing from the recent discharge.

"It's a shame he mated you. There would be many warriors on our homeworld who would give anything for a tailed goddess such as yourself."

"You have two seconds to get your bloody claws off me, or you'll wish you'd been the one at the end of a pistol. He's not dead."

"I loved my brother."

"You are sick. Love doesn't come from pain." She still fought. Tears streamed down her face. Her joints popped. She could see Shon's still form.

"Stop fighting or your recovery will be most painful."

"Let me go." She needed to see. Needed to know.

"I'm afraid I can't do that."

"I'm afraid you're going to have to." Jake's voice was ice. He'd come, too late. Her rage turned to him, then herself. If she'd just got them to the comm center. Shon was...

"Let her go."

He released her, and she scrambled away from the vile bastard to wrap her arms around her Shon. Her mate.

He wasn't breathing. She'd finally allowed her heart to give, and look what happened. She roared her pain until her throat ached. Soft croons came from her throat.

"Kaia."

She swiped at the voice.

"Chui!" Jake jerked away from her reach. "Kaia. The killer's gone. They've taken him away."

"Don't take Shon from me, please." Her heart shriveled in on itself.

"I won't let them take him. Please. We have to go. Let's take Shon, together, before they look too closely at us." He ran a hand through his unruly hair. "You two being naked didn't help my story much."

Kaia pressed a fist to her stomach and cried, sobs racking her body. Jake put his shirt around her shoulders, and lifted the body of her fallen mate.

Chapter Four

Kaia held the mug of tea in her hand, staring from the private observation deck. The arrival back to 'Port Adana meant nothing to her. Jake assured her Shon's body had been transported without incident.

A quiet numbness had invaded her soul from the moment of the gun's impact, but something odd was stirring deep inside. She heard the sound of a door opening behind her.

"I hope you haven't forgotten your promise."

Kaia swung around and stared. Her heart screamed in joy, but she couldn't speak. Shon leaned against the doorway, nonchalant and gorgeous. And impossible. "You were..."

"Your heart knew better."

"I thought you were dead." She dug her claws into the back of a chair to keep herself upright.

Shon strolled across the room, tugging lightly at her heart with emotion of his own. "With such a new bond, you wouldn't have survived my death. My brother might be a bastard, but he wouldn't have killed you."

"You don't mean this was a setup?"

"From the beginning."

Fury lashed her chest from inside, coiling and whipping until she thought she'd lose her mind.

"You're destroying that chair, hellcat." The deceptive calm in his voice didn't hide the wariness in his stance.

"I thought you were dead."

The touch of his soul soothed her, calmed her. She rumbled a warning in her chest.

"It was the only way. He needed substantial proof. I didn't know he'd planned it until after I was shot. I was just supposed to get off 'Port Adana and get a new identity."

"How? How did all this happen without me knowing about it?"

"Jake. That's why I was coming here. I needed a new identity and a faked death. He did it."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

He laughed. "I tried. You wouldn't let me."

Kaia closed her eyes, pain tearing apart the anger until she had nothing left but a shadow of grief. "I've dreamed you were alive for days. Do you know what that did to me?"

"I couldn't come to you until now. Until he left."

"Shon, you..." She pressed a fist against her suddenly lurching stomach. He had her in his arms before she could step away. Tears streamed down her face. "You're not dead."

"No." He held her tight. "I made a promise."

"You let me believe." She tried to shove him away, but he wouldn't let her go.

"I had no choice."

"I can't lose you again. Tell me it's over." Her soul flared in hope, the warmth he'd given her still simmering. The numbness was slowly seeping away. Anger and happiness roared through her veins.

"It's over." He shushed her and pressed light kisses along her jaw.

She dug her claws into his shirt and tore the material apart. Palms pressed against his chest told her the truth. He was really here!

Kaia wrapped her arms around him and held him tight. "I love you. Don't you ever die on me again."

Shon lifted her up and turned them around. "I won't."

She laughed for the first time in days and wept for joy. He was real. Never alone again. Never.

"I love you, Kaia. Please don't ever forget that."

"I won't, but you'll have to make an honest-ish woman of me."

"Honest-ish?"

"I'm a thief for a well-known hacker. I wouldn't ask you to give up your job."

"Marry me, Kaia."

"I'll think about it." He growled and she laughed. "You'll have to convince me you're worth it."

"I can take you on a cruise," he murmured against her skin. "They have this amazing jungle on board. I bet we could find some way to convince you to say yes."

Kaia groaned. "No more cruises for some time, thank you. I'd rather show you the underworld of 'Port Adana."

"What a shame. I did enjoy the hunt."

"Who said the hunting stops? We have an entire spaceport at our disposal. Trust me, no one invades my territory."

"No one?"

She purred at the press of his hand against her pussy through the gauzy clothing she'd chosen to wear since her return. "All mine."

"We'll see about that." His fingers worked magic through the material, creating friction against her clit.

Kaia groaned. "I really thought I'd lost you." Tears burned her eyes but she held them back.

He pressed light kisses against her throat. "I know. I couldn't come to you sooner, or things would have started over again. My people have to believe I'm dead. My brother hunted me and he never failed in his missions. Now no one will doubt his leadership."

Shon's lips followed the trail of her skin to the curves of her breasts. Little flutters of pleasure began stroking her nerve endings. She let her head fall back in sweet ecstasy. "What are you doing to me?"

"I'm making love to my mate." The internal pressure intensified. "In every way I can."

Another pulse of pleasure shot to her core and Kaia moaned.

"My touch is nothing compared to what our bond can do."

She grinned. "Your touch is far more than you give credit for."

He leaned close and growled in her ear, "That's nothing. Tell me, hellcat, how does this feel?" Something warm and wicked sizzled her nerve endings at her pussy, sparked through her body and jerked a moan from her lips.

His low chuckle against her skin brought its own pleasure. "I'm going to lick and taste you, Kaia. Slow and easy. Every inch." He emphasized each word with building pressure against her pussy, both physically and through their mate-link until Kaia was shaking.

Kaia trembled in his arms. His rough tongue against her pussy would send her over the edge. They both knew it.

His hands bunched the material at her hips, tugging it up until the cool air of the observation room added its own fuel to the fire of her body. Each brush of air was a caress to her pussy.

"Ahh, you like that." Shon continued pulling until her torso and then her breasts were bare. The teasing air became something different, something Shon was doing, but she couldn't pin it down. Shon moaned. "So beautiful."

Kaia leaned forward and pressed a slow kiss against his lips. Shon's taste had imprinted on her mind like his touch had imprinted on her body. He was everything.

Shon ended the kiss and the smoky pleasure in his eyes told her he was not unaffected.

"This sensual tie, the mating bond, are you the only one who can use it?"

Shon grinned. "I'm tempted to say yes, but that would be a lie. You'll be able to use it one day." He stroked her from the inside and her pussy clenched in hard need. "I'll take this pleasure while I can."

"Will this stop?" Her heart and pussy ached. *Please don't let it be so.*

"No, love." He pulled the rest of her shift over her head. "I just doubt you'll let me tease you without teasing back."

She grinned and wrapped her arms around his neck. Fingertips brushed the soft hair at the base of his head. "You know me too well."

"Not well enough," Shon growled and a tingle of pleasure slid down her spine. He licked her pulse point at the throat, and slid his teeth along the skin until she ached for him to bite.

Shon took his time, alternately teasing and fucking. He nipped at her skin and she cried out, closer to the edge than she expected. Somehow they were lying together on a settee, and his tongue was brushing against her sensitive nipples.

He continued to lick and nip, bite and suck until her body was on fire with heat. With each rise of pleasure he stoked the fires with tender caresses of her pussy and tail.

His nails raked against the base of her tail and up her back. She bit her lip and arched into his touch. Shon's tongue inched lower until he reached the curve of her hip. His teeth scraped against the skin and she purred. Pleasure shot to her core and she fought his touch. It felt too good.

His hands held her. His rough tongue licked her skin, driving Kaia insane. Her pussy ached for his dick, his mouth. Anything!

Shon chuckled. "Easy." He moved his lips across her stomach to the soft fur of her mons and pressed soft kisses against the sensitive skin. She spread her thighs, and he moaned low in his throat.

"You are so beautiful." His lips and tongue worked their magic on her pussy, pushing her past thought. Each decadent lick became fire through her core, pulling her inner muscles tight with impending orgasm.

She murmured and begged. Pleaded and growled. Nothing pushed him faster. Nothing made him change his course and it was driving her insane.

The internal stroking grew more intense and Shon played her body like a dance, twisting her, teasing her until she couldn't stop the pleasure/pain from making her cry in need.

Tears streamed down her cheeks, and the ache sharpened.

He rose over her and pressed the head of his cock against her soaked entrance. No words. Just warmth and heat. What she needed. What he needed.

Shon drove deep into her core and she screamed, claws digging deep in the carpet, tearing away the thick strands. Pleasure shot through her body and her inner muscles tightened, clenching him with every wave.

He trembled and held still until her body relaxed, leaving tiny shocks of pleasure through her body.

Shon wrapped his arms under hers, tugging her closer. "Say you're mine."

"I'm yours."

He thrust and twisted his hips, hitting a spot that had her quivering. The aftershocks became hotter.

"For how long?" His teeth grazed her shoulder and she whimpered.

"For as long as we're mated."

He growled and nipped her skin. His body jerked to a stop and she arched. "No."

"What?"

"We are mated for life." He thrust again, savage, hard and her pussy clenched around him, needing more.

"Just like that, please." She pressed kisses against his sweat-covered shoulder, tasting his heat.

"How long are you mine?" He fucked her harder.

She kept her claws sheathed and pawed at his back. "For --"

He twisted his hips and she bucked against him. Her pussy tightened around his hard length. She was already close. Her heart ached.

"I love you." She set her forehead against his shoulder and cried, desperate. "Never alone."

He didn't relent, driving deep into her with each thrust. "Never."

She let her head fall back against the carpet.

"I'm yours." Her orgasm crashed over her. Shon arched into her heat following her over the edge. Kaia fought the urge to tear open his skin and drink his blood.

"Don't fight it." He gripped her hair and jerked her head back. "Mine. I'm yours." At that moment his feral beauty brought out something dark, something primal.

Carnage. Heat. *Mine*. Her beast rose and she bit, hard, tasting the meat of his shoulder. Her teeth didn't pierce, but he groaned in pleasure, his hands cradling her head to his skin.

His teeth grazed her shoulder, and she made a soft mew in her throat. He bit and she cried out. They held one another until the trembling left their limbs and the cool air of the room evaporated the sweat off their bodies. She wrapped around him, comfortable, content. A soft purr rumbled through her chest, and she bathed the bruising wound she'd left on his shoulder.

"I tried to be gentle." His wry grin touched her.

Kaia laughed. "That was gentle." She looked deep in his amber eyes and felt the love of their bond strengthen her heart and soul, ease the aching loneliness of too many years.

"I love you, my sweet hellcat. I will never leave your side again."

She snuggled close and smiled. "I'm counting on that."

"Kiss me and make me yours." His lips brushed her forehead and she lifted her lips for a tender kiss.

"Always." And her heart raced free with her mate by her side.

Epilogue

Jake watched their reunion with a hollow ache in his own chest. Another life saved, another bright light for his corridor kids: the street rats of 'Port Adana. Soon he'd be replaced with a newer guardian. Very soon now the kids would stop trusting him. He'd grown up.

The silent movement of his associate set Jake's hair on edge, but he didn't shift his gaze from the scene below.

"Is this what you wanted?"

"More than what I'd hoped." The new High Elder's voice held low and steady. "You did far better than expected, human."

"I'm less human than any of you at this point." He tapped a fingertip to his temple. "Brain's been rewired since birth." Jake crossed his arms, surveying everything, memorizing this moment to recall later.

The High Elder said nothing.

"Will the pelt be enough?"

"I have the vid you sent me in addition to my own hunting cam. The female's reaction would be more than enough to convince them, especially knowing that he was mated. His honorable death would also secure my hold in the clan."

"Honorable?" Being shot immediately after creating a lifemate didn't ring as honorable. It sounded more like a nightmare.

"He took me on a hunt, a chase. He fought to the end. And at the end I used his weapon against him. Not claw and tooth, but the weapons we brought to the battle. A fitting ending for a great warrior who'd served his people."

Jake raised his eyebrows. Their people were twisted. Shon was likely the only sane one.

"I'm fascinated with this outside world. Who knows, maybe we'll start exploring on our own."

Jake made a noncommittal response. The Elder had never spoken for this long.

"It is good that he has found a mate. She is more than worthy of him, of our family." Jake slid his gaze to the Elder's face. For a moment he saw sadness. "I will miss my brother." He adjusted the shyrah pelt bundled on his shoulder and held out his hand. "It was a pleasure doing business with you."

Jake laughed and shook his hand. "You'll have to forgive me for saying this, but I hope to never see you again. The favors I had to call in for this operation put me in the hole."

"You'll be financially compensated."

Jake grinned. "Some things can't be bought with money."

The Elder made a noncommittal noise of his own and nodded. "Wise words for one so young. Good-bye, Jake."

"Good-bye, High Elder."

He slipped away without a trace, and Jake shook his head at the wonders of the world he called home. 'Port Adana was growing too small for him. Too many people knew his name. Rumors were starting to slip through the crevices of his information system. Someone was looking for him, someone with a vendetta. It was time to dust the port-dust off his boots, and search for a new safe haven.

Kaia wrapped her arms around Shon and pulled him close. Jake couldn't remember the last time he'd seen her so happy or relaxed. A quiet *mew* at his feet drew his attention.

"Hello, Sheba." She jumped up on a container beside him, concern evident in her projected emotion. "It'll be fine. She was the last of our crew." He scratched under her chin. "How do you feel about taking a trip? Travel the rim, and see what kind of mischief we can get into."

She said nothing, just waited. He knew she'd come with him. She'd known this day would come, the itch to pick up and move.

Kaia and Shon grew more intimate and Jake's lip lifted in a half smile. "Come on, Sheba. Let's go see a man about a ship." She jumped up into his arms, and he let her settle in the nook created against his body.

He'd leave after their wedding. Or their first child's birth, whichever came first.

Dawn Montgomery

Writing is a driving passion for Dawn Montgomery. She's told stories her entire life and has no intention of slowing down any time soon. Dawn's world is hectic and it reflects in her tales. Reflection comes later, when you get a chance to breathe. Aside from caring for her family, telling a great story is the most important thing and she loves hearing from her readers. You can learn more about Dawn by visiting her website at www.dawnmontgomery.com, and can reach her at dawn@dawnmontgomery.com.