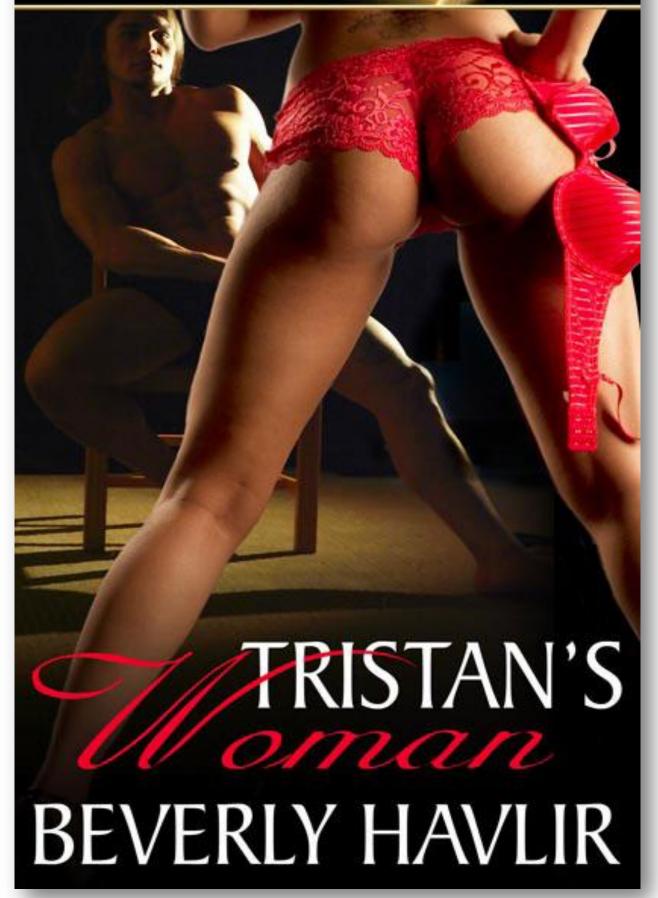
### ELLORA'S CAVE REEN



### **TRISTAN'S WOMAN**

**Beverly Havlir** 

### Prologue

**Pleasure Planet** 

2250 A.D.

"Fuck me harder. Stick your cocks in me. Please, harder."

Ava leaned her head against the square, one-way viewing glass, her fingers rubbing around and around her stiff clit. She was wet and aroused, small drops of moisture rolling down her thigh. Her breath came in quick pants, her fingers working in sync with the moans and whimpers of the woman inside Pleasure Room Three.

The Erosian pleasure worker disguised as a seven-foot-tall, green-skinned Barraccus grunted. "Fuck you hard, I will." He pushed the woman's dark limbs wider and reared back. With one rough thrust, he shoved both his cocks into her pussy and ass.

"Ahhh," Ava moaned softly. She dipped a finger, then two, deep in the wet folds of her pussy. Her moan coincided with the whimper from the woman splayed on top of the tangled sheets.

"Oh yessss. I want both of your cocks. Fuck me," she demanded.

As the Barraccus pulled out, Ava glimpsed the glistening heads of his two cocks. She whimpered in need. The top one was roughly ten inches in length, the shorter one at the bottom about nine and a half. She couldn't look away, and drew in a shaky breath. She could almost feel the other woman's pleasure as the Barraccus worked his cocks inside her pussy and ass.

"Oh God, oh God, oh God," the woman chanted mindlessly.

Her eyes glued to the places where the couple was joined, Ava pumped her fingers inside her pussy. Her breath quickened as she drove herself to the edge. Her hips pushed against her fingers, trapping the slim digits inside the slick folds. She parted her legs wider as she gripped the window ledge, seeking some surface to hang onto.

The Barraccus grabbed the woman's jiggling breasts in his hands and squeezed roughly. "Ohh," Ava whispered, feeling the caress on her own aching body.

The woman's eyes rolled to the back of her head. The brute bent low and pulled her nipple between his sharp teeth, sinking into her flesh. Ava's breasts tingled, feeling the sharp sting of his teeth as if he'd bit down on her nipples.

The Barraccus straightened and hefted the tiny woman in his arms. Her legs immediately clung to his hips, his cocks sliding home in her pussy and ass without missing a beat.

Ava bit her lip, watching the huge cock ream the woman's anus over and over again. The woman was in ecstasy, whimpering and begging for more. Ava felt her own climax approach, and pushed her fingers faster and harder in her pussy. The Barraccus grinned and bared his teeth—his gleaming golden eyes the only feature marking him as Erosian—as he fucked the woman harder.

"Two cocks of Barraccus. You like?" he asked. At the woman's nod, he thrust harder. "Fucking your ass and pussy same time, I like."

The rough words spiked Ava's arousal. With a great shudder, she came in a gushing orgasm. She flexed her inner muscles to draw out the delicious waves and massaged her clit in sensuous circles. Her orgasm went on and on, until her knees threatened to buckle and she had to grip the window for support.

Though hazy eyes, she glanced back at the woman who was still getting worked over by the Barraccus. It was clear she was in the throes of a powerful orgasm, her body quivering and jerking with pleasure. Her limbs had gone limp. Only her small fists clung weakly to the green-skinned giant in an effort to hold on. Pure satiation flicked across her dazed face, the look of a woman who'd been thoroughly fucked by her lover. Envy knotted a tight fist in Ava's stomach and the pleasure she felt from her orgasm evaporated into thin air. It was quickly replaced by bitterness. She wanted—needed—a man to call her own. It didn't seem likely that she'll ever have that. The High Council had decreed that half-breeds were forbidden to serve clients at the Pleasure Palace.

Ava's lips curled in disgust. Anger, impotent and familiar, had her clenching her fists. By virtue of being born a half-breed, she'd also become a pariah. Erosians were a proud race. Except for pleasure workers, Erosians of pure blood were expected to mate with one of their own to maintain the purity of their heritage.

An ache started to throb somewhere in her heart. Her mother, a full-blooded Erosian, had broken that cardinal rule. She'd fallen in love with an outsider. Why did Ava and Kell have to bear the brunt of the punishment? Aleesia Summerlin had protected her children from the harsh realities of Erosian society while she'd lived. All that had changed when she died. The High Council promptly took her brother, Kell, away and installed him in the compound for "training". Training for what, she didn't know. She still believed it was all part of the effort to keep her in line. Just the threat of never seeing her twin again made her do the High Council's bidding.

Her throat tightened. Loneliness was like a steel weight on her shoulders. She and Kell didn't belong here. Sure, they possessed the vivid, golden eyes that were the mark of all Erosians, but there the similarity ended. Unlike the rest, they weren't shape-shifters.

It was a very lonely existence. Even if she could get away, she would never leave her brother. And where would they go? Nowhere. Ava sighed, her shoulders slumping in dejection.

Once again, her eyes were drawn to the couple, who were stirring once more. A lustful smile tugged at the Barraccus' thick lips as he worked his cocks in the woman's slick orifices. They moved, thrusting in counterpoint to each other. In. Out. In. Out. But Ava derived no more enjoyment from the erotic scene in front of her. Instead, she ached with an inner pain that was a constant companion. The weight of loneliness bore down on her shoulders. How long had it been since she'd felt a real cock slide inside her pussy? Too long. With a melancholy sigh, she straightened her clothing and made her way to the end of the corridor. She opened the door and stuck her head cautiously outside, peering down the deserted hallway before hurrying toward the platform to get ready for her performance.

### **Chapter One**

Lush, thick brush provided cover for Tristan as he briefed Jed and Logan. "We've received a tip that there are at least two, possibly more, Karn'alians here at the resort. We are to retrieve them and get out." The two men nodded. "The Prime Ruler has issued a new directive. We cannot disrupt a kingdom's peace and sovereignty. We do not make ourselves known. In other words, we keep a low profile and find our targets before the Pagans do. Set weapons to stun only."

"Got it," Logan replied in agreement, shooting the younger man beside him a mocking look. "Hear that, Jed?"

Jed mumbled his agreement, flicking his weapon to stun setting. "How reliable is this tip, Tris?"

"So far, our source has come through for us every time. The only time things went wrong was on Exeter, when the Pagans got there before we did." Tristan's lips tightened at the memory. They'd lost twenty of their people when the Pagans beat them to the remote outpost. They had fought, even though they were outnumbered, but they had failed their mission. "It won't happen again."

Tristan glanced at the Pleasure Palace. The building was low and sprawling, spreading wide with various wings and sections. In front of the gilt-edged entry was a sculpture of two figures coupling. His eyebrows rose as the lifelike carvings switched from one explicit position to another every few minutes. The attention to detail was amazing. The female sculpture's pussy looked remarkably real, down to the clitoris that was briefly revealed as the couple changed positions. Well, there's no mistaking what kind of place this is.

The opaque glass doors opened automatically for clients to pass through. Two burly men stood guard on either side, primitive laser stunners holstered to their sides. They're clear, Jed reported through their com-link. For security purposes, Cyborgs had the ability to communicate silently through microchips implanted in their ears. I scanned them and they have no other weapons.

Tristan nodded and signaled the two to follow him inside. One of the guards gave them a cursory glance as they entered the resort, but didn't stop their progress.

Inside, the temperature was noticeably cooler. The natural inlaid flooring was polished to a high shine, muting their footsteps. It was also darker, the lighting subdued and strategically placed. The air was fragrant with a soft, pleasing scent.

Logan sniffed experimentally. My scanner indicates that the air coming from the vents above is mixed with some kind of relaxing agent. It's harmless.

Indigenous plants provided a touch of nature amidst deep-cushioned seats available for lounging. Elegant and refined, one would hardly suspect it was a pleasure resort designed to cater to every sexual fantasy. Flat viewing screens flashed a welcome message and instructions in various languages. Humans mingled with different species in the foyer. It was easy to discern the clients from the resort workers, who wore short, silky tunics belted loosely at the waist.

Wow, Jed's surprise was clear over the com-link. I had no idea Erosians were so beautiful.

Tristan stifled a grin, his gaze following the voluptuous female Jed was currently admiring. Her breasts pushed against the soft fabric of the tunic, the thin material outlining the large mounds and leaving nothing to the imagination.

Logan rolled his eyes. Down, boy. We're on a mission here.

Jed threw Tristan a hopeful look. Maybe we can find time for some R&R after we complete our mission?

We'll see. For now we have to find out where our targets are.

Logan's snicker came loud and clear over the link. Oh, to be young and perpetually horny.

The younger man threw Logan a mild look. I'm only a few years younger than you, remember?

Let's concentrate on the mission at hand, Tristan instructed. The informer didn't give us a specific location. We just have to do our own surveillance and keep scanning. He strode to the bar area just off the main foyer.

Heads turned when they walked into the lounge of the Pleasure Palace. Though they dressed in clothing suited to blending in, there was no mistaking the hard physique under their dark cloaks. Their height alone placed them head and shoulders above others present. One glance at their faces, revealed by the cowls they pushed back, convinced observers that these men were not to be trifled with. The male patrons cast wary looks their way, fidgeting on their seats and surreptitiously groping for their weapons. The women cast covetous glances at them, sexual interest in their eyes.

So much for not attracting attention, Jed commented dryly.

It's your ugly face, Logan snickered. They can't help but gawk at you.

I have it on good authority that I'm handsome and irresistible, Jed shot back with a grin.

Who told you that? The women you have at every space station?

Jed grinned. I'll be glad to throw one your way, Logan. Just let me know.

Enough. Logan, scan for Karn'alian life force, Tristan ordered. His gaze swept the length of the room. With the different life forms that frequented the pleasure resort, they'd have to be careful and be on guard. A place like this didn't distinguish the good guys from the bad. The Pagans could be here as well.

It took only a moment to perform the scan before Logan spoke. Negative. No sign of Karn'alian life in this room. Negative Pagan presence.

With an imperceptible nod, Tristan strode past the long, curving, smoked glass bar that extended from one end of the room to the other. A full complement of workers busily dispensed colorful drinks in different-sized containers to the numerous servers who wandered around the lounge. He commandeered a table at the rear of the room, the position giving them an excellent vantage point.

Logan signaled a waitress. Why don't we start by ordering a drink? Let's see what information we can get.

A buxom server came over and gave them all a sultry smile. "What can I get for you?"

Tristan watched as Jed turned on the charm, the younger man's slow grin revealing gleaming white teeth, his light green eyes crinkling at the corners. His ability to charm the female species had proven invaluable on different occasions. "What are you offering?" Jed asked.

Logan's groan echoed in the com-link. The woman bent closer. Her breasts were in serious danger of popping out of her tight top. "Anything you like, stranger."

Jed's eyes took in the view with appropriate male appreciation. "Maybe a body shot would be suitable."

She threw her head back and laughed. "Why don't you come see me later? I get off in a couple of hours. How about I get you three a round of Neehaleese ale? It's the best in three galaxies. So smooth and so good, you'll never want to stop drinking it."

"That'll be fine," Logan nodded. When she left, he turned to Jed. "Can't you lay off the women even for a little while? We're here on a mission."

"She might prove useful—give us information," Jed countered. "We are on Pleasure Planet, the biggest playground in the galaxy."

"Jed's right," Tristan agreed. "We can't call attention to ourselves. We have to appear as if we're seeking pleasure ourselves."

The waitress brought their ale and deposited it on the table with a suggestive wink at Jed. With a naughty grin, he returned her wink and ogled her ass as she walked away.

Tristan surveyed the room. His senses were on high alert and he knew that his men were the same, despite their casual stance. Every mission was of the highest importance, whether they retrieved two Karn'alians or two hundred. Their race was in danger of extinction if they didn't increase their numbers. Millions of people had died during the Pagan occupation and the resulting Pagan War. An unknown number of Karn'alians had escaped to make a new life in other worlds. It was now up to the elite force of Cyborgs to find them and bring them back.

His lips curled with anger. The Pagans had enslaved his people, putting them to work in the iridium mines, then systematically slaughtering them when their usefulness ran out. The women had been raped and brutalized over and over again. And the children? Tristan seethed with a bitter fury. The Pagans had maimed the children to ensure they wouldn't be useful as soldiers someday. It had been a source of amusement for the Pagans to decide which body part of a Karn'alian child to amputate—an arm, a leg or a foot. He flexed the muscles in his right arm. A glance would show a heavily muscled arm, nothing out of the ordinary. But underneath the tanned skin was an intricate robotic arm, powered by a computer chip implanted at the base of his skull, able to perform a myriad of functions to aid him in battle.

From the children maimed and rendered crippled, a handful of surviving Karn'alian scientists, with the help of leading doctors and renowned scientists from the planet Dakara, had created an army of Cyborgs—faster, stronger and smarter than the wretched Pagans. Tristan had been one of the commanders that led the uprising and the subsequent defeat of the enemy. His bitterness at his fate, as well as his mother's death, had proved to be a strong motivator to fight. The Pagans were eventually pushed out of Karn'al and freedom was once again theirs.

He subdued the bitter anger that still festered within him and brought it under cold control. He wouldn't hesitate to kill a Pagan the moment he detected one. But first things first. He had to find his people and bring them home.

His gaze roamed the lounge. In stark contrast to the elegant simplicity of the foyer, the lounge was gaudy, bawdy and ostentatious. Garish artwork featuring females of all shapes and sizes in varying states of undress hung on the walls, clashing with the deep red wallpaper. The Pleasure Palace was a sprawling resort complex that attracted every kind of human and alien alike, all looking for sexual relief.

Logan indicated the buttons on top of the table. "Why don't we check what they offer here at Pleasure Palace? That's a good place to start searching."

Jed fiddled with the buttons and grinned. "What do you fancy, Captain? Pleasure Palace has the widest array of humanoids and alien species known to the galaxy. Even mechanical females and blow-up dolls, if you're into that stuff."

Tristan shook his head with a faint grimace. "No, thanks. I don't find it appealing to slip my cock into a fake pussy."

A three-dimensional image of a scantily dressed female rose between them, her melodious voice loud and clear as she recited a lengthy welcome message. "Why don't we summon the hostess to show us around? Maybe she'd be more help." Logan signaled a buxom female dressed in a sheer, diaphanous tunic.

The hostess glided over to their table, her golden gaze underlined by a subtle sexual interest. "Greetings." She acknowledged Tristan with an inclination of her head, her gaze lingering for a fraction of a second on Logan before sliding to Jed. "My name is Ampara."

Although she was attractive, Tristan felt no more than a kindling of interest. A check on his monitor showed that Logan, on the other hand, experienced a definite spike in his body temperature. As for Jed—well, Jed was interested in anything female.

"Would you care for a tour of what Pleasure Palace has to offer?" Ampara asked.

Logan was the first to stand up, not bothering to disguise his interest. "Lead the way. I'd be willing to follow you...anywhere."

Ampara's expression was lined with faint awe as they stood before her. Tristan was used to that kind of reaction from everyone they met. All of them were extraordinarily tall, their bodies packed with hard muscle. Although a couple of inches shorter than Tristan, Logan nevertheless looked just as menacing and dangerous. On the other hand, Jed's easy grin and good looks hid a skilled and ruthless warrior, a trait which had served him well numerous times in battle.

Ampara blinked before gracefully inclining her head. "Follow me, please." She led the way down the spacious hall. In this part of the resort, the plush carpeting muffled their footsteps. Sconces lit the way, their muted light casting shadows on the walls. Glass-walled rooms lined either side of the hallway, velvet drapes pulled back with gold tassels to enable them to look inside. A cacophony of ecstatic moans and pleasure-roughened groans filled the air.

With a graceful gesture, Ampara pointed to the first room on the left. "This is our vanilla package."

"Vanilla?" Jed asked curiously.

Tristan peered inside. The woman on the other side of the glass was lying flat on the edge of the bed, her head thrown back and her wet lips parted. A light flush covered her sweat-slicked skin and her perky breasts quivered. A man stood between her legs and fucked her vigorously.

Ampara gestured with her hand. "This package is for those who just want straight man-woman sex." She threw them an inquiring glance, her gaze containing more than a touch of curiosity. "I trust you're all looking for more than that?"

The eagerness with which Jed agreed was amusing. "Definitely. Vanilla sex is boring. I like my sex spicy and kinky."

"What about you, Ampara?" Logan suddenly asked, his voice carrying a hint of challenge.

A faint blush covered her creamy cheeks. "I like lots of things," was her brief answer before she moved on to the next glass lined room. Be careful you don't crash and burn, Logan, Tristan's amused voice murmured over the com-link.

Ampara spoke again, shooting Logan a sharp glance. "This is the other vanilla package. As you can see, the room is divided into two. One is for manon-man sex, the other for woman-on-woman sex."

With a dismissive glance at the man-on-man display, Tristan gazed with interest at the two women going at it on a red divan. One woman was on her knees, licking and lapping at the other's pussy with uninhibited enthusiasm.

Ampara raised one perfectly shaped eyebrow at Logan. "Find anything to your liking here?"

Logan chuckled. He stepped closer to her and rubbed his hard cock against her hip. "This is strictly for the ladies, Ampara. Would you care to find out?"

She turned red as the ruby pendant she wore around her neck, but didn't deign to answer. "This next package is the bondage room."

The room was decorated like an old-fashioned dungeon with chains attached to the walls at different heights and locations. A woman was manacled to a pair of chains that hung from the ceiling. Clamps were pinned to her swollen nipples. Behind her, a beefy man methodically whipped her plump ass with a flogger. At every stroke, the leather strands kissed her skin with a crisp swat, making her moan in excitement. An automatic vibrator attached to leather straps bound to her upper thighs moved in and out of her pussy. Wetness slid down her thighs, glistening damply under the lights.

Interesting. Tristan felt himself stir. There was something incredibly erotic about a bound and helpless woman, receptive to whatever pleasure her lover chose to give her.

He dragged his gaze away and looked over at Logan. His second officer was looking at Ampara instead of the display. He smothered a grin. Logan had that familiar gleam in his eye that meant Ampara would be in his bed sooner or later. Judging from the wary look in the woman's eyes, it would be much later if it was up to her. Ignoring the suggestive light in Logan's brown eyes, the hostess wandered over to the next glass display. Inside, a woman was being worked by a greenskinned, muscle-bound, seven and a half foot alien. His two cocks slid rhythmically in and out of her sopping pussy and well-lubricated anus.

Jed was impressed. "You have a Barraccus?"

The alien with two cocks was rare in this galaxy. Hard to capture and hard to tame, the Barraccus could kill with one blow.

"Erosians are shape-shifters. That's not a real Barraccus, but this scenario has proven to be very popular with the women," Ampara replied.

"I'm sure," piped in Logan in a dry voice.

Tristan took in the erotic display behind the glass. "She seems to be enjoying it very much."

"Have you tried a Barraccus, Ampara?" Logan asked, watching her reaction with great interest.

She lifted her chin and stared Logan straight in the eye. "As a matter-of-fact, I have."

Deep, boisterous laughter rumbled from Jed's chest. He shifted behind Ampara and, with his hand, mimicked an aircraft crashing and burning. Logan gave him a baleful glare.

Tristan shook his head with an impatient sigh. This was not getting them anywhere. Somewhere in the pleasure resort were two of his people. He needed to find them before the Pagans did. With quick strides, he made his way to the end of the hallway and into another darkened lounge.

Tables and chairs surrounded a T-shaped platform set in the middle of the room. At the end of the platform were heavy drapes that were currently drawn closed, blocking out prying eyes. There was a barely leashed feeling of anticipation in the air, the conversation hushed and excited.

Logan stepped up behind Tristan and reported over the com-link, No sign of Karn'alian or Pagan life.

I'm glad you could tear your attention away from Ampara for a moment, Tristan drawled over their secure communication line. Turning to Ampara, he asked, "What's going on here?"

As if on cue, the heavy beat of drums filled the air and gradually rose to a resounding crescendo. Every male in the lounge, human and alien, sat forward in eagerness, all eyes glued to the stage. Driven by an intense curiosity that he didn't question, Tristan edged closer to the platform. The music switched to a stirring, sensual rhythm. A lone spotlight focused on the center of the platform. The curtains twitched then slowly parted.

A smooth, shapely leg appeared. A strange fluttering sensation started somewhere in Tristan's chest. The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. A voluptuous woman draped in thin veils swayed into view, dressed in sheer, loose pants and a top that barely contained her generous breasts. She undulated onto the stage, her smooth belly dipping and rippling with every sensuous movement.

Tristan's cock hardened instantly. His breath stuck somewhere between his lungs and his throat. His computer monitor flashed, indicating a drastic change in his body temperature. He inhaled deeply, unable to take his eyes off the woman dancing on stage.

Long, golden-blonde hair fell down her back in glorious, tousled waves. Her lowered gaze hid the color of her eyes, the long lashes creating half-moon shadows on her cheeks. He was struck by the fullness of her rosebud lips and her small, perfect nose. The graceful arch of her neck invited a man's touch. As she swayed and turned, her breasts were pulled taut by her outstretched arms, their heavy weight straining the thin material of her top.

Blood rushed to his cock, lengthening it to its full size. His system showed a marked increase in his pulse rate as she executed a graceful turn, the veils falling around her in a filmy cloud. Tristan stood as close as he could to the stage, unable to take his eyes off her. He was mesmerized by the sexy sway of her hips. Every shake of her soft body drew his eyes to her womanly hips and to the plump curves of her buttocks. She was lushly formed, generously shaped, perfect for fucking.

Before the night was over, he was going to have her.

Without missing a beat, Ava's gaze was drawn again and again to the heavily muscled stranger who stood at the foot of the stage. His face was cast in shadows, making it difficult to discern what he looked like. One thing was for sure, he was as tall as a mountain. While everybody else remained seated at their table, he chose to stand. Nobody dared to make him sit down.

A frisson of awareness slithered down her spine. She could feel the heat of his eyes as she undulated around the platform. The detachment she normally felt at performing her sexy belly dance was nowhere to be found tonight. Her skin tingled with tight, prickling, hot and achy sensations.

The temperature rose several degrees. Beads of sweat formed on her forehead, despite the cool air that blasted from the cooling system. The rest of the room faded from her consciousness. The world narrowed to just the two of them. Every sway of her hips, every sexy swish was for him alone. Her dance became one of invitation. She didn't know what was happening—she only felt it with her quickened breathing. All she knew with any certainty was that she was performing for him alone. She drifted to where he stood right at the edge of the stage, pulled by an irresistible force.

Her gaze locked with his. Her nipples tingled, turning into stiff buds that pushed against the translucent material of her costume. Desire was a tight fist that knotted in her stomach, sudden and breathtaking.

#### I want you.

She read it in his dark eyes with startling clarity. Intense awareness snaked through her system, little fingers of heat drummed insistently on every inch of her flesh. Her dancing had taken on a sexual tempo. The heat in her eyes, though directed at him alone, was there for all to see. Her skin was hot, sensitized to the slightest breeze. Her blood pulsed in time with the heavy drums. The unmistakable proof of her arousal pooled damply between the folds of her pussy. May the Gods have mercy on her, she wanted him, too.

Tristan looked at her flushed cheeks and flared nostrils. His sensors picked up her arousal. Possessiveness swelled in him, the abruptness of the feeling taking him by surprise. The thick, coursing desire that rushed through his veins demanded fulfillment. She belonged to him. Tension mounted in the room. All eyes were focused on her, mesmerized at the sexy dance she was performing. Tristan resented having to share her with the rapt audience. This show was for him alone. She's mine.

His eyes caressed her silken body. The loose trousers hung low on her hips, giving him tantalizing glimpses of her soft skin. His fists clenched at her sexy gyrations. She turned in a circle and slowly withdrew a veil draped across her chest and threw it to him. He stretched an arm out and easily caught it, sniffing it much like a lover would. Murmurs of envy rose among the other men, some clamoring loudly for another veil. The thick sexual arousal that gripped the two of them communicated itself to the other patrons present, hiking their temperatures as well.

By the Gods of Karn'al, Tristan, Jed muttered in the com-link, unable to hide the large, telltale bulge in his pants. You're generating enough heat to light up the whole resort.

Logan swallowed visibly. He was not unaffected himself. Tris-

I want her.

Logan laid a calming hand on Tristan's arm. Be careful you don't attract the wrong kind of attention.

Tristan cast a restless glance around the dim lounge. Every male within thirty feet was affected by the unmistakable invitation to sex she was offering with every wiggle of her hips, every bounce of her breasts. His highly sensitive sense of smell picked up the sweet scent of her arousal. Those tight nipples pushed insistently against the transparent fabric of her top, making his hands itch to palm them. All because of me. All for me. Another stronger feeling of possessiveness rose to his throat, making it more urgent that he let everybody know she was his. His cock, thick and insistent, demanded to be appeased. Soon...

Ava shivered at the intense fire that lit the eyes of the mysterious stranger, gasping at the electric touch of his gaze. She didn't know who he was and didn't care. The air became oppressive. She began to pant. Needles of desire raced up her skin. She felt feverish, hot and achy. She was filled with the overwhelming urge to take her clothes off and offer him her body and soul.

His dark eyes smoldered with an answering desire.

It was a sensual shock to her system. Her pussy creamed, spreading outward to dampen her labia and her upper thighs at an alarming rate. Her eyes widened at the tight, prickling fluttering that started deep within her. By the Gods. She was going to come by the power of his gaze alone.

The tingling in her belly gained in strength, gathering momentum. Her movements slowed, her slightest movement sending waves of pleasure skittering through her susceptible pussy. Her clit throbbed. A moan worked its way past her throat as she came.

The music rose to a resounding crescendo, the heavy beat of the drum pulsing in time with the huge orgasm that slammed into her. Her lips fell open at the shock of ecstasy that swelled inside her. Her skin was slick with perspiration, her heart beat a rapid tattoo in her chest. All her motion stopped, halted by the tide of sharp sensations that pulsed inside her. Panting, trapped in his gaze, her body trembled from the force of her pleasure. Oh God, oh God...

Like a rag doll, she slid to the floor. She was so weakened with pleasure that she couldn't move. Thunderous applause roared in the lounge, accompanied by catcalls and whistles. With great effort, she raised her face to look at him.

He stood no more than a few feet from her. He watched her with a knowing smile, as if he knew exactly what she was feeling. It was one of those smug male smiles that said he knew he'd brought her pleasure and would do so again. Her spine stiffened at his arrogance. The brazen possessiveness evident in his eyes chased away the lingering pleasure that thrummed through her veins. Cursing her weak knees, she pulled herself up on unsteady legs. Just before she made it behind the curtains, she saw a familiar, burly man standing guard in the corner, his arms crossed, his eyes gleaming with speculation. Ava turned and ran.

Gold. Her eyes were the deep, shimmering gold of precious metal.

Tristan made an effort to control the heart thudding in his chest. He had felt every single glorious sensation that tore through her, shared every bit of pleasure with her. He felt drained and energized at the same time. He rubbed the silky material of the veil between his fingers. Her scent rose off the delicate silk, light and subtle, teasing his senses. He voiced the question plaguing his mind. "Who is she?"

Ampara hesitated. "I'm afraid she's not available for one-on-one entertainment. She's a performer, that's all."

"Tell me her name." The command in his voice was unmistakable.

"Her name is Ava," was Ampara's hesitant reply.

"Ava," Tristan repeated under his breath.

"There are any number of women ready to cater to your every desire," Ampara offered. "Would you like to see them? You can have your pick of one, two, even three women."

It was like Ampara hadn't even spoken. He wasn't interested in any other but Ava.

The lights dimmed until there was near total darkness in the lounge. The audience began to leave, still exclaiming over the sensuous performance. Many vowed to return the next day to see her again. As Tristan listened, his jaw tightened with displeasure. If he had his way, she'd be performing that dance for him alone. "I want to meet her."

Ampara shook her head firmly. "I'm afraid that's not possible. Ava is not a pleasure worker. She's a performer." She smiled and softened her tone. "However, Pleasure Palace offers a wide array of choices for the discerning client. Please follow me." She strode toward the opposite hallway.

Tristan turned to Jed. With a big grin, Jed sidled up to him and drawled over the com-link, Way ahead of you, Captain. I got a tracker on her.

Tristan nodded, throwing Jed a quick grin of appreciation. Quick thinking, Jed. He took the tracking module the younger man handed to him.

It's a small payback for all the times you saved my ass, Jed stated in a teasing voice.

Logan clapped the younger man on the back before he turned to Tristan. Go. Jed and I will reconnoiter, see if we come up with something. We'll continually run a scan for Karn'alian and Pagan life force.

The mission— Tristan began.

Go, Tris, Logan insisted. Jed and I will do the legwork. Time enough for our mission tomorrow. He grinned. It's about time you had some pussy.

It was true. He hadn't had a woman in a while. And this one aroused him with stunning swiftness. He couldn't wait to find her.

Jed and I will keep our hostess busy while you slip away, Logan reassured him, pulling Jed out into the hallway.

In the darkness of the lounge, it was easy for Tristan to sink deep in a secluded corner and check the coordinates on the tracker. The little, green blinking light was his target. She was swiftly moving north. Tristan vaulted onto the stage and through the curtain. He spied an exit door. Looking behind him to make sure he wasn't followed, he eased out of the door into the inky blackness of the night and tracked her steadily through the dense forest. A different kind of urgency gripped him. He couldn't wait to see her again. This time, she wouldn't be the only one coming.

# **Chapter Two**

Ava fled into the darkness, her veils trailing on the soft, damp soil. Her feet flew over the ground, taking her deeper into the woods. She didn't need any kind of light to illuminate her path. She knew the way like the back of her hand. She needed to get home right away. Only in her quarters did she feel completely safe.

What had happened back there? She didn't know and couldn't explain. All she could remember for certain was the intensity with which she was drawn to the mysterious stranger, an irresistible kind of magnetism. Who was he? He didn't look like any visitor she'd ever seen before. The cloak he wore couldn't quite hide the sheer strength of his heavily muscled body. She shivered, though the night's temperature was warm.

The lust that glowed in his eyes had been there for all to see. He wanted her. She felt it deep inside her pussy where moisture still lingered. The possession in his eyes was unyielding. He meant to have her. So she did the only thing that she could do. She fled to the safety of her secluded cottage.

The automatic doors swished open with silent swiftness. She ran in and leaned against the wall, her heartbeat thundering in her ears. Only when the doors closed did she let out a sigh of relief. She sagged to the floor, putting her head between her knees, pulling in deep, measured breaths to calm the heart that was currently trying to jump out of her chest. There would be hell to pay if it were to reach Malek's ears that she had practically consorted with a client while performing. The burly snitch of a guard he assigned to watch over her nightly performances had been standing behind the stage curtain tonight, quietly observing, intimidating as always. She was expressly forbidden to have any contact, even minimal, with resort clientele. The punishment would be swift and harsh.

"Why did you run?"

With a shriek, she jumped up and found him standing right inside the door. Her eyes grew as round as saucers. He was even more imposing up close. Beneath his cloak, his trousers molded the thick muscles of his thighs and the light, almost translucent shirt clung to his chest. Her gaze slid up to his face. His dark, obsidian eyes were intimidating under the slash of his eyebrows. His nose was slightly crooked in the middle. His lips were firm, his jaw square. There was nothing soft about him. He looked dangerous, completely menacing. "H-how did you get in here?"

He shrugged, his sharp gaze raking over her in a way that was becoming familiar to her. It was a look of ownership, a stamp of possession. "It was easy enough."

Her spine stiffened, though she took one step back for good measure. "You have to get out of here," she hissed in a furious whisper. Her eyes darted to the walls with something akin to panic. She just knew that bastard Malek had installed closed circuit monitors in her quarters to watch her every move.

He followed her gaze. With a frown, he glanced at the walls. He held up a finger to silence her for a moment. Then he grinned. "Jamming signal initiated."

She frowned in confusion. "Jamming signal?" Then she shook her head. "No, no. That won't work. You have to get out of here."

He took one step toward her. "Whoever they are, they won't know I'm here," he stated with supreme confidence. "There's no need to be afraid."

Ava backed away, glancing with frustration as the distance between her and the door grew farther. "I don't know what you think you're doing. But if you think you can barge in here to—to—"

His eyebrow rose mockingly. "To what? To make you come again like you did back there?"

She flushed. "I don't know what you're talking about," she denied tightly. "You shouldn't have followed me. I want you to get out of here."

His eyes gleamed with heat. "Did you think after that cock-teasing performance you gave me that I wouldn't come after you?"

Her chin came up, fighting the lure of his deep voice. "I didn't perform just for you. I danced for everybody out there."

"Liar," he accused softly. "You danced just for me. Every move you made was designed to arouse me. Every sexy sway of your hips orchestrated to inflame me. It worked."

She shook her head in denial. "You're delusional."

"I assure you, I'm not." A half-grin played around his lips. "Do you need me to remind you of what I'm talking about?"

She warded him off with a hand. "Stay right there. I don't even know who you are."

"I'm the man who's going to fuck you tonight," he declared with supreme confidence. His gaze ran over her barely clothed form once more.

Ava almost melted from the heat of his gaze. She resisted the urge to bring her hands up to cover herself. She lifted her chin, the defiant gesture totally at odds with the tight peaks of her nipples pushing against her thin costume top. "You're so sure of that, are you?"

"As sure as the wetness that's spreading through your pussy right this moment," he returned with silken softness.

Her cheeks burned. Damn him. How the hell did he know that? Clenching her fists, she faced him with false bravado. "If you think I'm going to let you touch me, you're mistaken. One call and security will be swarming here in seconds."

He gave her a feral grin. "First, you have to actually reach the button. And I have no intention of letting you do that." He advanced toward her. Eyes widening, Ava took a step back, then another when he didn't stop. "Let's see how you feel in a few minutes, after I've gotten you in bed."

With a gasp of fear, Ava whirled around and ran to the safety of her bedroom. She'd taken no more than a couple of steps when his arms locked around her waist like steel bands and actually lifted her off the floor. She struggled without success, trying to pry his arms off her middle. Her blows didn't even faze him as he continued on into her bedroom. The breath rushed from her lungs as he dropped her on the bed. She scrambled to her knees and tried to glare at him. She swallowed as, with a flick of his wrist, the cloak fell to his feet. He slowly, deliberately, began to unbutton his shirt. "You don't know what you're doing," she managed to say huskily. "You can't be found in here."

He grinned. "So I can stay if they don't find out?" He didn't stop until all the buttons were undone. "By the way, who are they? What are you so afraid of?" he added casually.

The sight of the taut muscles of his bare chest momentarily robbed her of thought. She blinked, trying ineffectively to clear her thoughts. "You don't understand," she breathed after a moment. "There will be repercussions if I'm discovered entertaining you."

His eyes narrowed. "Do you entertain all the time?"

"Of course not," she blurted out indignantly before she realized what she was saying. His pleased smile had her gritting her teeth. "Not that it's any of your business. Will you stop that?" she snapped when his fingers went to the button of his trousers.

He didn't even pause in what he was doing. He undid the button of his fly and lowered the zipper, as casual as you please, as if he did this all the time. She could only gape at him when he pushed the trousers down his hips and stepped out of them. He stood in front of her fully naked and fully aroused. The words she was about to say stuck in her throat. He was, quite simply, magnificent.

His shaft rose from a base of dark curls up to his navel. His cock was as thick as her wrist, capped with a broad, mushroom-shaped head. The sight was mesmerizing. The skin looked silky-soft in contrast to the steel-hard muscle it covered.

He took his cock in his fisted hand. There were tiny lines of strain around his lips. "Take your clothes off."

Ava gulped. "You...you..." She took a deep breath. "You have to leave," she finished huskily.

"I'm giving you five seconds to undress," he warned. "After that, I take it off."

She tore her gaze away from the stiff flesh that jutted proudly at her, silently tempting her to touch, to taste. "Listen, I don't know what happened back there. But we can't do this. I'm asking you to leave."

His eyes flashed. "Negative. I'm not leaving." He put a knee on the bed. Startled, Ava scrambled to the opposite side. Her gaze darted from him to the door, judging the distance. If she could only make it through the door, she could run outside and escape. But before she could even make another move, he was there beside her. Incredibly, she heard his low laugh before he hauled her against him and toppled back on the bed. Before she could even catch her breath, he rolled over and pulled her hands over her head. He threw a leg over her flailing limbs, effectively subduing her.

Panting, she glared at him. "I'm asking you to leave. Find somebody else to fuck tonight. You don't know the trouble I'll be in."

His face sobered. "I don't want to leave." He rubbed his stiff cock against her thigh. "I don't want somebody else. I want you." He bent his head and looked directly into her eyes. "Whatever trouble you think you'll get in because of me won't happen. I'll make sure of it." The last was added in a husky voice before he ripped her top in two.

She gasped. The sides fell away to expose her heavy, tingling breasts. He didn't even pause, just went straight to the waistband of her pants and pulled. The fragile material gave in an instant. Ignoring her hiss of outrage, he tossed the scraps of cloth aside and just feasted his eyes on her naked body.

His gaze was hot enough to melt an ice planet. Ava ceased to struggle. Her nipples puckered into tight, painful points. The rapt look on his face as he gazed down at her halted whatever words she was about to say. Nobody had ever looked at her in that hungry, I-must-have-you-now kind of way.

An answering hunger rippled through her starved flesh. It was at that moment she conceded defeat. She was going to let this stranger fuck her. "I don't even know your name," she whispered.

"My name is Tristan," he murmured just before his lips swooped down to possess hers. With a muted groan, Ava responded with mindless abandon. Her lips opened under his, the sweep of his tongue across her lower lip the only warning she got before he delved into the dark cavern of her mouth. The hot flicks of his tongue were intoxicating, tasting faintly of ale and something else, something she couldn't quite name, but that was immediately addicting. She was drowning in his kiss, reveling in the urgent melding of their mouths. By the time he tore his lips from her protesting ones, she was breathing hard and greedy for more.

His eyes glittered like dark jewels. His tongue snaked out to lick her kissswollen lips. He smiled when she attempted to capture his mouth for another kiss. "We have all night," he assured her.

Ava pulled against his hand. "Release me."

The slow, sexy grin he gave her weakened her knees. "I rather like you in this position."

An unpleasant thought brought her up short. "You like your women tied up and restrained?" How many women did he have? Come to think of it, what did she really know about him? Who was he? Her stomach sank in dismay. What was she doing? He could be a killer wanted in five galaxies...and she could be his next victim.

He frowned. "I suppose I enjoy sex games, but—" He paused, then glared at her with something akin to affront. "I'm not a killer. Nor am I wanted in any galaxy."

Ava's eyes widened, bewildered. How did he know what she was thinking? Was he a mind reader?

"My com-plant is highly sensitive. It can detect thoughts and feelings, unless you have remarkable psy-control and you're able to block your mind waves."

Com-plant? Psy-control? What was he talking about?

"Com-plant is my computer implant," he explained with exaggerated patience. "There are some beings in the galaxy that have exceptional psy-control that can block probes into their thoughts and memories. Are you reassured now that I'm not a killer?"

She flushed. "I don't know anything about you other than your name."

In answer, he slid a thick finger inside her wet pussy. Ava gasped.

"Would your pussy be this wet if you were really afraid of me?" Tristan asked. Her reaction was all the answer he needed. He added another finger and began a slow, almost lazy, pumping motion. Her resistance dissolved in the face of such persuasion and her limbs fell open, giving him unrestricted access.

"That's right," he murmured in appreciation. "Open for me."

She should take offense at the supremely pleased, arrogant tone he'd adopted. But the swirling sensations he brought about made any such thoughts flee her mind. It felt so good. And damn him, he knew exactly what he was doing to her. Her temperature rose. She felt hot, very hot.

"You're registering a spike in your temperature," he announced, his tone lined with a mix of curiosity and arousal.

Ava bit back a moan.

He plunged his fingers in to the hilt. "The heat in your pussy is remarkable. I've never felt anything like that before." He stilled. "My com-plant tells me this is not the norm."

Ava looked at him in disbelief. "You're thinking about that now?"

Tristan had the grace to flush. "My apologies. I've never encountered a pussy such as yours. It's highly unusual. The more aroused you are, the hotter your pussy gets."

Her gaze slid away, slightly embarrassed. She felt like a freak specimen under observation. "It's a rare genetic quality I inherited from my mother. Not all Erosians have it." She wiggled and attempted to push him away, trying to close her legs. "Science class is over. Let me go."

He had the audacity to grin, easily holding her in place. "Ah, but we've only just begun." He resumed his movement, his fingers dipping in and out of her pussy. "I'm already anticipating the moment when my cock will be buried in this heat. I fear I might not be able to wait." Ava glared at him with resentment. "I'm not here to amuse you."

He stuck his face close to hers. "The last thing I want from you is amusement. I want to fuck you until you can't walk. I want to bury my cock in the incredible heat of your pussy and just rut in you, until you set us on fire."

Her brain fogged over with his words. All thoughts of resistance fled. He withdrew his fingers from her pussy, the audible, slurping sound of her moist flesh clinging to his echoing in the silence of the room. Heat skittered along her spine as he brought his fingers to his mouth and sucked.

"So hot and delicious. You taste better than Kai-pana juice."

She shivered. Kai-pana was a fruit known to be an aphrodisiac. Its juice spiked one's sexual arousal and was said to enhance sexual performance. "I don't believe you. Kai-pana is very rare."

"Hmm, you're right," he agreed, bending low to skim his lips down her neck. His tongue snaked out to dip into the shell of her ear. "We found it in the farthest outpost of the Exeter quadrant. One sip and it would turn you into a raving creature, starved for sex and plagued with an almost unquenchable lust." He suddenly sucked on the skin at the base of her throat. "I'm thinking of giving you a drop. That'll give me just enough time to sink into your hot pussy over and over until I'm satisfied."

Heat pooled in her belly. His fingers skimmed down her raised arms to her side, seeking a breast and finding it. Squirming on the bed, she released the breath she'd been holding in a gasp. His big hand cupped and curved around the mound, holding her nipple between his fingers. He squeezed.

"Ohhh," she moaned, jerking against him. The pleasure was so sharp it bordered on pain.

He locked his jaw and gritted his teeth. "Tell me what you want."

He said she was hot, but the heat emanating from him was tremendous. With a small whimper she struggled and strained against his hold. Her blood turned molten and throbbed hotly under her skin. "Touch me. Touch me all over." The soft touch of his hand belied the lust swirling between them. The same feeling of helpless desire that had taken her over during her performance was once again weakening her limbs. The tight claw of want had a stranglehold on her. She wanted him with a totality that took her breath away. With a small moan, she shifted closer, as close as she possibly could.

Tristan bent low and nuzzled her neck, inhaling her scent. His tongue came out and licked her all over, driving her to arch her neck in invitation. He drew back and looked down at her. His lips were mere inches from hers. If she just reached up, just a little bit, she would... When their lips touched, her eyelids fluttered shut and all thought flew from her mind.

He kissed her softly, running the tip of his tongue over her lower lip, before opening wide and taking possession of her mouth. It was a kiss that plundered without hesitation, a fierce and uncompromising taking.

Her breath escaped in a hiss of pleasure.

He was a master at long, languorous licks. But it wasn't enough. Tight frustration wrung a moan of protest from her, one he ignored. His big hand curved around the indentation of her waist, his fingers trailing sensuous patterns on her sensitized skin. Everywhere he touched left her with a simmering mark, trails of heat seeping under her skin.

"I need more of you," she sobbed urgently.

"And you will have more of me." He cupped her breast and rotated his palm on the stiff crest.

He was driving her crazy.

He raked her nipples with his teeth. The light, barely there touch did not even begin to satisfy her. She writhed on the bed. "Release me," she demanded in a whisper.

Tristan chuckled and shook his head. "Not yet." He prodded her nipple with the tip of his tongue, grinning at her moan. "So plump and large, perfect for my mouth." He pulled her flesh deep between his lips and sucked. Ava gasped and closed her eyes weakly. The hard, rhythmic suction of his mouth drove the breath from her lungs. She arched against him. Her fists clenched. She was filled with the overwhelming need to touch him. Frustration fed the need she felt, and she whimpered in protest. Light fingers trailed down over the slight swell of her abdomen. Her skin tightened under his light touch. Her lips parted on a soundless moan, moist and needy.

His eyes dark and hot, he placed her hands on his chest, finally releasing her wrists. A sigh of bliss escaped from her. She drew her palms over his taut, silken muscles. Ava gave in to her urges and rubbed her nipples against the incredible heat emanating from him. "Ohhh."

He slid down, curving a hand under her ass, shouldering her legs wide apart, opening her to his gaze. The look in his eyes made her shiver. This big strong warrior was looking down at her with such hunger and naked wanting. She swallowed. The intensity of this...thing happening between them was frightening. She bit her lip, smothering a moan.

Tristan reached up and brushed her lower lip. "Don't." He leaned down and took her in a kiss of complete possession. Her senses whirled. Hunger was a living, breathing thing inside her. She was ravenous for him.

Ava cupped her breast and offered it to him, the rose-colored nipple pouting at him. "Kiss me. Here."

He lowered his head and pulled the tip between his lips. At the contact, she groaned and pushed more of her flesh into his mouth. Sharp needle points of desire attacked her with every push and pull of his lips. A moan of frustration came from her lips at his light touch. She wanted him to suck her harder, deeper. She wanted him to draw her flesh deep into his mouth and suck.

"More. I need more."

Instead of complying, Tristan went lower and slid down over the slight swell of her abdomen. Hard hit by desire and anticipation, Ava writhed on the bed. She waited for his touch but it never came. Her eyes opened and found Tristan looking down at her, a muscle ticking at his jaw, fine lines of strain around his beautiful lips. Tristan gazed down at her, lust surging in his bloodstream. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were soft and unfocused. "Look at me," he commanded, his voice strained.

Her damp hair stuck to her cheek as she tossed her head. "Take me."

"So be it," he declared in soft tones, his lips parting in a victorious smile. The soft skin of her abdomen beckoned. He slid down to his ultimate destination. Her musky scent assailed his senses, making his mouth water. He wanted to taste her on his lips and drive her over the edge of fulfillment.

The smooth expanse of her long legs drew his gaze as she twisted on the bed restlessly, opening wide and inviting his touch. He stilled, poised over the fragrant mound of her pussy. He couldn't wait to taste her. His flattened tongue snaked out and he gave her a long lick. "By the Gods, you taste incredible."

Her pussy was smooth and hairless. His breath rushed out of his lungs, forcing him to inhale deeply. Eager to taste her, he sought the innermost folds of her pussy. He pushed her legs wide apart, exposing all of her to his gaze. With his fingers, he pulled the dripping labia of her pussy apart and concentrated on the little button of pleasure that was pouting at him, begging for his touch.

He bit at her, holding her steady when she bucked in his arms. Tristan slipped his tongue through her slit and plunged deep inside, massaging and tormenting the tender tissues of her channel. By the Gods of Karn'al, her pussy was indeed hot. A fierce tide of lust gripped him. He wanted nothing more than to bury his cock deep in her wet sheath. The feeling was primal. He wanted to establish possession. He wanted to make her his.

With a fierce frown of concentration, he slipped deeper, seeking more of her honeyed taste. He was enveloped in her private heat, the internal temperature of her pussy hotter than any other he'd known.

How the hell was that possible?

His cock brushed against the cool sheet and he almost groaned out loud, near bursting. Unable to bear it any longer, he reared up and covered her

body with his. Fitting the head of his cock between the folds of her pussy, he pushed in with one great stroke.

#### Ava cried out.

Tristan didn't move, every muscle tight and straining. Dimly he noted his complant registering a large spike in the pleasure part of his brain. Beads of perspiration covered his face. He moved once, and had to close his eyes with the supreme sensation of being inside her pussy. He clenched his muscles, gripping her hips roughly as her heat surrounded his cock. He'd never felt anything like it. The small part of his brain still functioning told him he was hardly being gentle with her, but he couldn't help the need driving him. He withdrew and pushed back in with one smooth stroke, earning a strangled gasp from her. Right then, he knew she was with him every step of the way. Again and again, he stroked inside her, burying himself balls-deep in her receptive pussy. He heard an animal-like groan and realized it came from him. He pushed her thighs wider and rooted deeper. He needed to fuck her, needed to absorb as much of the rare heat of her tight channel as possible.

Clamping his hands on her upper thighs, he splayed his fingers and pulled open her labia. His cock ground against her clit every time he drew in and out. Clenching his teeth, his control snapped. Firmly holding down her writhing body, he fucked her, hard and fast, thrusting deep every time. The mewling noises she made barely registered in his mind. He wanted to last, but the feel of her pussy clinging tightly to his cock was his undoing. Her sob of fulfillment reached his ears. With a rough growl, he fucked her faster, gritting his teeth at the slide of his cock against her slick walls. Pleasure shot from the base of his spine. With one last mighty thrust, he came with a roar. He shook from the force of his orgasm and slumped over her. A slow grin pulled at his lips. If the way she gasped out his name over and over was any indication, he'd fucked her well and good.

Raising himself on his elbows, he pushed aside the hair that partially covered her face. Her eyes were drowsy, her cheeks pink. Tristan kissed the sweet curve of her jaw before he carefully withdrew from her and stood up. With a rueful grimace he looked down at his cock, expecting to see it singed and burned through. Although his cock was red, everything looked normal.

"A-are you all right?" she asked hesitantly.

His lips curved. That's supposed to be my line. "Just a little hot," he drawled. "Your pussy has an unusually high temperature."

A delectable flush spread over her cheeks and her eyes slid away. "I can't explain it. I don't know why I'm like that." She glanced back at him. "In your— er—experience, I gather that's not something you encounter often?"

He chuckled and shook his head. "I can honestly say I've never encountered a pussy as hot as yours."

"I'm sorry," she offered with downcast eyes. "I'm a freak."

He bent low to kiss her. "Nothing to be sorry about. And I don't think you're a freak. To be honest, it just about blew me away."

Her face lit up. "It did?"

"It felt incredible," he whispered against her lips. "I can't wait to feel it again."

"Oh." Her eyes turned sultry and inviting. "I'd like that, too."

With a smile, he lowered himself over her. It was true, he realized. He couldn't wait to feel the tight, hot clasp of her pussy again. Soon, he was lost in the allure of her body once more.

# **Chapter Three**

Just before the yellow sun rose, Tristan was awakened by a call from his ship. He crept out of bed and walked out to the sitting room.

"Speak," he commanded in low tones. He glanced back once, noting that Ava hadn't moved.

Logan came on the com-link. I think you better come back here, Tris. It's urgent. We found something.

I'll be right there. He severed the link and dressed quickly. He glanced down at Ava. She looked much younger in repose, her lips softly parted as she slept, the golden, curly strands of her hair spread out on the pillow. Something tugged at his heart, but he didn't stop to analyze his feelings. Just looking at her made him ache with a hunger that he'd never felt before.

Did she even know how beautiful she was? How generous and passionate and giving? As he stood memorizing her features, there was a sudden niggling thought in the back of his mind. She looked vaguely familiar, like he'd seen her somewhere before. He frowned, quickly searching his com-plant database. Nothing. If he had, surely he wouldn't have forgotten her?

He reached out a hand to touch her, only to stop halfway. He'd better not. He needed to get to his ship. I'll be back, Ava. Before he opened the door, he did a sweep of the outside. Satisfied that nobody was about, he stepped out and disappeared among the dense foliage.

At the outer edge of the forest, he teleported back to his ship. Seconds later, he was striding through the transport bay to the operations room.

"What did you find?" he asked without preamble.

Logan and Jed looked up from a bunch of imprints from the onboard computer. "There some strange readings here, Tris," Logan replied, pointing to the middle of the imprint.

Tristan looked at the readouts. "Karn'alian life force?"

Jed nodded. "Two. But they're different."

"What do you mean?" he asked the younger man.

"See here," Jed pointed out. "Karn'alian life force leaves a definite mark, a certain energy read that enables us to find them. These two are of varying levels."

Tristan frowned. "Which means?"

"They're not wholly Karn'alian," Logan supplied the answer.

"We think they might be descendants," Jed piped in. "But we're getting no other Karn'alian reading from the whole planet."

Peering closer at the imprint, Tristan looked at the coordinates of the reading. "They're far apart."

Logan's blunt finger rested on the paper. "This one is located in the middle of the city. Jed mapped it and we're fairly positive it's inside the High Council compound."

"And the other one?" Tristan asked.

Logan and Jed looked at each other before the younger man spoke up. "It's in the direction of the forest. If my coordinates are right, it's right where you were last night."

Tristan froze in shock. "She's Karn'alian?"

"I was hoping you'd be able to tell us," Logan replied quietly.

Tristan could feel himself reddening. He hadn't bothered to scan because he'd been too busy fucking her. He pulled in a deep breath, cursing himself for getting so easily distracted. "There's no other dwelling nearby. It's her." His lips tightened grimly. "Let's get a more comprehensive reading on the other spike. Then we'll head out to retrieve both of them." He turned away, surprised and pleased at the discovery. Ava was Karn'alian? Even better. Last night he'd made her his. This discovery sealed her fate. He couldn't wait to get his woman. \* \* \* \* \*

When morning came, Ava blinked the sleep from her eyes and rolled over. The space next to her was cold and empty, telling her that Tristan had left some time ago. She smiled dreamily. Oh, what a night it had been. She'd lost track of how many times she'd come. She stretched and smothered a yawn. There was a welcome soreness in different parts of her body.

With a sigh, she hugged a pillow close to her. It had been hours since he'd touched her, but her blood still sang. All night long he'd feasted on her pussy. She grinned. And other parts of her as well. He was a master when it came to giving pleasure. A little shiver ran through her. She could still feel the rasp of his tongue on the tender tissues of her pussy and her clit. He'd made her come so many times that she'd been weak and limp by the time he was done with her.

All the pleasure implements she'd used before were nothing compared to the real thing. Reality was much better than imagination. A living, breathing man with a fantastic cock beat a toy any day.

Would she see him again? Would he come back? With a dreamy smile on her face, she snuggled deeper under the blanket. Maybe he'd come back tonight. She hoped so. She'd love to spend another night with him.

But what if they were discovered? The thought drew her up short, stopping her daydreams. There would be hell to pay if the authorities found out. A long time ago, she'd lost her virginity to a boy who'd actually liked her before he found out that she was a half-breed. Since half-breeds weren't allowed sexual encounters, she'd been locked up in an isolation cell as punishment. She shuddered. She never wanted to go through that again.

Ava came back to reality with a rude thud. Nothing had changed. She was still a second-class citizen ostracized by a society obsessed with genetic purity.

A series of peremptory knocks on the door gave her a start. There was only one person she knew whose knock was as arrogant as that. Malek. With her lips set in mulish lines, she pulled on a robe and opened the door. She deliberately blocked the doorway. "What can I do for you, Malek?"

The man standing outside her door was typically Erosian. Handsome and physically perfect, but hollow inside. He gave her a mocking smile. "Pleasant morning to you, too, Ava."

She hastily wiped all expression from her face. It wouldn't do to let this man have even a quick glimpse into her mind. Malek was a scheming, cunning, ambitious snake. As special advisor to the Erosian High Council, he held sway over some very important decisions and was privy to the goings-on inside the council chambers.

He smoothly slid inside, brushing against her so close she had no choice but to move back and let him in. She didn't miss the sweeping glance he gave the room.

Her knuckles turned white as she gripped the doorknob tightly. "Looking for something?"

Malek turned in a slow circle, his sharp eyes taking in the mussed sheets of the bed. "I had a report of a slight disturbance last night."

Ava schooled her features into a blank mask. "Disturbance?"

He stared at her for a moment before he nodded. "Yes. The guards I posted outside thought they heard a man's voice."

She tilted her head and met his gaze head-on. "They're mistaken. Why don't you check the vid-monitors you installed in here?"

Malek pursed his lips as he looked at her, ignoring her comment. "I want to remind you that you are not allowed to entertain men here. Nor are you allowed sexual assignations."

"How can I forget?" she snorted. "The guards you have following my every move remind me of it all the time."

His eyes turned dark. "You are a half-breed, Ava. A half-breed promised to the King of Neehaleese."

"You want me to whore for Eros."

Malek's nostrils flared. Ava glared at him in defiance. One's physical appearance had nothing whatsoever to do with the ugliness they harbored inside. Malek was proof of that.

"The Neehaleese ruler has taken a fancy to you. He's been waiting for a long time, Ava. Sooner or later, you're going to have to go to Neehalee and fulfill your part of the bargain."

"A bargain that I did not make," she snapped with cold fury.

His eyes flashed in anger. "May I remind you that the only way you can secure your brother's release is if you cooperate?"

She threw him a bitter look. "How can I forget? Every day I wake up, I remember that you hold my brother captive against his will."

Malek's smile was smug. "Yes. I'm glad you haven't forgotten that one small detail. If you care for your brother, you will not disobey the Council on this, Ava." He raised an eyebrow. "Unless you want him sent to the mining colonies?"

Ava's eyelids lowered, hiding the hate she felt for this man and everything he represented. The Council knew she would never let her beloved brother be sent to the awful mining colonies. "I know what my obligations are. You have no need to remind me," she declared in stiff tones.

His cold Erosian-gold eyes slid over her body. Lust flared in their depths, and a sliver of dread crawled down her spine. Ava drew the edges of her silk robe tighter together.

"There is another way."

Her skin tightened with revulsion at his words. She knew what was coming next—she could almost see the words forming in his mind.

"You're a beautiful woman, Ava. Quite stunning." Malek walked in a circle around her. Though she didn't turn, she felt the imprint of his gaze. She tried to suppress the shudder that tore through her. Malek halted in front of her. "I could convince the Council to send another woman in your place."

Ava glared at him, anger welling up inside her.

He ran a fingertip down her arm. "I could give you a better life. Take you away from this little cabin in the middle of the forest."

"In exchange for what? Becoming your whore?" she retorted bitterly.

He shrugged. "You're willing to whore for an old King, why not me? I could secure the release of your brother and send him someplace else to live the rest of his life." His tone was persuasive, smooth. "Think about it. No more enduring the stigma of being a half-breed. If you were mine, nobody would dare say anything about you."

She sniffed disdainfully. "I'm not interested."

His nostrils flared in anger. "You would rather let that gnarled, old Neehaleese monster put his hands on you?" He advanced toward her. "He's pushing ninety. Rumor has it he needs extra stimulation to get aroused. He likes his cock sucked for hours, Ava, before he can achieve an erection." His lips parted in a malicious grin. "Would you rather do that? Or would you rather sleep in my bed and let me rut between your thighs?"

I'd rather die. She retreated until the small table behind her stopped her movement. "The Council has decreed that no full-blooded Erosian can mate with a half-breed. You can't break the law."

Malek's chest puffed out in an arrogant gesture. "You underestimate my power and influence over High Councilman Drago. A well-placed suggestion, a word of advice in his ear, and he'll be convinced he's doing the right thing in letting me have you."

Ava lifted her chin in defiance. "This alliance with the Neehaleese King is too important for Eros. The Council won't renege on the agreement."

"Do you think you're the first? Hardly. There have been three before you, Ava. Three women sent to the Neehaleese King to use and discard." His gaze was triumphant as he watched all the color drain from her face. "He's convinced he's still able to sire an heir, and when the women don't quickly become pregnant, he gets rid of them."

"You're lying," she whispered in horror.

"Believe what you like. But the Council turns a blind eye because they need Neehaleese aid too much to stir the pot." He shifted closer. "You're not the first and you won't be the last."

Ava swallowed the bile in her throat and forced her gaze to meet his head on. Showing him any kind of weakness would be fatal.

"You care about your brother, don't you?"

She didn't answer.

His lust-filled eyes roamed over her barely covered form, lingering on the soft thrust of her breasts against her silk robe. "You'd do well to remember that I could give Kell the protection he needs. It would be such a tragedy if he was to suffer an accident and perhaps...die."

She clenched her fists in anger. "You bastard!"

"Tsk, tsk. Name calling will get you nowhere." He touched her cheek. "I could make life very difficult for you and your brother."

Her eyes threw off sparks of amber fury before she averted her face. "If you think that threatening me will make me change my mind, you're mistaken. I'll find a way, Malek. I'll find a way to get my brother out of the prison you've put him into and get us off this planet."

"I do believe you just threatened to commit an act of sedition," he stated in a smug voice. "That will earn you some punishment. Guard!"

The door opened and a guard came in, holding his weapon in his hand. His glance flicked from Malek to Ava. "Yes, Sir?"

Malek strode to the door, pausing to talk to the burly man. "She threatened to escape. Take her to an isolation cell until further notice." He gave her a last glance. "If you know what's good for you, you'd do well to curry my favor.

Maybe a few days' confinement will help you see things my way." His eyes slid lasciviously over her one last time before he walked away.

The guard grabbed her arm and snapped on magnetic handcuffs, tightening them brutally. Ava winced in pain and struggled wildly. "At least let me put on some clothes."

He shot her an evil grin. "Just following orders." He stared at her chest, exposed between the lapels of the robe that had gaped open in the struggle.

She pulled it closed, grimacing in pain from the handcuffs, and gave the guard a malevolent stare. "Touch me and they will kill you."

He laughed. "You're a feisty one, aren't you?" He pulled her roughly along, tossed her into the back of a hover cruiser and took her to a remote part of the forest. In a few moments, he stopped the vehicle and led her to the isolation cells buried underground. He took off the magnetic handcuffs and pushed her into the small chamber.

Ava landed with a small whoof, curling her legs protectively underneath her to soften her fall. Rubbing her reddened wrists, she looked up in time to see the smirk on the guard's face before the door slammed into place, plunging the cell into darkness.

Hot tears of impotent fury rolled down her face. Oh, how she despised that man! Malek was becoming more and more dangerous, far too aggressive, and this time he hadn't hesitated to dole out the punishment he knew she hated the most. She'd always been afraid of tight, enclosed spaces. She trembled, fear clutching at her insides. The isolation cell, buried eight feet from the surface, had no lights. A thin sliver of sunlight shone through the slats that allowed fresh air into the cramped, stuffy room. At night, it was the worst. It was so dark, Ava couldn't see her hand in front of her face. The walls felt like they were closing in on her.

She paced back and forth in the tiny space, wiping away her tears with determination. Malek would not win. She wouldn't allow him to win. One way or another, she would get her brother off this hateful planet. She had to think of a plan and act soon before it was too late. She needed to get Kell out of his

confinement and secure passage to somewhere else, anywhere else, as long as it was away from here.

She would do anything to protect Kell. Her brother was her only family, and they had sworn to their mother to take care of each other. She wasn't about to stop now. I'll get us off this planet, Kell. I promise. How, she didn't know. But she had plenty of time to think, now that Malek had thrown her in the isolation cell. She had to come up with a plan. The sooner the better.

\* \* \* \* \*

A three-dimensional image of the topography of Eros appeared before the three warriors. Jed pointed at a location in the middle of the image. "This is the High Council compound, comprised of ten buildings. Somewhere in here is the other Karn'alian reading."

"Security?" Tristan asked.

"Heavy," Logan replied. He punched some buttons and more images came up. "Security towers, one through five. Elevated, manned continuously. Only one entrance and exit and security clearance is needed." He looked at Tristan. "No clearance, no entry."

Tristan grunted. "We'll find another way."

"I'm already on it," Jed reported. "It'll take me a couple of hours. I've launched a subterraneous probe to see if we can dig under."

Logan shot Tristan a curious look. "So she didn't say anything that might have given you a clue to her identity?"

A dull flush crept up Tristan's cheeks. "Didn't have the chance to talk," he muttered.

Jed masked his laughter by pretending to cough. "I wouldn't waste my time talking either."

Logan stifled his own grin. "Good enough for me. At least we still have a tracker on our other quarry. We can find her easily enough."

Jed punched some buttons and frowned when nothing came up on the screen. "Huh," he mumbled.

Tristan's gaze was sharp. "What is it?"

"No reading on the tracking device. Let me try something else." Jed made some adjustments and tried to pull up the signal. "Nothing."

Tristan sought to calm the alien feeling of fear that gripped him. "Try again," he commanded in a calm tone. "She's still on the surface, correct?"

"We've monitored all departures, and I'm positive she isn't on any ship that left," Logan replied. "Jed, you're the best at this. Find her."

"I'm trying," Jed muttered. "Nothing's coming up. I'm not even reading the tracking device." He glanced at Tristan. "It's possible she's out of range, or surrounded by interference."

Tristan's went cold all over. Where the hell was she? Something was wrong, he just knew it. "We have to find her now," he decided abruptly. "I don't have a good feeling about this." He led them to the transport bay. Pressing a button, a panel slid open noiselessly to reveal a cache of weapons. "Be discreet. We don't want to alert authorities to our presence. Blend in. Find her and get out. Choose light weapons." He picked a menacing, five-inch curved Karn'alian knife and holstered it to his side.

"Do you want us to bring her here to the ship when we find her?" Logan asked, picking his own weapon of choice, a lethal pair of double-edged blades.

Tristan nodded. "Make sure she's unharmed. I want to know the second you find her."

"Sure thing, boss," Jed piped in. He chose a deadly sword and slipped it into its holster. Karn'alian Cyborgs were trained in the art of fighting with their hands, their minds and the use of their superior physical abilities. Even without weapons, they were a deadly force.

They teleported to an isolated spot on the outer edge of the city. Their arrival was automatically masked with a holo-imager, and only a slight distortion

could be detected visually. At Tristan's signal, they set out in different directions. Jed and Logan headed to the heart of the city. He decided to go to the pleasure resort and start there.

Entering the ornate foyer once again, Tristan pulled the cowl of his cloak lower, hiding his face. He glanced left and right, deciding to walk into the lounge where Ava performed the night before. It was empty.

"There will be no show tonight."

Tristan turned to see Ampara, the hostess from last night, approach him on silent feet. He tensed. "Why not?"

She looked visibly upset. "The dancer, Ava, is—" she paused, "—indisposed at the moment."

"What the hell does indisposed mean?" he asked, his voice vibrating tightly. He stepped closer to her, a big, menacing, cloaked figure.

Ampara took a frightened step back. "I'm not at liberty to say."

Tristan laid a hand on her arm. "Do not be afraid. I'm not going to hurt you." He took a deep breath and sought to calm the voice in his head that was insisting something was very wrong. When he spoke, his tone was calm. "Tell me, where is she?"

She shook her head, clearly frightened. "I cannot. If anybody even suspects that I am talking of matters I'm not supposed to, I will be punished."

Tristan pulled her into a small, dark alcove off the hallway. "I promise you that nobody will know that you talked to me. Just tell me where she is. Is she...hurt?" It was hard to get the last word out. Just the thought of her lying somewhere, hurt and in pain, was too much to contemplate.

"Why do you care so much?"

The muscle in his jaw ticked. "Because she's mine. And I will do anything to protect her." His voice was clear, his words strong and sure. As soon as he said it, Tristan knew it to be true.

She looked at him, searching his features for honesty. To his surprise, Ampara burst into tears. "You've got to help her. She's locked in the isolation cell."

He stiffened. "Why?"

"I don't know why," she answered tearfully. "I was just notified moments ago that she would not be performing tonight, and that she's earned a stay at the isolation cell." She wiped away the tears pooling in her eyes and grabbed him. "You must find her, please. She hates the isolation cell. Ava, she's...she's afraid of small, enclosed spaces."

Anger began to grow inside him. "Where is it?"

"It's located deep in the forest. Please take care of her," she implored. She wiped the remnants of her tears with a trembling hand. "I have to go now. Make sure you leave undetected," she cautioned before she stepped out of the alcove and swiftly made her way down the hallway.

Tristan followed mere seconds later, walking purposefully out the front doors. Once he was far enough away from the resort, he contacted Jed and Logan through the com-link. She's locked in an isolation chamber, deep in the forest. Meet me there.

Without waiting for their answer, he set out on foot, heading toward the heavily wooded areas. Quietly, he stalked into the forest, every sense on the alert for any presence. Deeper into the woods he went, his rapid progress dictated by the overwhelming concern he felt for Ava. She's afraid of the dark. He refused to think of her alone and terrified. He needed to think, to stay calm and find her. I'm coming for you.

He came upon a clearing. Crouching behind a large boulder, Tristan observed a security building. A guard stood outside, armed with an electroshocker. It was a device designed to deliver a shock that would quickly disable an opponent or prisoner. His fists clenched, and anger became a cold, hard ball inside him. If that guard had touched Ava with that electroshocker, he was going to have to kill him. Tristan circled around to the back of the building, and peered into a grimy window. Two guards inside, one outside. He observed the guard posted outside going down on his knees to check something. Tristan frowned. Were the isolation chambers underground? He waited until the guard outside took up his position once more. From there, it was easy. He crept up behind him stealthily. In a series of quick moves, he disabled and disarmed the hapless man. Dragging him to the rear of the building, Tristan tied him up with a restraining cord that was virtually unbreakable.

One down, two to go.

The best defense was a good offense. Surprise would be his best weapon. He strode into the security building, his steps deliberate. The guards snapped to attention and pointed their guns at him. Tristan smiled.

"Who the hell are you?"

"You have something of mine," he replied in an easy tone. "I've come to get it."

The tall, burly guard burst into laughter, one with a nasty edge to it. He looked at his partner, and they snickered. "Well, now. You and what army?"

Tristan didn't move a muscle. "No army. Just me." Before they could reply, Tristan leapt and disposed of their guns in a flurry of movement. Looking at their stupefied faces, he grinned as he tossed the guns out the door.

"Would it make it easier on both of you if you just turn your backs and pretend you didn't see me?" Tristan asked in a mocking voice. "I don't want to hurt you."

"We'd rather face a dozen Innundali soldiers," one snarled.

"Ah, but I'm so much more dangerous than an Innundali soldier," he shot back. The easy grin he gave them belied the intensity of his watchfulness, waiting for their next move. He didn't have to wait long. The two guards had no plan of attack, they just decided to charge him.

He eluded one easily, knocking him down with one well-placed blow. The other guard crept up behind him and landed a blow to Tristan's side. With a

grunt, Tristan recovered and deflected a second blow. He pivoted and hit him so hard his massive body went through the window.

The second man crouched. He'd turned pale but his lips curled into a sneer. With a roar, he ran toward Tristan.

Tristan didn't move, merely balanced on the balls of his feet. In a move so fast his opponent had no time to react, Tristan flung him against the wall. He fell to a heap on the floor.

Leaving the unconscious guards on the floor, he ran outside. The isolation cells were buried underground, covered by thick, reinforced steel. He opened them one by one, his heart hammering when he didn't find Ava in any of them. He heaved open the last door and found Ava lying on the floor, curled up like a baby. Her eyes were tightly shut and her hands were wrapped around her middle.

He swallowed the fiery anger that threatened to choke him. His voice was gentle when he called to her. "Ava?"

Through tear-streaked eyes, she blinked up at him in disbelief. "Tristan?"

His jaw locked at the hope in her voice. Lying flat on the damp ground, he reached down and extended his arm. "You're going to have to jump and grab my hand," he ordered gruffly.

Ava didn't hesitate. She did as instructed and caught his offered hand on the second try. He pulled her up with a minimum of effort. As soon as she was clear of the cell, he hauled her into his arms.

"Are you hurt?"

She buried her face in his neck and held on tightly. "No."

His arms tightened around her. She still hadn't stopped shaking, and his complant detected her high pulse rate. She must have been terrified down there. Cold fury swelled inside him. He was going to kill those responsible and destroy all the isolation cells. A few plasma charges would do the trick. But first, he had to get her out of here. "I'm going to take you somewhere safe," he whispered against her hair. "You're coming with me." When she didn't say anything, he drew back slightly and looked down at her. Her eyes were closed. He wanted nothing more than to wipe away the look of stark terror he'd seen in her eyes. But he needed to get her out of there first. He instructed the ship's computer to transport them up from the surface and fired off a quick message to Logan and Jed on their com-links. Then he picked her up, his heart constricting at the trusting way she held on tight and buried her face in his neck.

Once he got Ava calm and settled, he intended to find the other Karn'alian and get the hell away from here. Then maybe she could answer some questions. Like who she was and what she was doing on the pleasure planet.

## **Chapter Four**

The ship door swished open silently and Tristan strode in. Ava gave him a soft smile from her perch on the edge of the bed. "Hello."

His eyes raked over her. "Feeling better?"

"Yes." She fingered the hem of the tunic she wore. It was huge, reaching to her knees, but it was as soft as butter and felt wonderful against her skin. In a self-conscious gesture, she smoothed her tousled hair, glad she'd freshened up before he came back.

Before he'd left her earlier, Tristan had pointed out where she could clean up. She'd peeled off her sweat-soaked robe and stepped into the micro-cleanser, the ship's version of a shower. She'd stared blankly at the empty cubicle, not knowing what to do. She'd jumped when a female voice announced cleansing would commence in ten seconds. Ava felt foolish as she'd closed her eyes, anticipating a rush of water. It was more of a spray mist combined with a warm gush of air and took no longer than a minute. But she felt refreshed and totally clean. On Eros, it was still the old-fashioned spigot with water. After her cleansing, she'd looked around Tristan's spartan quarters. There were no personal items around, no indication that it was even his.

"I want to thank you for getting me out of the isolation cell. I've never liked that place," she confessed with a little shudder. Though she was thankful she was no longer in there, she had other pressing things to worry about. She had no doubt that she'd have to face the consequences of her escape. By now, Malek would undoubtedly have been informed of what happened. That hateful man had leverage to use against her—her brother. She didn't want to endanger Kell's life. "I need you to take me back."

"No."

Ava swallowed and fought the immediate swell of panic inside her. Forcing herself to remain calm, she faced him squarely. "You don't understand. I need to go back there or things will be worse for me."

Tristan didn't move a muscle, yet he suddenly looked more dangerous in her eyes, more frightening. "Are you in any danger?"

Her eyes flew to his. The muscle in his jaw ticked and his lips were pulled into a grim line. "You can't get involved."

"I became involved when you took me deep inside your body last night," he drawled.

She flushed but shook her head stubbornly. She couldn't risk Kell's safety inside the High Council's compound. "I can't bring you into this. Please understand," she beseeched him. "I need to go back to the surface right now."

Tristan crossed his arms over his chest. "I want some answers, Ava."

Ava turned away, clenching her fists in frustration. "While I am grateful that you freed me from the isolation cell, my life is really none of your business." Malek would surely administer a more severe punishment once she got back. Nobody had ever escaped from an isolation cell. But she would gladly accept it to spare her brother any more suffering.

"I want to help you," Tristan said roughly. "I can't do that if you don't tell me the truth." His tone lowered, became persuasive. "Tell me what's going on."

She turned away, wringing her hands together. She knew next to nothing about this big, strong warrior. He'd taken her body, given her unbelievable pleasure, and for one night alleviated the loneliness of her life. Alternately rough and gentle, he'd made sure of her pleasure first before his. She trusted him, that's all she knew. Would he be willing to help her get her brother out of the compound and away from this planet? Hope began to slowly unfurl in her chest. The promise of a new start, a new life, beckoned. If Tristan could help Kell, why not tell him?

Ava took a deep breath. I might as well start from the beginning. "I'm a halfbreed. Erosians are not known for their tolerance for mixed species. They're fanatic about the purity of the gene pool." She couldn't hide the deep resentment in her tone. "Half-breeds are ostracized, not allowed to mingle with regular society. Second-class citizens," she added bitterly.

"I know."

Her gaze flew to his. "You know?"

"You're half Karn'alian, Ava. One of my people," he revealed. "Our home planet is Karn'al. The Prime Ruler sent a platoon of Cyborgs out to scour the different galaxies for Karn'alians that escaped during the Pagan Wars."

Huh? "I don't know what you're talking about." She shook her head in confusion. "My mother was a native Erosian, but I never knew who my father was."

Tristan sighed. "A race called the Pagans once occupied many worlds and destroyed whole planets. They came to Karn'al and slaughtered and enslaved our people. Many were able to escape. We fought a long war before we were successful in driving the Pagans out."

Ava couldn't believe what she was hearing. Aleesia Summerlin never mentioned anything about Karn'al to her children when she was alive. Her brow wrinkled, confused and shock by what Tristan was telling her.

"Our numbers were so depleted that our race is still in danger of extinction. The Pagans, or what's left of them, have vowed revenge on Karn'al. They are hunting down the Karn'alians who escaped their initial invasion and killing them."

"Your people are dying?"

His lips twisted. "Not of any disease, no. But we have virtually no women to bear children. And if the Pagans find our people before we do, they'll surely kill them."

Ava stood up and paced the room. This was all too much to take in. "You're a C-cyborg?" she croaked through dry lips.

His eyes were enigmatic. "When the Pagans came, they killed or imprisoned most of the able-bodied men of our world. The women were systematically raped and killed. The children were maimed in different ways to ensure they wouldn't grow up to fight against them."

Ava was aghast at the brutality he spoke of. "You were one of the children?"

Tristan nodded, lingering anger in his eyes. He raised his right arm. "My arm was cut off here—" He indicated his shoulder. "The same was done to others, some a foot, a limb, an eye. The Pagans made a sport of it, deciding which part to cut off a helpless child."

She swallowed, her heart constricting at the horror of what he'd had to suffer. "Oh, Tristan."

"An underground rebellion eventually formed. Scientists built a secret subterranean facility and spirited away all the children. The Pagans never bothered to look, assuming the children just died." His eyes took on a faraway look. "It took a long time before we all grew up and trained to be warriors. By the time we did, most of our people had died." He focused his intense dark eyes on her. "Karn'alians emit a unique energy reading. My men called me back to the ship this morning to inform me about you. You're part-Karn'alian, Ava. And I'm taking you back with me."

This was too much to take in, to try to understand. The only thing she could focus on now was that she and Kell finally had a way to get away from their horrible existence and start a brand-new life somewhere else. "I'm not leaving without Kell."

His eyes narrowed to angry, tiny slits. "Is he your lover?"

"He's my brother," Ava informed him with some exasperation, not noticing that he'd gone completely still. "He's being held in the High Council's compound to ensure my cooperation," she finished bitterly.

"For what?"

Her lashes lowered. "As a half-breed. I'm forbidden from being a pleasure worker. But the High Council has struck a deal with the Neehaleese King. I'm to be his wife."

The heat in his eyes as they roamed over her singed her. "I won't allow that," he declared with chilling softness.

She shivered, whether from the intensity of his gaze or the underlying violence in his tone, she didn't know. "It'll start a war."

He stepped closer to her, close enough to make her nipples tighten in anticipation. "We'll be gone from here before it gets to that." He stroked her cheek. "I'll get your brother out, Ava. That I promise you."

Ava rubbed her cheek against his palm. "And then what?"

"I take you back to Karn'al," Tristan muttered softly, bending to run his lips down to the shell of her ear. His arms went around her, trapping her in a hot, sexual cocoon.

She couldn't help but voice the question in her mind. "What then?"

He drew back, his face carved in hard, sensuous lines. "I'm not certain. Every time I look at you, I can't get beyond wanting to fuck you." She blushed at his frank words. "I keep seeing you in front of me, splayed wide open while my cock tunnels in and out of your hot, tight pussy." His big hands crept under her tunic and slowly pushed the soft material up.

A shaky breath rushed from her lips. Her pulse skittered madly as a tight firestorm of desire began to ignite in her. "I-I feel the same way."

He licked the corners of her lips. "You cast a spell on me last night when you performed your dance with the veils." In a flash of movement, he pulled the tunic over her head and tossed it behind him. "You're a sorceress."

Her lips parted, inviting him inside. "I'm not." She gasped at the first touch of his rough palms against her breasts. The slow, kneading motion he started drove the breath from her lungs. Her nipples puckered, pushing insistently against him.

Tristan skimmed his lips from the curve of her neck down to her shoulder.

"Tristan." In a move that surprised him as much as her, she slipped her tongue between his lips and kissed him.

There was no hesitation on his part. He responded in an instant and made the kiss his own. He drew her in skillfully, taking her deeper into the hot, damp cavern of his mouth. Wetness gathered in her pussy, spreading like fire, radiating out through her sensitized skin. Her breath came quicker, harsher. She wanted him so much. The light teasing touch of his palms only whetted her appetite for more. Covering his hands with hers, she squeezed them over her flesh, harder, more forcefully. She glimpsed the half-smile on his lips, but she didn't care. She wanted more, needed more.

Taking his hand, she drew it down to her pussy, trying to push it into the sopping slit. But he resisted, instead exploring and teasing, swiping at her clit. She groaned in protest and pushed two of his fingers high up inside her. The low sound of satisfaction she made elicited a low laugh from him.

She tore her lips from his. "What have you done to me?" she gasped as he went deep. "Ahhh." The lust churning inside her was driving her beyond control, turning her into a crazed woman.

He sat down on the bed, positioning her on top of him. Ava straddled him, her legs on either side of his. She shamelessly ground down on his hand. Sharp needles of pleasure attacked her from all directions. Lifting her breast to his mouth, she offered herself to him.

Tristan took her nipple between his teeth and gently bit down. The shock of the pleasure-pain had her throwing back her head. He wrapped the long tresses of her hair around his free hand and tugged, arching her neck back. Then he feasted on her. There was no other way to describe the way he ate at her breasts, tugging, pulling and driving her out of her mind. The rough way he was treating her was exactly how she wanted it. She didn't want slow or gentle right now. She wanted fast and hard.

Plunging her hands into his short, dark hair, she pulled him closer. He opened wide, pulling most of her breast in his mouth. Ava shut her eyes tightly, a willing participant in the furious ride. She needed his cock in her. Now.

She fumbled with his trousers, moaning with more than a hint of desperation. When she finally eased his cock free from its confines, she made a delighted sound. The head was thick and red, a drop of clear liquid balancing at the slit. She licked her lips. She wanted him in her mouth so bad she was shaking with it.

Scrambling off his lap, she knelt between his legs. She pulled the pants free of him and tossed them aside. His cock was a hard stalk of flesh that jutted

from a nest of dark curls. He was long and thick, and he made her mouth water with longing. With a small moan of hunger, she fitted her lips over the broad tip and took him deep with a slow slide of her wet mouth.

He groaned.

Ava was aware of nothing else except the hard piece of flesh she was savoring. It pleased her enormously to slide him deep in her mouth and lave him with her tongue. She wanted him, all of him.

Her eyes fluttered open and met his. Fine lines of strain etched his face, and he was looking at her with absolute concentration. Slashes of color appeared high on his sharp cheekbones. Wanting to drive him as crazy as this was driving her, she ran her lips sexily up and down his shaft, taking the time to lick the thick vein on the underside of his flesh.

His hips came off the bed. Gripping his thighs tightly, she slid down and licked the two spheres at the base of his cock. She pulled one in and sucked, lingering over her caresses. Making her way back up to the tip, she took him deep, as deep as she could, and held him there for a moment. The slurping sounds she made were delicious to her ears. Did he realize how hungry she was for him? She was going insane with wanting him. She wanted his essence, to take that part of him deep within her. She wanted him to come in her mouth. Maybe that would assuage this terrible hunger that was now overtaking her. She was so lost, so steeped in pleasure that she didn't notice the momentary stiffening of Tristan's body.

Tristan looked up as the door swished silently open. Logan and Jed stood on the threshold, wide-eyed and struck speechless by the erotic scene they'd discovered.

Logan opened his mouth to speak, but Tristan shook his head, quieting him. So his men stood as silent witnesses, watching the beautiful creature between his legs devouring his cock. They weren't unaffected. Their cocks had visibly swelled and were straining against their trousers.

Tristan cupped Ava's head and guided her movements, wordlessly urging her to go faster and take him deeper into her throat. She was a natural, her tongue skillful, her mouth a delightful cavern of temptation. The sight of his cock stretching her lips wide as she enjoyed herself was unbelievably erotic. His blood surged through his veins.

He pulled her up and positioned her on top of him. He took her lips in a hot kiss, lifting and squeezing the generous mounds of her breasts. He heard her whimper and felt her pussy brush against the tip of his cock. Her moan of frustration made him smile. Positioning her over him, he slid deep into her, sheathing himself to the hilt in one swift stroke.

"Ohhhh," she gasped.

He gritted his teeth as the heat in her pussy enveloped him once more, holding still until he got used to the unusually high temperature inside the slick walls. The combination of moisture and heat sent pleasure skittering up his spine, threatening to overload his senses. Grasping her hips, he guided her up and down. Soon, it was she who took up a fast rhythm, bouncing up and down his cock, stretching up until only the tip was left in her pussy before plunging deep again and again. By the Gods, she was a natural sensualist. His glance slid to his comrades. They had a clear view of his cock sliding inside Ava's pussy again and again. A thick surge of lust welled inside him at the admiration in their gazes for his woman.

Ava threw her head back and moaned.

"Look," he rasped.

She followed his gaze, twisting slightly to look over her shoulder and promptly froze. "Tristan?"

He didn't cease pumping his cock in and out of her wet pussy while he gauged her reaction. "They've been watching you, Ava," he whispered roughly. "Watching as you take your pleasure on my cock. First in your mouth, then in your pussy."

Her breathing was shaky. It was obvious she was torn between wanting to go on, and discomfort at discovering they were being watched. But he didn't stop the mind-blowing strokes in her pussy. He tunneled in and out, varying his speed and depth, making every effort to stop himself from spilling at the heat surrounding his cock. He watched her eyes glaze over with pleasure, watched her wrestle with her inhibitions. Gradually, she fell again under the spell of the desire surging through both of them, and her hips started moving once more.

"That's the way, Ava," he whispered as he tongued her nipple. "Show them how much you enjoy fucking me. They're mesmerized by your beauty, hypnotized by the sight of your pink pussy swallowing my cock over and over again." He sucked the delicate skin at her throat. "Does it excite you more knowing that they're watching you?" She whimpered. His fingers tightened on her hips. "Does it?" he repeated roughly. At her nod, he smiled with satisfaction. Lifting her in his arms, he shifted on the bed so that she was facing the door. "Look at them." He could see Logan and Jed reflected on the darkened window of the ship.

Her eyes flared with surprise, shadowed by temptation.

"Look at them and let them see you. It's all right," he soothed when she made a small protest. "It's all right to let them see. If they could feel the heat from your pussy, they'd never last. You're so hot, you feel so good."

Ava tore her gaze away from him to look at the two men watching them fuck. A tight fist of desire curled inside Tristan. She had that lost look of somebody so immersed in pleasure, so lost in the moment, she didn't care who saw her. He slipped a finger between her lips, stifling a groan when she immediately started sucking. He heard a choked moan, and didn't know whether it came from Logan or Jed.

"Play with your nipples," he commanded, never ceasing in fucking her willing pussy. Her small hands cupped her heavy breasts, her fingers pinching and pulling at the stiff tips. "Tell me what you're feeling, Ava. Tell me what you want." He kept his gaze on the images reflected on the window, at the graceful line of Ava's back and beyond that, his men's rapt gazes as they watched her undulate on his lap.

"Fuck me, Tristan. Fuck me hard and deep," she sobbed brokenly.

At her impassioned plea, Logan began to rub his stiff cock. Jed wasn't faring any better, his fists clenching, affected by the sight of the woman bouncing hungrily on Tristan's lap. Tristan gritted his teeth as the pleasure swelled inside him. He was going to come soon, he could feel it. The heat was tremendous. Cupping the plump cheeks of her ass, he lifted her higher and plunged deeper, the sweet sound of her moan reaching his ears.

He lost awareness of the two watching. Now he was intent on pushing them both over the edge. Ava was making sexy, tortured mewling noises above him. It spurred him on. The ride was furious, rough and fast. He gritted his teeth, feeling the beginnings of her orgasm. Her pussy tightened and contracted on his cock and he almost lost it. He didn't let go of his control until he heard her scream and felt her shudder violently. Only then did he give one mighty thrust and shoot off deep inside her pussy.

Afterwards, Ava was slumped over him, her face shiny with sweat. He hugged her tight, his flesh still pulsing deep inside her. He drew back, feeling her stiffen. "What's wrong?"

Her cheeks were a deep red. "Those two men..." she trailed off and took a deep breath. "They were watching us."

Tristan gently pushed her hair back. "Does it bother you?" She bowed her head. He tipped her chin up. "They enjoyed it as much as we did, Ava. You shouldn't be ashamed. You were so beautiful, lost in the throes of pleasure. I was proud to have them witness that."

She buried her face in his neck. "I'll never be able to face them, whoever they are."

He chuckled, feeling relaxed and replete. "They're my comrades, my secondand third-in-command. We've been together for a long time. They're like my brothers." He paused. "I like it that they watched me fucking you, giving you pleasure."

She mumbled something he didn't understand.

"It was exciting, was it not?" he asked softly. "It excited you, knowing that they were so affected, so aroused."

Her lashes lowered, hiding her eyes from him.

He smiled. "You aroused them, Ava. They watched you play with your breasts and they almost couldn't help themselves. It's natural to revel in somebody's admiration. Don't be embarrassed."

She released a sigh, the sound a mixture of acceptance and resignation. "It's all your fault. You've turned me into a wanton hussy."

Possessiveness welled inside him and he pulled her close. "We'll get your brother out of the High Council's compound. Then I'm taking you back to Karn'al where you belong."

## **Chapter Five**

Ava walked into the operations room of the ship, her fingers intertwined with Tristan's. Hot color flooded her cheeks at the sight of the two men standing in the middle of the room.

She made herself look them in the eye as Tristan performed the introductions, refusing to look away. Both men were tall and built, with muscles that rippled with obvious strength. Logan was older, his face harsher, but there was a sensuality inherent in the firm slash of his lips. Jed was younger and very good-looking, charming and confident, judging from the sensual light that lurked in his deep green eyes.

Sexual tension thickened the air, but it was gone quickly. The men were once again looking at her with polite regard. She flushed, confused by the tightening of her nipples under the tunic. A low, insistent throbbing started in her pussy.

Ava didn't see the grin that Tristan quickly stifled. He turned to his men. "Her brother is the other energy spike we've been picking up." Logan and Jed nodded. "He's being held inside the High Council compound."

He walked toward a three-sided, complicated-looking console. It was full of buttons that blinked incessantly. Tristan pressed one in front of him. Ava's eyes widened as a realistic-looking, three-dimensional map of Eros came up between the three men.

Tristan examined the map. "We need to get in and out without alerting the guards."

Logan grunted. "I'm in the mood for a fight. Why don't we take the whole lot of them on?"

Jed's lips curved. "Sounds like fun to me."

Tristan shook his head firmly. "Ordinarily, I'd be all for it, too. Except we got word that a Pagan cruiser has been spotted heading here."

Logan grinned with relish. "Even better."

"We can't wait for them to get here. We get Ava's brother and we get out." Tristan cocked an eyebrow at Jed. "Anything from the subterranean probe?"

"Negative," Jed replied. "I found no other way in. Like I said, one way in, one way out."

Ava watched this exchange with interest. Tristan was every inch the commander, his bearing tall and straight, inspiring confidence with his strength. Jed and Logan were no less intimidating, their casual confidence a clear indication of their skills in combat.

Logan gestured to the towers. "Guards are changed every four hours. One guard stays inside the tower, one patrols the walkway. It takes five minutes to walk from one end to the other."

Tristan placed his palms on the console and leaned in. "Weapons?"

"Very primitive," Jed replied. "They have a variety of them, from laser to old-fashioned, bullet-equipped guns."

Tristan considered the map for a moment. "We go in here." He pointed to the corner tower before turning to Jed. "Can we lock on to the energy signal?"

"It fades in and out. There's too much interference in the compound," Jed replied. "They're using some sort of low-level signal to jam electronic devices."

"So we can't just teleport out of there after we find him?" Logan asked.

"Negative." Jed pushed some more buttons on the console. "We're going to have to do this the old-fashioned way. We have to retrieve the target and get some distance away from the compound to teleport back here."

Tristan grunted. "Fine. We go in, get our target and get out. We have to make it to a safe teleporting distance with a minimum of fuss. We don't want the Pagans alerted of our activities."

"That's too bad," Jed drawled in mock regret. "I'm just itchin' for a fight."

Logan muttered his agreement, but they didn't oppose Tristan's plan. Ava spoke up. "I want to go with you."

"No," Tristan answered without even looking at her.

She bristled at being dismissed so easily. "He's my brother." She lifted her chin. "You don't have the right to stop me from going."

Logan and Jed looked on with foolish grins on their faces, waiting for Tristan's answer. He shot them a quelling glare before facing her, his stance one of exaggerated patience. "It may get messy down there. My men and I need to focus on retrieving the target, not have to worry about your ass."

Her eyes narrowed. "My ass will be perfectly fine. I'm not a dimwit. I know enough to stay out of danger." She felt a moment of trepidation as his eyes hardened but she refused to back down. She wanted to go, dammit.

"You will do as you're told and stay here on the ship, awaiting our return." His tone and countenance didn't change, but just the same Ava swallowed the lump that suddenly lodged in her throat.

She gritted her teeth in frustration. "Kell does not know what's going on. If I'm there, he'll come without resistance."

Jed's lips curved in amusement. "I don't think he'll be in any position to refuse us."

Ava shot him an irritated glance. Men. They were all the same. They stuck with each other, like some sort of primal tribal thing. She turned to Tristan. "I'm asking you again. Let me go with you. I haven't seen my brother in a long time. I won't be any trouble, I assure you. Kell will understand better and come willingly if I'm there," she reiterated. Tristan's dark, inscrutable gaze stayed on her for long moments before he sighed. "Fine. But you will do exactly what we tell you. If you lag behind or we run into trouble because of you, I won't hesitate to take you back here in a second, do you understand me?"

Pleased at her small victory, she nodded eagerly. "Thank you."

"We'll be ready to go as soon as it turns dark," Tristan informed them. "Ava, you'll find some clothes in my quarters." His eyes traveled down her bare legs. "Much as I like the sight of you with only that tunic on, you'll need more clothing than that."

Her cheeks flaming, Ava shot him a glare that promised reprisals later, before she walked out with her head held high. As soon as the door swished closed behind her, Logan chuckled.

"With all due respect, Tris, I think having some pussy has made you soft."

Jed grinned, nodding in agreement. "I agree."

A smile played around Tristan's lips. "It's hard to say no to her. She's something else."

"We know. We were there, remember?" Logan murmured.

"I take it that you haven't told her about the Ritual of Acceptance?" Jed asked carefully.

Tristan grimaced. "Not yet. It's too early to tell if she's it for me."

Logan's eyebrow rose. "Will you be able to let her go once we take her back to Karn'al?"

He sighed. "I don't know. I haven't exactly given it any thought."

"Somebody will claim her, if you don't," Logan reminded him. "The policy to procreate is of the utmost importance. She'll be placed on the list for immediate claiming."

A sigh blew from Tristan's grim lips. Procreation was high up on the Prime Ruler's list of goals. Due to the near extinction of their race, unclaimed

Karn'alian women were required to submit to the harvesting of their eggs to match with male donors so that scientists could proceed with procreation experiments. The thousands of Karn'alians expected to be brought back home were needed to expand the gene pool. But the Prime Ruler had made it clear that artificial reproduction was to be the last resort. He wanted breeding done the natural way. As a result, Karn'alian men were required to claim women as their mates as soon as possible. As soon as Ava arrived on Karn'al, she would be placed on the claiming list. That gave him pause. The thought of some other man laying a hand on Ava brought an odd sense of tension in him.

"Logan's right," Jed spoke up. "A little pussy on the side is fine, but when we take her back, you know she'll be claimed, unless you claim her as yours first."

Tristan ran his hands through his hair. "I realize that. The thought of somebody else touching her..." he trailed off, the unspoken words hanging over them.

"If you do claim her," Logan began in a soft tone, "you have to tell her of the ritual. You have to make her understand its necessity. From what Jed and I saw earlier, I don't think she'll be opposed to it."

Ambivalence gnawed at Tristan. The Ritual of Acceptance existed among the Cyborg warriors. One had to share his claimed woman for one time only with one of his comrades. If he claimed Ava as his, he'd have to share her with either Logan or Jed. If he died in battle, the ritual would mean that Logan or Jed would take his place, ensuring the continuity of the Karn'alian line and assuming responsibility for Ava's well-being. How would Ava react to that? Would she be open to the idea? He recalled her reaction when she'd spotted Logan and Jed watching them from the doorway. She'd been uncomfortable initially, but he knew she found it exciting that they were being watched while they fucked. Maybe with the right preparation and stimulation, she'd be open to the idea of letting another man join them in bed once to complete the ritual.

He clamped his jaw. Just one time, that's all he needed to do to fulfill the damned ritual. Any more than that and he didn't think he could do it, certainly not on a regular basis. "I'll think about it," he said when he finally spoke. "We leave at dusk. Get ready."

He turned and left, honest enough with himself to admit that there was a measure of excitement at the thought of the pleasure he and another man could give Ava.

# **Chapter Six**

Tristan followed Jed down the narrow hallway. The tracker Jed held in his hand was locked on the energy output from Ava's brother. His restless, alert eyes surveyed the path up ahead. He didn't like the feel of things. It had been way too easy. They were able to get in with hardly any problem at all. There weren't any guards posted anywhere in the building.

Something's not right, he warned Logan and Jed over the com-link. It's too easy.

Almost like they're expecting us, Logan remarked.

I don't have a good feeling about this either, Jed put in. We're almost there. Hey, Logan, he added. Maybe we'll get the fight we've been hankering for.

Bring it on, Logan countered with more than a hint of relish in his voice.

Be alert for anything, Tristan instructed. We get him and get out.

Aww, Tris, Logan drawled mockingly. Where's the fun in that?

We'll have fun later. Right now, he ordered firmly, we get Kell and get the hell out of here. He glanced briefly back at Ava, who was following him quietly. Logan brought up the rear.

Jed turned left at the end of the hallway, halting in front of the last door and inclined his head. Right here.

Tristan nodded and moved into position. Logan took up the other side of the door, giving the go-ahead. Tristan opened the door carefully, silently and walked inside, followed by Logan.

"Well, well," said a masculine voice. "We've been waiting for you."

At the end of the room stood a tall, slender man flanked by about two dozen Erosian guards. A young man was tied to a chair, his head bowed, his body marked by bruises and dried blood. "Kell," Ava gasped in shock. She turned furious eyes at the man in the middle of the guards. "Damn you, Malek."

The man Ava called Malek smiled with malicious glee. "You left me no choice, my beautiful Ava. When you escaped from the isolation cell, I knew you would come for Kell sooner or later." His hard glance slid over Tristan. "I just didn't expect you to bring friends."

Ava glared at him with hate in her eyes. "Let him go."

"You know I can't do that," Malek replied, crossing his arms over his chest. "This is all his fault, by the way. He wouldn't tell me where you were."

Tears pricked at the corners of Ava's eyes. "That's because he didn't know," she replied, choking on a sob.

Malek's gaze hardened. "I'm going to be magnanimous, Ava. I'm going to let your friends go free. But you, you stay with me." The way he said it left no doubt what he was going to do to her.

Tristan shook his head. "I don't think so. How about you let Kell go and we won't kill any of you?"

An ugly laugh erupted from Malek. "You're in no position to bargain, whoever you are. You're surrounded. Even if you manage to get outside, they'll shoot you on sight." He raised his eyebrow, looking at Ava with ill-concealed lust. "I've changed my mind, Ava. Obviously, you wouldn't be suitable for the Neehaleese king. I think I'll keep you as my bed-mate. I'll keep you in line."

Her lips curled with disgust. "Never."

Jed and I will take care of the guards, Logan offered. Tris, no doubt you'll take care of Malek?

Absolutely, Tristan replied with barely leashed anger. He could gleefully wring the man's neck for the way he was looking at Ava. Pulling her behind him, he faced Malek. "We're taking Kell and Ava with us. I don't want this to get ugly. If I were you, I wouldn't stop us."

Malek gave him a disdainful stare. "You're sure that you'll get out of here alive?"

Tristan gave his men an imperceptible signal. With a ruthless skill honed by years of fighting, they attacked the guards. It happened fast, with not a single shot fired. A cacophony of groans and grunts filled the room, and for a while, chaos reigned. The Erosian guards didn't know what hit them. Karn'alian Cyborgs were highly trained in combat, whether with their bare hands or with weapons. Their strength was vastly superior to humanoids. In the end, the guards all lay on the floor, lolling weakly, or were rendered unconscious.

Malek stared, horrified at the speed with which they'd disposed of his men. He brought out a radio and called for more guards. But before he could finish speaking, Tristan threw a small, curved knife. The pierced radio fell, useless, to the floor, crackling loudly.

A flicker of fear crossed Malek's face as Tristan began to advance toward him. He took a hasty step back. "You'll never get out of here alive."

Tristan grabbed him by the neck and pushed him against the wall. He stuck his face close to the terrified Erosian and said in a low, menacing voice, "I'm tempted to snap your neck in two for the way you're looking at my woman."

Malek gurgled noisily, his face turning red.

"I'm taking her and her brother away from this planet. And if I even think you're following us, I'll come back here and finish you off. Do we understand each other?" he asked.

Nodding, Malek choked and gasped. Tristan simply let go, letting him slide to the floor, limp and shaking. He dismissed Malek and turned to find Logan and Jed untying the slowly rousing Kell.

Ava rushed to his side. "Kell, are you all right?"

Kell slowly opened his eyes and blinked, eyes widening despite the cuts around his eyes. "Ava?" he rasped. He glanced around in bewilderment, his gaze landing on the three Cyborgs. "What happened? Who are you?" Upon seeing Kell's face, Tristan stiffened. Logan and Jed looked shocked. Logan was the first one to recover. "Tristan?"

"I know," Tristan replied grimly. "I see it, too. But we don't have time right now. Let's get out of here."

Feeling the undercurrents between the three men, Ava glanced at Tristan questioningly. "What is it?"

His lips thinned. "Later. Logan, take Kell." He waited a moment as Logan helped Kell to his feet. He frowned as once again his eyes fell on Ava's brother. Could it be that they really didn't know who they were? This was big. Bigger than simple retrieval of surviving Karn'alians. For Kell was the very image of the Prime Ruler.

Ava and Kell were the long-lost children of the Prime Ruler of Karn'al.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tristan stared with tight-faced grimness at the vast openness of space outside the operations room of the Destroyer.

"Is it possible that it's them?" Jed asked. "It was believed they were killed while trying to escape the Pagans."

"Apparently not," Logan stated dryly. "I don't think there's any mistaking Kell. He's the very image of his father."

"I know," Tristan agreed quietly. "The Prime Ruler hadn't yet ascended to power at the time the Pagans invaded. According to the elders, he sent his wife and twin babies on the last ship to escape Karn'al, the ship that was never heard from again."

Jed whistled. "He'll be very surprised and pleased when we get back with them."

Logan nodded. "No doubt. But his wife died some time back, right, Tris?"

Tristan nodded. "I'll have to talk to Ava. This won't be easy to accept."

"What won't be easy to accept?" Ava asked as she walked in, catching the last of Tristan's statement. When no one answered, she continued. "Something's going on. I'd like to know what it is."

"Jed and I have to prepare for our landing," Logan hastily spoke up. "We'll leave you to it, Tris."

Tristan waited until the two men were safely out of the room before facing Ava with a sigh. "I was hoping to wait until we got to Karn'al before I talked to you."

She gave him a wary look. "What is it?"

He ran his hands through his hair, wanting to make this easy for her. "Did you know your father?"

Ava visibly stiffened. "He died a long time ago, that's all I know."

"He's not dead," he revealed gently. He went on, not knowing how to break the truth to her gently. "Your father is the Prime Ruler of Karn'al."

Tristan began to worry when she didn't speak, didn't even move. When she did, her voice was cold. "You're mistaken. My father is dead."

He sighed. "I'm not mistaken. Kell looks remarkably like him, Ava. So much so, that when we saw your brother, we knew instantly who your father is." Tristan took her hand in his, rubbing her soft palm. "He thought you were dead."

She tossed her head. "Is that why he never bothered to look for us?" she asked, bitterness lacing her tone. "My mother cried every day, Tristan. She didn't think I knew, but she could never quite hide the loneliness she felt. He didn't care to find out what happened to his family. He didn't bother to look for us." She turned away, hugging herself tightly.

Tristan shifted to stand behind her, wrapping his arms around her. He didn't know how else to comfort her. "I wouldn't presume to know all the answers, Ava. All I know is, he believed you were dead. If it makes you feel better, he's never mated with another woman, nor has he sired any other children." He

kissed the soft shell of her ear. "Your father is a good man. Give him a chance to explain when you meet him."

She leaned against him. "I'm not sure I want to meet him."

"You can't avoid that. People will take one look at Kell and realize who he is."

The sigh that blew from her lips was full of sadness. "Can't you take me somewhere else? I don't think I can do this."

"My duty is to take you back home." His answer was matter-of-fact. He wanted her to see there was no other way. "Even more so now that I know your real identity. I have to take you back to Karn'al."

She sniffled, a sound which tore at his heart. "I have to let Kell know."

Admiration blossomed inside him. He didn't doubt she was brave enough to face whatever came. "Don't worry. I'll be right there with you if you need me," he assured her softly. Something tugged at his heart, something he never expected to feel. If he could take her hurt away, he would. He never wanted anything to hurt her again. Tristan refused to examine exactly why he felt that way. Like so much in his life, he accepted it with grace and without question. If Ava was the woman destined to be his mate, then so be it. He would claim her as his as soon as they arrived on Karn'al.

## **Chapter Seven**

Killian was his name, and he was the Prime Ruler of Karn'al. Ava faced her father after so many years. She swallowed and lifted her chin. I can do this. I'm not scared. He was tall and silver-haired, his body still strong and muscular beneath the flowing robes. Her heart ached as she looked at Kell standing next to her. Father and son looked so much alike, there was no mistaking Kell as the progeny of the Prime Ruler.

She held herself stiff as he hugged her. "My daughter, I have despaired of ever seeing you again." Were those tears that glistened in his eyes?

Killian drew a deep breath. "Your mother? She passed peacefully?"

Ava nodded with a jerk of her head. "She died in her sleep."

For a moment, stark sadness shone in his weathered, still-handsome face. "Aleesia was my first and only love. No other woman would do for me." He gave a small nod, composing himself once more. "I told her to take you somewhere safe, and that I would come for all of you."

Ava's heart tightened. "But you never came."

"No," he agreed sadly. "I was lost for some time, presumed a casualty of war. I was badly injured and hid out deep in the mountains. By the time I healed and came back, I was informed your mother had taken you on the last ship to escape. A ship that I was told was lost, no survivors reported."

She didn't want to, but Ava felt herself softening toward this man whose pain was so apparent. He couldn't hide the grief he felt upon hearing of her mother's death. Ava found herself wanting to ease some of his pain. "Mother never loved another, if that brings you any comfort. She was devoted to your memory. Although Kell and I never had the chance to know you, we knew she loved you."

Killian swallowed, gripping her hand tightly. "Thank you, my child. My heart aches just looking at you, for you are so like your mother."

Something in her eased, allowing her to breathe lighter. Her eyes fell on her brother, so tall and handsome, looking strong and confident next to Killian. Oh Mother, how I would give anything for you to be here right now.

"It will not be easy," she began, hope blooming in her chest. "But I want to get to know you, F-father."

Killian didn't bother to hide the tears in his eyes. "My heart thanks you, Ava. For some reason, the Gods have chosen to bestow upon me a second chance to be with you and Kell. I have no wish to squander it."

He wrapped his arms around her. Ava leaned against him, closing her eyes, feeling his love for her. All the anger and bitterness she had harbored while growing up seemed to melt away with that touch. She realized she wanted to get to know the father that had been denied her by cruel circumstance. This was what her mother would have wanted.

"Everything will be well from here on out," Killian declared gruffly. "Now that I have you and Kell with me, all is well."

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Ava was shown to a small dwelling on the outskirts of the city. It was pretty much like the rest of the Karn'alian dwellings—small, square structures identifiable only by a number. It was furnished sparsely, the only furniture being a large bed in the middle of the room. Her escort left her silently, the door closing behind her.

"I was beginning to think you weren't coming."

Ava jumped, whirling around to find Tristan leaning against an open doorway on the far side of the room. "Tristan."

He searched her face intently. "Everything went well?"

She nodded. "Yes. I've decided he's not such a bad man. We were all victims of the chaos that war brings." She blinked in confusion. "Why am I staying here instead of with my father?"

Tristan strolled toward her, looking attractive in a tunic and loose trousers. Out of uniform, he was as devastating as ever. She looked up at him when he stopped a few feet from her.

"This is where I live," he informed her, looking deep into her eyes. "You were brought here because I've claimed you, Ava. In the eyes of all of Karn'al, you're my mate."

She cocked her head. "Don't I have a say in this?"

A shadow crossed his face, too fast for her to discern what it meant. "You can deny my claim. If you wish to do that, all you have to do is return to your father and declare it so." He caressed her cheek with his hand. "By doing so, you're declaring yourself free for another man to claim you, to lay his hands on you." He lowered his head, brushing his lips against hers. "To fuck you."

Her breath hitched. "What does it mean when you claim me?"

He licked the corners of her lips. "If you agree, we will be mated in a traditional Karn'alian ceremony." He kissed her deeply. By the time he withdrew, her breath was coming in quick gasps.

She felt bereft when he moved away. "If you agree, there are some things you need to know about mating." He took a moment before he spoke. "Cyborgs are more than just comrades, we're blood brothers. When one of us mates with a woman, we have to fulfill what is called the Ritual of Acceptance."

She frowned, not understanding. "Ritual of Acceptance?"

He held her gaze directly. "You have to join with me and one other in the ritual."

Shock coursed through her system. "By joining, you mean-?"

"Yes. For one time only, I and a comrade of my choosing, one who is closest to me, will join us in our bed to mate with you as well."

Her knees weakened. Erotic images assailed her at his words. She remembered when Logan and Jed watched her make love with Tristan. She could feel the same thrill of excitement snaking through her system. She really shouldn't be so excited at the thought.

But the possibility did excite her. The thought of another, maybe Logan or Jed, pleasuring her along with Tristan was very tempting.

She swallowed, trying to hide what she was feeling. Would he think her wanton for wanting to do that? "That's all right with you?" she managed to ask through dry lips.

"It's the Karn'alian way. More so with the Cyborgs, Ava. If I die in combat, one of my comrades will step in and take care of you, provide for you, protect you." He looked so calm, so collected, that it was hard for her to see what he was thinking. "It is required that we do it once. Only once." For a brief moment, he allowed his true feelings to show. "Because I don't think I could bear it if I had to share you every night."

She took a step toward him.

He warded her off with a shake of his head. "I need your answer."

Did she really have any other choice? Tristan gave her incredible pleasure. He was gentle, he was considerate. The heat they generated was unbelievable. Could she really allow another man to take his place? The thought was repulsive to her. She didn't want any other man. She wanted him and him alone.

"More than anything else in this world," she began softly, walking toward him, "I want to be your mate." Her hands crept around his neck. "Only you, Tristan. Nobody else." She touched her lips to his. "You make me feel things I've never felt before."

Something close to relief flickered in his face. "Then it's done. You're mine, Ava."

Ava buried her face in his chest. "Same goes for you. You're all mine." She burrowed closer to the warmth of his body. "This ritual, when does it happen?"

"Right now."

Moisture pooled in her lower belly, rendering her limbs useless. She leaned into him, already aroused at the thought. "Have you decided who?"

He groaned and tunneled his fingers through her hair. "I don't know what I ever did to deserve you. But I swear on my life, that I will do everything in my power to make you happy, Ava."

Happiness took root in her heart. "You already make me happy, Tristan."

Cupping her buttocks, he pulled her up against his already stiff cock. He led her to the bed, stripping her of her clothes. When she was naked, he bent and tongued her nipple. Her breath hitched in her throat. She pulled him closer, loving the push and pull of his mouth, getting unbearably aroused. But all too soon, he stepped back. Shaking, she tried to remain still as he opened a drawer. The desire coursing through her blended thick and fast in her bloodstream. She had no resistance to the feeling. She was already wet. There was no hiding that fact from him.

He had a black silk cloth in his hand when he turned back to her. "Turn around."

A rush of excitement swelled inside her. She bit her lip as he wrapped the cloth around her eyes and blindfolded her.

#### "Tristan?"

"Trust me." His voice was low and gentle. "This is all for you, Ava. I want to make this as special as I can."

She shivered as he knotted the cloth securely. Cool air whispered over her skin, tightening her nipples and sparking an almost unbearable ache in her pussy. The door swished open. Her head came up.

"Who's here?" she asked in a whisper, her voice trembling with anticipation.

Cool lips touched her nape. "It's all right. Just relax."

She melted against Tristan, loving his familiar touch. The rough pads of his fingers slid down her side, coming to a stop on her hips. She jumped as a

new set of hands drifted over her breasts, lightly brushing her nipples. She moaned. "Tristan?"

His low, sensuous voice rasped from somewhere beside her. "I'm right here."

A pair of hands settled lightly on the curve of her waist. She instinctively knew it wasn't Tristan. It felt different. They drifted down to her mound, catching some of her moisture in a quick swipe.

She whimpered. Flames licked wherever they touched her body. It was tortuous to stand there and absorb the sensations brought about by so many fingers. Her feelings were heightened by being blindfolded and not seeing who was touching her. She didn't know what to expect or what was coming. She succumbed to the feeling of total helplessness that was assailing her. Total surrender, that's what she was giving them. She was surrendering to the pleasure the two of them would give her.

Somebody—perhaps Tristan?—guided her to lie down on the bed. Heart hammering, she lay quiescent and expectant, waiting for what was surely to come. When it came, it was where she hardly expected it to originate. A firm set of lips kissed her feet, laving her toes with soft licks.

Ava inhaled sharply. She never knew how erotic it was to have her toes sucked. She moaned and shifted on the bed.

"Don't move." Tristan's harsh order came over her head. She looked up, tilting her face toward the sound, seeking him. He laughed softly, taking her wrists in each of his hands, pulling them over her head, wrapping her fingers around the thick headboard. "Hold on to that."

Lips skimmed her middle, laving her navel with languorous licks. Her nipples tightened in the cool air, already expecting their fair share of attention. But the lips headed below, right toward her sopping pussy. Ava rubbed her legs against the cool sheets restlessly, opening them wide. A very pleased, very male laugh reached her ears before a damp tongue swooped between her slick folds and sought her clit.

Ava reared off the bed, the touch electrifying her. She moaned, not in the least satisfied. The moan turned into a gasp when her nipples were pulled,

teeth gently raking over the sensitive tips. Her pussy was not spared, the stiff clit laved over and over again by a delightfully rough tongue.

"Amazing," a masculine voice exclaimed. "Her pussy is indeed hot."

She flushed, vaguely recognizing the voice. But her senses whirled dizzily, bombarded on two fronts. She almost let go of the headboard, momentarily forgetting Tristan's instruction to hold on. After one particularly tender bite on her clit, she gasped, only to feel a very thick, very erect cock nudge her lips. Her senses whirled—she didn't know who'd taken possession of her pussy or whose cock was at her lips. She no longer cared.

With a soft moan, she opened her lips. The cock was huge, the tip broad and warm as she enveloped it in her mouth. Spurred on by the grunt of pleasure at her action, she applied herself to pleasuring the cock. With her tongue, she licked it up and down, pausing to savor the thick vein that pulsed from the base of the shaft. A big hand pillowed her head, raising her slightly for a better angle. He fed her the cock as deep as she could take it. Again and again, the cock swelled even more inside her mouth.

Ava was no longer aware of her surroundings. All she could focus on was the pleasure they were giving her, assaulting her senses without mercy. A pair of callused hands pushed her legs wide apart, a warm male body settling in between. His tongue was a weapon for which she had no resistance. He was a master at licking and exploring her tender, giving pussy.

She'd never had so much attention given to her breasts. They were pulled and tugged in an erotic massage. The tips were highly sensitive to the slightest touch. They were heavy and tingling from being kneaded and caressed, shaped and squeezed.

So much was happening at once, she couldn't take it anymore. With a small scream, she tore her lips from the cock as she came. On and on it went, until the violent tremors subsided and she was left gasping for air. Limp and weak, she slumped back on the bed.

The mattress dipped as the men shifted. Somebody picked her up and positioned her on top of a warm body. She trembled, still reeling from the aftershock. A tortured moan was wrung from her as a thick cock pushed its

way inside her pussy, slipping all the way to her womb in one stroke. Her mind spun. Was it possible to die from too much pleasure? A soft whimper of protest hovered on her lips. The huge cock inside her was barely moving.

A harsh breath was expelled loudly beneath her. "It's...too hot," a male voice gasped. It was moments later before he moved inside her. With deliberate movements, the cock went in and out, deeper and deeper, each time a little harder. "I've never had a pussy this hot."

In the next moment, Ava lost her breath as she felt something cold and slippery applied to her rear. She froze as one, then two fingers worked the thick substance around and inside, their entrance made easy by the lubrication. Before long, she'd accepted their entire length, stretched and slippery. But too quickly, they were gone. She gasped as she felt the broad tip of a cock working its way inside the tight ring of muscle. "Ohhhh."

The blindfold covering her eyes was pulled off. Trapped between two male bodies, Ava looked down to see Logan under her. His face was twisted with pleasure, his hands anchoring her hips. She looked over her shoulder and met Tristan's hot gaze. The head of his cock finally slipped in and she cried out at the intense pleasure that followed the momentary pain. "Tristan!"

Inch by tormenting inch, he worked his cock inside her ass until he was all the way in. She sucked in her breath with a sharp hiss, feeling utterly possessed. "Tristan," she whimpered.

"By the Gods, Ava, it feels so good," he rasped, wrapping his arms around her and seeking the jiggling mounds of her breasts.

In unison, Tristan and Logan began to move. Thrusting in and out, adopting a rhythm that drove her insane. Throwing her head back, she panted. She was no longer her own person, but an instrument of pleasure for the two men. It was exhilarating to be the center of such torrid attention, every thrust a push toward the edge, toward the approaching precipice.

With a gentle touch, Tristan drew her hair over her shoulder and kissed her shoulder. A stark contrast to his escalating strokes. She heard animal-like noises echoing in the room and realized it was her.

"Tris, I'm not going to last long," Logan grunted, tunneling his cock deep in her pussy.

In response, Tristan tugged her hair and angled her face for his kiss. He fucked her with little gentleness, his hips slamming against her buttocks with mind-numbing intensity, again and again.

Her orgasm, when it came, hit her with such force that she tore her lips from his and screamed. "Tristan!" Huge waves of pleasure slammed into her as she shuddered violently. She was only dimly aware of Logan pumping his seed into her. But it was Tristan she was aware of. She knew the exact moment he stiffened behind her and uttered a soft curse as his cock clenched inside her ass. Tears came to her eyes at the immense combination of pleasure and pain that streaked through her body, centering on where her body was joined with Tristan's. Exhausted, she slumped back against him as he shifted, lifting her off Logan. The slide of the other man's cock out of her pussy made her shiver with remembered pleasure. She moaned as Tristan slipped out of her ass and he laid them down on the bed.

After a long moment, Logan stood up and dressed. "My gratitude, Tristan," he murmured. "I can't remember the last time I've had so much pleasure." His warm gaze fell on Ava. "He tried to warn me that your pussy was—unusual. I regret I will only have the privilege to feel it this once." He ran his hand down her cheek before he left as silently as he came in.

Tristan leaned over her. "Are you all right?" he asked with gentle concern when they were finally alone.

Although she was sure her cheeks were red, it really was too late to feel embarrassed. The pleasure she had derived from the experience was proof that she had enjoyed it. "I'm wonderful."

He chuckled. "I'm glad you enjoyed it." He pushed a damp tendril behind her ear. "Although I must warn you, I will not do that again." His arms tightened around her. "You're mine, Ava. I couldn't bear it if I had to share you all the time."

The possessiveness in his tone didn't bother her, instead she reveled in it. "It was fun tonight." She kissed the corner of his lips. "But I don't think I'd want to

do it on a regular basis either." She frowned. "This ritual thing, I don't have to reciprocate by sharing you with another woman, do I?" Her tone clearly indicated she wouldn't find any pleasure in that.

A pleased grin parted his lips. "No, you don't have to share me." He drew back and looked at her with concern. "Are you sure about this, Ava? My life is not an easy one. I will be sent out on missions frequently, to faraway places. I don't want you to regret being my mate." His eyes clouded. "I wouldn't like it, but I would understand if you would rather stay with your father and get to know him."

Ava couldn't believe this big, strong Cyborg of hers was showing a rare moment of insecurity. "My father and I have a lifetime to get to know each other. I want to stay with you, Tristan. I wouldn't want it any other way." She kissed him. A feeling of love welled up in her chest, threatening to bubble over. Her eyes memorized his strong, handsome features and her heart melted. "I'm so glad you found me."

His face was somber. "You were meant for me. How else can you explain that I found you on a world millions of miles away from Karn'al?"

The light of love shone brightly in his eyes, there for her—for anybody—to see.

Her life had taken a turn for the better. Pleasure Planet seemed a thousand miles away, her lonely existence just a memory. Kell was now the heir to a kingdom. Her brother had shown remarkable courage and strength facing the changes in their life. His relationship with Killian was guarded and wary, but Ava was positive that would change soon. Already she could see a tentative bond forming between them all.

As for her, she found love with her very own Cyborg, a warrior sworn to protect and love her all the rest of their days.