



# **Seek and You Shall Find**

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## **Blurb**

Blackguard only wants to get back to the war his planet is fighting, but instead, he's picking up a woman. A seeker morph. She's been promised to him to cement an alliance his world desperately needs. When he's betrayed and all his men are killed, he's forced to flee without his promised morph.

Only a pod opens in the back of his shuttle.

The seeker morph, Annalisse, emerges. She's awake from stasis and is now in a sexual heat. Her body is demanding that she bond, and Blackguard is only too willing to fulfill her needs, except that he also must keep them safe from the enemies who betrayed him. Annalisse will become whatever the man she bonds with desires, only she finds Blackguard wants a woman much like she already is.

It's a race to a communications array that will allow him to get them off the planet in one piece. But once they lift off, Blackguard must resume his duties as ruler, which requires him to abandon Annalisse.

Will Blackguard seek out the woman he never knew he sought? Will Annalisse find the man who allowed her to stay true to herself?

## Chapter One

Clang.

The pod spun around as it briefly touched the side of the hold of the small spaceship.

Blackguard watched intently as a huge crane loaded his item of cargo. He folded his arms across his chest. Damn female was surely more trouble than she would ever be worth.

Nearby, his captain of the guard, Moses, held his breath as the container bounced on landing, then resumed breathing as it settled down safely in the hold.

Why was the man so concerned? Well, besides the fact that if anything happened to the pod before the bonding of the morph, they might lose the formation of a huge alliance with his people to help them fight their most notorious enemies. But it wasn't like this pod contained Moses's future. No, only Blackguard's.

The crane lifted its boom to go back to loading more typical shipping containers onto other ships. Several more cranes operated in the loading bay of the dock. Metal catwalks and ships ran the length of the bay with an open area in the center.

"The seeker morph is loaded onboard, sire."

Blackguard nodded to Moses. "Noticed."

"You don't sound happy about it." Moses's grizzled face wrinkled up in disapproval. Disenchantment with his prince as always. "You didn't even want to peek at her before she was loaded onboard."

"What am I supposed to be happy about?" Blackguard leaned on the railing to the metal walkway nearby his ship, which would take him and his morph back home to his palace, where she'd become his princess. "A woman in stasis I've never met that I have to mate with?" Didn't matter if she looked ugly or wouldn't tell him "boo." He'd have to make her his just the same. His marriage had been arranged for him, not by him.

It had been set up several months ago by his father.

But too many lives depended on him for him to balk over taking a woman into his life and his bed.

"She's a seeker morph."

Blackguard's hand clenched on the iron railing. Moses acted as if that explained everything. What was so damn special about that species? The name explained nothing to him. Not one damn thing. Too little was known about them. "So?"

"She's a woman, who, once she wakes up, will bond with and be whatever you desire. As she enters her first cycle, she'll go into heat and be moldable. She'll become your greatest passion. Everything you've ever wanted." Moses shook his head, looking anywhere but Blackguard's face. "To most men, that would be all they'd dream of. A woman they could mold to whatever they wanted her to be. A woman whose first time is a sexual heat that she can't escape or put off."

"And?" Blackguard shrugged his shoulders.

The exasperation sounded in Moses' voice. "Seeker morphs are rare. And you will have one." She was the last known true seeker morph for generations. Few seeker morphs were born. Rarer still did a seeker survive to their first cycle, which generally hit about their 25th year. Seeker morphs were so sought after, they were often stolen before their

first cycle and killed in the attempt to claim them.

"That's supposed to make me jump for joy?"

Driven by a sexual heat to bond with a man, the morph would bend to his every wish and command even as she fucked him six ways to Sunday.

"Most men..."

"Yeah." The last seeker morph had been the cause of a war between two rival galaxies. "Most men would." Didn't mean he would.

Why didn't he find this intriguing? Why didn't he find a woman who'd succumb to his every charm arousing? Maybe because his planet warred to keep its place in the galaxy instead of being bombed into non-existence? Maybe because he didn't have time to go a-fucking and bonding with a woman with his planet in jeopardy, even if it guaranteed him alliance? Maybe because he liked a woman to challenge him? How the hell was a woman designed to cater to his every whim going to do that?

He was tired of everyone telling him how special he was because he was the prince. Moses was one of the few that stood up to him. That was why he was still the captain of the guard, despite his age. Moses had worked under Blackguard's father for years.

"At least be polite to our host overseeing this transaction."

A transaction. Maybe that bothered Blackguard most of all. The seeker morph wasn't even seen as a person by his people or her own. Only a commodity to be traded.

Moses moved to the side and down steps, heading for the doorway that would take them to the passenger loading dock and where his host had gathered to wish him well.

Blackguard gritted his teeth. "Should I remind you to be more concerned with my enemies than with my own following of protocols?"

"No." Moses didn't stop but continued through the door without a glance back. "No need to remind me."

Blackguard waited a moment and then followed behind the older man's back. Typical.

Tangara, their host and the deliverer of the seeker morph, moved forward to pump Blackguard's hand. He was an Engosian, an ally both of Blackguard's people and of the planet Morpho. He'd been chosen to facilitate the transfer for Morpho, though they'd insisted Blackguard be present. "It's an honor, sire. A true honor. I know you can't wait to get the little woman home, so I won't keep you." His grin turned sly. "Isn't she a pretty thing? Tall for a morph."

"I don't know." The other's man's grip turned tight, trying to squeeze hard. Blackguard extricated his hand but not before giving a none-too-gentle squeeze of a shake back, much harder than the grip thrown at him. Time to remind the other man of his people's strength. While they were allies, something reeked about the man Blackguard didn't trust. "Haven't seen her yet." Why had Tangara? He had to have known they hadn't opened the pod. He'd been right there the whole time the damn thing was being loaded.

Moses moved forward. "We didn't have time to open the pod, and we didn't want to chance her coming out of stasis. Her awakening before her time would be unfortunate." He lowered his head. "I'm sure you can understand our reasoning, sir."

Moses covered the game of words that shouldn't have set off Blackguard's irritation, but had. Blackguard glared at his captain. He also felt the stares of other people and looked around diligently to find the source.

"Yes. I didn't think you'd be opening the pod before you left." Tangara moved the

hand away that Blackguard had squeezed, stretching his fingers out and bringing them back toward him as though they ached.

Blackguard felt no pride in his physical prowess, only gladness at still being able to do something for his people. He wouldn't have responded like that if Tangara hadn't tried the action first.

What was the man up to?

A bang sounded behind them from a container being lodged in another ship's hold. The crane set down a pod in a small shuttle craft built for one, which looked ready to take off.

Moses's and Blackguard's hands both went to their guns at the same time at the first round of noise.

The sooner they lifted off from this place and got back home, the better.

Blackguard moved his hand as he saw the source of the noise but kept it close to his weapon. "Thank you for your assistance in this matter." He stood solemnly, not letting any emotion grace his face. "For acting as the emissary of Morpho." He nodded, bowing his head slightly as was the custom of Engosians.

"It was my pleasure, King Blackguard."

"I'm not king yet." He would be by the end of the week. The formalities hadn't been executed yet, but when his father had died two months ago, the system had been set in motion for Blackguard to rule. Picking up the seeker morph was step closer to his control of the throne.

"But you will be. Our seeker morph will rule by your side. As your queen. Your perfect queen." The man smiled, showing pointy teeth.

Too many teeth. Too big a smile. And the seeker morph wasn't Tangara's.

Movement came from behind Moses. Not another crane. A gunman on the gangplanks above them. Had Blackguard not been watching, he never would have seen the brief glimpse before the man ducked behind a canister.

Tangara saw the man, too. Blackguard saw his eyes shift to the canister. But he didn't react in a panic. Instead, he prattled on as if the gunman wasn't even there.

Dammit. A trap. Blackguard's hand clutched his gun again.

Tangara had never intended to deliver the seeker morph. He'd set them at ease by placing the pod in their ship. Instead, he'd betrayed them all. Had he betrayed Morpho? Or were they in on the transgression against Blackguard's people?

Blackguard's gaze swung around to other side as his fingers tightened on his weapon. More brief movement along all the upper catwalks. They hid themselves. How many were there? "Moses."

The man didn't flinch or tear his gaze away from where he stared. He'd seen what Blackguard had.

With careful slowness, Tangara dropped his hand down to his waist. "This will create an alliance..." He stopped at the look on their faces and the lifting of their weapons to his chest. "What's wrong?" He quickly pulled up a phaser from some hidden holster around his waist.

Blackguard didn't hesitate. He shot point blank with his phaser toward the other man's chest.

Moses shot at the same time.

Tangara died before he hit the deck.

At the sound of the phaser fire, Blackguard's men filed out of their aircraft with weapons drawn. They weren't standard shuttle crew, but members of his army.

The firefight began.

The men they fought against had the higher ground from raised walkways surrounding the shuttle. With it, they possessed the advantage. Not to mention greater numbers. Though Blackguard's men managed to take out many of the gunmen, most of his men were being methodically cut down one by one.

All he could do was watch from his position.

"Come on!" He grabbed Moses's shoulder. "We have to reach the men." They'd moved further away from the shuttle to greet Tangara. But they could follow the gangplanks back to their men's position.

Moses clasped him back, holding him in place. "We can't reach them. Not in time. We'd have to cross the open area where there's nowhere to shield us. They'll cut us down." He continued to try and pick off the gunmen. A useless endeavor.

"We have to do something."

"Shoot. It's all we can do."

Good men died in front of Blackguard. His finger grew tight on the trigger. Damn his enemies. Cowards, who would ambush a squadron of men and pick them off instead of a fair fight.

A bullet whizzed by his head and embedded itself in the metal behind his ear. Shards glanced across his neck.

As the men were being picked off, the gunmen turned their attention to Moses and Blackguard.

Moses grabbed him by the shoulder, pushing him away. "Go! To the shuttle. Now. You have to get away."

"What? I'm not leaving..."

"We'll be your diversion. Your cover. Go, sire." He shoved Blackguard along, pushing him. "We'll hold them off."

"No. You said it yourself, I can't reach our shuttle without crossing the open area."

"If you're captured or killed, your people will pay the price."

"No." Blackguard wouldn't abandon these men in their time of need. Wouldn't leave a man behind. "I'm not leaving you or my men."

Moses blew out a breath. "Will their deaths be for nothing? They die to protect you. You must go and get back to the warship."

Blackguard shook his head. "No. I won't leave you here to fight my battles."

He never saw the blow coming. Something whacked him in the back of the head. Hard. His world spun. Another blow. And down to the floor he went.

\* \* \* \*

Blackguard came to in a small shuttle.

Moses had buckled him in and was closing the top. It clicked into place with a thundering sound in Blackguard's throbbing ears.

Blackguard shook his head wildly to clear his senses. He growled. It had only been a few minutes since he'd been hit and obviously Moses had done the hitting. He fumbled with his seatbelt trying to free himself from the strap.

Moses spoke into the comm near the shuttle. "The auto-pilot is locked in for thirty

seconds. Once the shuttle takes off, that's that."

"You bastard." Once the shuttle took off, he'd have few choices. Landing again would be difficult with the gunmen. Not to mention the propulsion of the shuttle would be hard to call back in such close quarters. He'd have no choice but to exit the facility, even if he planned to come right back.

The engine began its power up sequence. Soon, there'd be no going back.

"Moses, please stop this!"

"Go! You must live." Moses yelled one more time before charging back up the ramp. He fired wildly, drawing the fire of the men above them.

Blackguard checked out the controls of the shuttle. It was the one he'd seen a pod loaded onto earlier. Not too complex a system but nothing he could override. He could fly anything so would be okay when the autopilot disengaged.

The docking clamps discharged. The shuttle sped from the docking bay heading for the doors. The auto pilot disengaged while in flight, and Blackguard took over. They exited the doors before they closed behind him. Someone had thought to close them but too late to capture him.

His lips twitched. He'd made it out in time.

Without his men.

They'd closed him out. Getting back inside would be difficult.

His fist connected with the steering column. Enough pain to bring him back to himself. He had to communicate with the other ship, which they'd left a few systems away. Then, he could exact payment for treachery. It would be huge. He'd bring hell on this planet once he'd rescued his men. All he had to do was get out of the planet's atmosphere, and he could call his ship to their side. He'd do that before going back in.

Damn Moses for making him abandon them.

An explosion from the docking bay he'd exited caught him by surprise. The entire base exploded into shards of fire.

His mouth opened. His men ... Moses. Hell, the damn seeker morph they'd come there for.

All gone. All lost.

He had no time to ponder their deaths.

The shock wave caused by the explosion caught his shuttle with a bounce, taking him with the driving force. The small craft had no defenses against the wave. All he could do was bounce along within its stream until it ejected him.

He tried to steer and keep control of the shuttle but the wave drove his path for several seconds.

Then, with a downturn of the shock wave, he crashed.

On the planet of his betrayer.

His head bleeding, he cursed everyone involved from here to eternity as his shuttle skidded to a stop.

They were all dead.

He struggled to look behind him at the roaring inferno. No one could have gotten out of there alive.

If he'd stayed, he'd be dead now, too.

He swallowed. Now was not the time to dwell on the losses. Now was the time to get off his ass and back to his planet. There, he could sort things out and figure what his next



move should be.

Vengeance.

The pod that he'd seen the crane load started beeping from behind him.

"Shut up." He tried to circumvent failing systems to get the shuttle back up in the air as he took off his harness. A no-go. Too much damage had been done to the small craft. "Shut up." The persistent beeping annoyed the hell out of him as he kept trying to access the systems even as they failed on him. He might be stuck at the crash site. He couldn't even get a radio signal out from this small of a ship to the other ship unless he cleared the atmosphere. It would be several more hours before they'd launch a rescue on their own.

He drew his phaser and turned around, ready to shoot the offending pod's controls to silence the beeping, only to find it had opened. The crash must have broken down the locks on the thing. It had unlocked whether he wanted it to or not. "This isn't a good time." Watch it be something alive like parsec beetles, a delicacy for some races, or psi-cats, a pet. Just what he needed all over the dying shuttle.

The cover slipped open as the beeping subsided.

Blackguard kept his gun trained on the pod, even as the heady scent of spices met his nose. What could it be, a spice delivery? He turned toward the back, facing all the way around, to get a better look.

A woman sat up with a stretch of her body. Her pert mouth yawned. A naked, beautiful woman lay in the pod. With big breasts. Long dark hair. Green eyes. Big breasts. He couldn't tear his gaze away from her. He reacted as if he'd been struck in the gut with something heavy. Could hardly get breath out of his lungs.

He blinked, not having expected a person to be in the pod, especially not this lovely creature. The gun shifted downward. Even with the surprise and the circumstances, lust filled him at her appearance. His cock tightened. He'd never seen a female so delicate looking. So beautiful.

He'd never scented anything like her either. Something resided below the spice's scent, which had to be her. His cock rose up as his heart pounded. The adrenaline raised by his getaway channeled to his libido. His whole body reacted to this woman and wanted things with her, that even in his wickedest days, he couldn't imagine. Until now.

He shook his head to clear the fog. This was a bad time for arousal.

Her gaze centered on him as an unsteady smile graced her lips. "You must be Blackguard. I'm Annalisse. Yours to do with what you will." Her voice sounded throaty. Husky. It ran along his spine like a rolling river with a sharp dip down to his heavy cock.

He almost groaned at the impact of her words. Annalisse. Beauty had a name. His arousal grew tenfold, which hardly seemed possible. Oh, yeah.

Maybe it was a good time after all.

## Chapter Two

Annalisse stared at the man in front of her. The largest man she'd ever seen. He stood taller than her by several inches. His torso was wider than hers, too. He made her feel positively petite, and that had never happened before.

Her reaction came suddenly, swiftly, and strongly. Her thighs clenched together as lust filled her every pore. This man would make any woman sit up and beg to be his, but she was particularly affected. She couldn't take her gaze from the man in front of her.

His throat had blood on it, but that didn't detract from his good looks. His wild looks. He didn't look civilized, not like she'd expected a prince to look. Not much about him appeared plebian, though, from his muscles to his attire. His black hair stretched to his shoulders and was tousled above a head wound. Her fingers itched to run through the strands. He wore brown leather pants and a blood spattered, white shirt along with tall black boots. All of his clothes offset his tanned skin. She longed to slip everything off and find the muscles underneath. Was he tanned everywhere?

She licked her lips. Finding out would be fun. Never had she wanted so many things at one time with one man.

Had her cycle begun?

Noting the motion of her wayward tongue, his blazing brown eyes spit fire before they grew cold.

He grabbed her arm with taut fingers. His touch inflamed her senses, even as tightly as he gripped her. "Who are you? What do you know?"

For the first time since she'd awakened, she looked around the small, sterile shuttle, stunned by his questions. This didn't look like a palace to her. Not a ride fit for a prince either. This was a simple, one person shuttle. She glanced out of the window. No palace sat nearby, only a meadow with trees all around the open space. A building burned in the distance, pushing out black smoke and tall orange flames.

He shook her a little, bringing her attention back to him. She wasn't sure how she'd stopped looking at him to start with. "I'm talking to you."

She bristled right back with a fierceness she'd never experienced before. How dare he manhandle her? "I'm not deaf. Nor do I need to be shaken."

His grip tightened, and he didn't release her.

The touch reminded her his body rested so close to hers. Despite her annoyance, she bridged the distance between them. Allowed their heat to come together, taking up the temperature in her body to the level of a furnace. It was like touching a match tip to the flint, it ignited her.

Slinkily, she rubbed her body against his. The roughness of his clothes pressed on all her sexual buttons. The crisp shirt moved across her nipples, making them perk out in interest.

She wanted to roll in him. Cover herself in his body and scent and use that for her blanket.

He made a strangled sound and pulled back from her.

Unacceptable.

She followed him into his own personal space, making his eyes widen. They filled

with arousal. She rubbed herself against his hardness, earning another moan. The stones in the Caverns of Lucidity had nothing on him when it came to being hard. She wanted him to sink within her depths to the fullest. She wanted to become one with him. Not anything she thought she'd ever hope for.

She'd never felt this delicious. This aroused. Her breathing came in pants. Her heart wouldn't stop pounding. She'd never felt ... so alive.

Her cycle had definitely begun.

Even as her rational mind came up with that explanation for her insides incinerating, need overwhelmed her senses as she pressed her curves against him. Closeness was the only thing that could ease the ache inside. The only thing that could make her body stop quaking was his body. He was all that she needed.

With a growl, he pushed her away instead of pulling her closer. "Are you the seeker morph?"

A chill descended over her body. Not from her nakedness but from the loss of his warmth against her. Her hands fisted. She needed that contact back. Craved it in a way she didn't understand. "What do you think?" Her mouth curled into a sneer. It would seem obvious to her what she was, especially as he must have picked her up from the base. She'd been loaded onto his shuttle after all.

The last thing she remembered was being placed into the stasis pod and hearing the lid slide over her. She'd watched it close her in as lethargy had settled over her limbs. Her eyes had closed before the last lock clicked into place.

"I think you're the seeker morph." He kept his eyes averted so he wouldn't look at her. Didn't seem to be able to cast his eyes to her body. Why? What was he worried about?

"You'd be right then." Her voice sounded as if she were a stranger. "Aren't you the smart one?" Why did she act so challenging? She'd never reacted this way before to anyone. Her difficult nature had usually possessed some moderation or tact, but here, she fully assaulted his every viewpoint.

To challenge him was to bring down his wrath upon her head.

She could sense he wasn't used to anyone questioning him. Yet, the idea of how she was acting and his punishment of her filled her with a thrill she'd never before experienced.

He took a step back from her. "What do you know? Are you in on it? Are you with them?"

"In on what? With who?" Something had happened to make this man suspicious of her. A terrible thought rode across her like a horse looking for its stable. "You aren't Blackguard, are you?"

This couldn't be happening. To be with a man who wasn't Blackguard right now would invite trouble. She would have issues keeping her hands off any man right now, but this one especially seemed to invite her lust-filled thoughts. As she'd been promised to Blackguard to cement some big alliance, this man better be him. Otherwise she might throw away everything because she couldn't be near him and not touch him. Her people depended on her to make this work.

All of this, despite her fears about losing who she was in a transformation of self. She was a seeker morph. She would bond to the man who took her and become his greatest desire. Her personality would be dictated by a man she hadn't met before. Would

any of the Annalisse she was remain after she met her intended? She didn't know.

"I am Blackguard."

She sighed in relief. Her cycle had begun, and she accompanied the man she was supposed to. He affected her in ways she'd never imagined. Who'd have thought Blackguard would be such a fine specimen of maleness?

A frown perched on her face. Only they weren't where they were supposed to be when she'd come out of stasis.

She remembered the priestesses saying that she'd need to be taken back to his palace for safety reasons. Supposed danger and concern about her cycle had augmented the need for stasis and the urgency to get her back to his world, along with the importance of her not reacting to any other man but him. "Where are we?"

He rubbed a hand over his face. A face she wanted to trace with her fingertips. A man had no right to be so pretty. "We crashed. We're on the planet Engosia."

The Engosians had been playing intermediary in her delivery. "We crashed?" She frowned and looked around.

She didn't notice much damage to the shuttle. They must have had a moderately soft landing. Had it been his piloting that had saved them? She'd bet it was. Anytime a shuttle crashed, it could be disastrous for those inside. She'd never seen a crashed shuttle from news reports in one piece like this.

"Yeah." He turned back to the dashboard. "The shuttle's controls have been damaged. Which leaves us out in the open."

She came up behind him and pressed her body against his back. Rubbed against him from side to side enjoying the crisp sensations of his clothes rubbing against her. Her skin felt so sensitive that it blazed with heat, which consumed her skin. Her hands went up to grasp his wide shoulders. She kneaded her hands along the corded muscles. What a wonder he was. Big and brawny. Her hands brushed against the curled edges of his dark hair. Silken strands tickled against her fingertips. She wanted to reach up and bury her hands in his tresses.

Between her legs, she ached to be filled. Need consumed her. Only he could solve that need. He could make the boiling in her come to a head. To an explosion. One they could both enjoy.

Her hips pushed against his butt. He could solve her longings for her. In many ways. Many positions. Many times.

His breath came out in a big rush. "Stop that. I need to think."

She moved her breasts back and forth against his back, ignoring his order. The sexual rush kept her breathing shallow. "Stop what?"

He turned to face her so fast she almost spun around. His face blazed his irritation. "That."

She didn't back away, though clearly, he expected her to. As if she would back away from him. His magnetism drew her. She couldn't back away. Wouldn't. "Why should I stop?" It was all she could do not to press her breast against him. The tips pointed in the direction she wanted to go. Toward him.

"Because I want you to."

"I highly doubt that."

"I order you to stop."

A small smile curled up on her lips. "I doubt that, too."

His eyes narrowed as he moved that big body closer to her. The heat from him caught her in its wake, thrilling every spark within her. "Don't."

"Don't what?"

"Don't doubt me."

Her skin prickled with his nearness. He radiated danger from every pore. Every hair on her body stood up in response. His scent, something utterly unrecognizable and masculine, invaded her senses. He seemed ready to snap.

She looked up into his rioting eyes, somehow overjoyed to be looking up at a man for once. A laugh bubbled out of her. "But you don't want me to back away." She took the step toward him that breached the gap in their bodies. "Not now. Or ever." She couldn't seem to stop herself from poking him like a stick to a lit fire. Would he burn her in response?

What would she be like afterward? Would she keep any of herself intact? She didn't know and wouldn't find out until after the bonding. A bond would exist between them that no one else could break. Ever. Now if she could get his mouth to stop denying his need for her.

His face blazed with a passion she'd never encountered before. A passion that stole her breath with its intensity. "You're in heat."

Another laugh bubbled up. Way to state the obvious. "Yes. Yes, I am." Her cycle had started much sooner than she'd expected. She'd thought there might be a few more days left after coming out of stasis. That there would have been more evidence of the cycle coming on when she'd been on Morpho if it was imminent. Instead, it seemed to have fast-tracked her into a pulverizing vat of lust. Each moment she spent in front of him made the heat that much worse. Her entire being smoldered in her cycle's grasp. The only thing that called to her to put an end to it? Him.

He swallowed. The motion moved his throat up and down. She wanted to follow that with her tongue. "For me."

"For you." She swallowed. Heat moved up her spine. She felt as though she was in a volcano and would never be cool again.

The right man can bring out a cycle in a seeker morph if she's close.

She froze for a second, hearing the words repeat again in her memory from another morph.

Had he activated her? Set her cycle into motion? Pumped the desire throughout her blood?

How could one man have so much power over her? How should she handle this? There was only one way that worked within her mind.

"Blackguard?"

"Yes?"

"Take me."

He briefly closed his eyes before opening them. He gazed down into her face with a look so intense it would have melted wax from candles. His gaze looked hungry. Devouring. Shiver inducing.

He reached out to grab her with a groan. Pulled her fully against his body, the contact blazing a rocket around her senses. His mouth descended in a flurry that she couldn't escape.

Didn't want to escape.

He took her mouth like he was taking her life force and sucking it down. He didn't allow her any presence of mind, instead taking everything she had to give and giving it back in the one futile kiss.

He kissed her like he had all the time in the world to play with her lips. Like he wanted to crawl inside her and possess her from the inside out. His lips possessed hers with careful dominion until she thought she'd go mad from the longings he induced.

She shivered from the seduction of his mouth.

She could get lost in a kiss. Who knew? She'd never been kissed before. Never been pulled into the fiery launch of such a thing.

The kiss was much better than she'd ever expected.

He was better than she'd ever expected.

He touched something primal in her as if that same piece existed in him as well.

She gave herself over to his embrace.

Thoughts didn't matter right now.

Only he mattered. His touch. His kiss. His body. All of that mattered. Nothing else did. Not right now.

His hand stroked along her back, rounding down her curves and coming to rest on her butt. He tensed his hand, clutching her cheek. Her body straightened instinctually, going against his. Her body coated him in the plaster mold of her.

He growled.

She'd done something right. Amazing, considering she didn't know what she did. The cycle must be guiding her actions. Or some instinct she hadn't been aware of or needed until now.

She could feel the bulge against her. Feel the evidence of how much he didn't want her to pull away, despite his earlier protests.

With a pant, he did pull away from her lips, leaving them lonely without him. "I ... you..." He couldn't seem to be able to find the words he wanted to say, which flustered him even more.

She'd sensed a controlled man. That she could put him that much out of control made warm circles around her stomach.

She moved forward to grasp his head and pull him down for another round of kissing. She didn't care what he was about to say. Only that she needed to taste him again. Needed him to fill her up with that large cock that still remained hidden from view.

He gave himself to her and more.

Yet, it wasn't enough.

She needed more. Needed all of him. Wanted his touch all over her. His body, too. His mouth. She wanted everything and would have what she needed. What she craved.

She reached up a hand to the top of his shirt. Flicking her finger, she undid the top button. Another flick undid the second. She continued, not looking at what she undid, but concentrating on kissing him for all she was worth.

When the last button had been undone, she took her hands to spread his shirt wide open. She'd reached skin. Delicious, mouth watering skin she couldn't wait to taste. One hand drifted up to explore this new found territory. A fine coating of hair sprinkled about his chest. Well-defined abs and pecs clenched under her wandering hands, while she enjoyed the feel of them.

Using the other hand to push his shirt further back, she leaned in to press her chest

against him.

The instant her breasts made contact with his skin, he moaned against her lips. She pressed back and forth, making sure he could feel the swells run across him. Her nipples jabbed into him like pin points. So electrified was her skin, it set off too many reactions in her to count. The feel of him against her was almost too wonderful to believe. Her breasts had never been this sensitive. This ... good.

He yanked his lips away. Rolled the shirt from his arms.

She wasn't even sure if it fell. Because her gaze focused on the sight in front of her. His chest. Wide and muscular. Tanned with light sprinkles of hair. Bared skin that invited kissing. Tasting. More touching.

Her hand reached out to stroke him again. Drawn by the deliciousness now exposed in front of her, her hand slipped down his chest as his skin sucked in on a breath.

She lowered her head to lap at the middle of his torso with her tongue beside her hand. A salty taste came away on its tip. She'd never tasted better.

His body shuddered at the contact.

She moved her head and twisted so she could taste a nipple. A flat, dark spot, she could feel harden as she laved with her tongue. She suckled his nipple into her mouth as best she could, leaving it with a little nip as it exited her mouth.

Warmth spread across her navel. Never had she imagined doing such with a man. Being so bold. Sex had been explained in clinical terms. Not this giving, this sharing. This warmth.

He jerked.

His reactions combined with her own made her want to do more and more. Her libido raged a lit fire with a heat that filled her core. She needed more closeness. More of him.

This was going to be a most interesting cycle.

\* \* \* \*

Blackguard reeled from the woman with her mouth moving along his chest. She'd tasted of fine wine when he'd tasted her kiss.

He'd never been so knocked off his axis like this. 'Course he had never met a seeker morph before either.

She rocked him from his toes to his head and everywhere in between. Now, she was about to rock his world.

His cock strained for the chance to be free. To experience relief from the confines of his pants before burying in her molten depths. It would be a most satisfying conclusion to all of this.

He couldn't wait to take her.

Make her his.

He didn't even know this woman. They'd met only moments ago. Now she was touching his body as if she'd done so all along.

A part of him looked at her, smelled her, and declared that she was his and always had been.

He'd never experienced anything like her before. Even moving as fast as they were, it felt so right. He had to have her. Under him. Had to fuck her until she acquiesced to his will.

Her scent inflamed all his senses. Made him crazy with want. Even before she'd been touching him.

She was mind blowing. Unbelievable.

He'd never expected a beautiful woman to wreak havoc on his senses and his logic. All of his reluctance had flown out of the window. He had to concentrate on her, and what he wanted to do to her.

Which was everything.

She leaned over to catch his other nipple into her warmth. She nipped him with a small amount of teeth. Enough not to be too painful but to invoke pleasure with the tiniest of tugs.

Her scent took over his senses again.

She smelled spicy. Musky. All woman.

He looked over her body as she dropped a light kiss in the center of his chest. Long dark hair coupled with bountiful curves and a chest that took his breath away. Eyes the color of tree leaves, so perceptive and giving. Her body glowed golden with an all over tan. No lines existed where clothing had restricted her exposure to sun. Even so, he remained darker than her. He was a head taller, too, though someone had mentioned she was tall for a morph.

Her full lips cracked into a smile, revealing white teeth as she looked up at him. "Still want me to pull away?" Mischievousness lit her face.

"Hell no." Not on his life or on a bet. Didn't she know how much she'd affected him? Couldn't she tell?

He reached down to his pants and undid the belt buckle.

She winked one eye at him, full of cheek and seductiveness at the same time. "Now you're talking my language."

A seeker morph in heat had to be the most seductive woman on the planet. In the galaxy. Hell, maybe in the whole entire cosmos.

He didn't sense any nervousness in her. No tension. This would be her first time. She didn't have a cycle until she could bond, and the bonding was permanent. But if she had any anxiety, she didn't display the emotion. Instead, she seemed a willing bedmate.

Something he'd always desired in a woman.

He undid the snap, but before he could take his pants down any further, she moved to run her hands over the exposed skin in the V of the pants. He licked his dry lips as her feather light touch ran into his pants and along his hard length. Up and down, she bowed her hands along him, encasing him in her warmth.

Her hands touched him, and he couldn't move to take the restricting material down any further. He rolled his hips back and forth until he could stand it no longer. He had to be free of the pants. He growled low and deep in his throat, almost beyond words.

She removed her hands and tugged on the pants, slipping them down his hips herself with nimble fingers.

She helped him shake off his boots and slip the pants down off his feet. Her teeth came out over her lip as she looked down at his engorged cock. Her face became filled with hunger. Hunger for him and only him.

The knowledge was more than he could take.



### Chapter Three

Blackguard grabbed her and yanked her body against him.

Annalisse quivered.

Time to take control. He'd let her have her fun. She was a virgin, and he'd allowed her a little time to get used to his body while he'd held his reactions in check. Not that she seemed to have any trepidation. If anything she was eager, which was how he liked a woman. But now was time for him to take over dominion.

Her body had no right to feel like this pushed so close to his. Had no right to feel this damn good against him. He'd never felt anything better than her.

Her heat infused him and made him burn like a rock in a volcano. He could burn to a crisp and never care.

He rubbed his cock against her, letting her know he wanted her. That he was going to fill her up with himself soon. That she was his.

She rubbed back against him, wild with abandon.

He exalted in her sensual reactions. Not plunging into her this second was the hardest thing he'd ever done. He had to take himself in check, or he'd lose it much too early. That was something he didn't want to do.

No, he had to make her burn the same way she did to him.

His hand slipped down over her stomach, over her trimmed curls to the heat between her legs. She scalded him. Gently, one finger pressed in to separate her folds and find the tiny bud nestled there.

She spread her legs wider for him as he positioned her back against the side of the shuttle, so she'd have some way to keep her balance. She clung to his shoulder with frenzied hands. She started to ask a question until his next motion.

His finger found the bud and began to flick it back and forth experimentally.

She keened without finishing her vocalization. The sound echoed in the small shuttle. She lay back and gave over control to him. Her body went limp, hands no longer sought him out to tantalize.

Such a responsive woman. Even her breasts seemed sensitive from the way she'd moaned while pushing herself against him. God, he'd never met a woman so wanton like this. She didn't try to hold anything back but gave her reactions all to him. Each stroke of his hand caused a shudder to move across her body.

He bent down, sliding his thumb into her folds while his other fingers toyed with the bud of her pleasure. Moisture rained to coat his hand and aid his sliding fingers.

Her head rolled around as her breathing grew into pants. Her breaths came faster and faster.

So wet.

Her channel tightened around him as he slipped two fingers in and out, as if seeking to hold him inside of her.

She would fit so close around his cock. She'd encircle him like a glove. Be so tight as he fucked her.

God, he'd never survive this. Not without coming apart in thousands of pieces with his pleasure. He couldn't wait to plunge into her. To make love, hard and fast.

Patience.

First, he'd drive her pleasure.

His fingers picked up the pace as he watched her face. So many emotions ran across such a beautiful visage. Such power over the woman existed in his touching hands.

The ultimate look of bliss slammed across her as her body straightened in the throes of her orgasm.

He'd caused her to plummet over the edge. Satisfaction and even more lust filled him with the knowledge he'd caused her ultimate bliss.

He had to be inside her now. No more waiting. Needed to feel her flesh around his cock and her body wrapped around him. Needed that as much as breathing.

He didn't stand by for her climax to finish, but instead, removed his fingers to lift her up by her butt, one hand on each cheek.

She looked up at him with eyes full of wonder. Didn't protest. Instead, she moved her body in ways to help him with the position. Letting him have his way. Which was what he needed now.

He maneuvered her into position. "Widen for me." Gave her a command with little preamble.

"What...?" Her eyes lost some of the lust filled haze.

He grew more commanding. "Widen." He wanted her entire pussy exposed to his penetration. The position would feel awkward to her at first but the pleasure would be worth the price.

Still looking unsure, she put the brunt of her weight on him along with the shuttle and widened her stance a little.

His cock prodded, trying to find his target. No go. He couldn't get himself in the exact spot he needed. Couldn't manage the spot to impale her. He found himself almost there but not quite. "Open more." He encouraged her with a thrust of his hips, letting her know what he wanted her to do.

She whimpered, understanding his desires and trying to accommodate him. She could have him but she'd have to work with him and let him inside of her. She had to comply. Shifting her weight around while he moved forward, she branched out her hips as much as she could, fully extending the muscles.

It had to be enough so that he could thrust forward. He could wait no longer to take possession of the beauty.

He needed that perfect spot and discovered his destination as his tip slipped into her. A fraction of an inch inside her but it was enough to start this dance between them.

The oldest dance of time.

Both of them sucked in breaths at the contact. His entire body sizzled with the want and need coursing along his veins. He gritted his teeth, trying to find his brain, which had been turned to mush. Needed some rational thoughts to come to the surface so that he could prolong this moment. He had to take this slower or he'd never last for her.

Slowly, he worked himself in a few inches at a time. Every time he'd gain ground, he'd move back before grinding against her again.

Each movement forward took him deeper into her depths by degrees. Each motion took him closer to the edge.

So close to spilling but he wouldn't allow himself to lose now. No, he'd make this last as long as he could. Give her as much satisfaction as he could endure before he found

his own.

He wanted to plunge in, seat himself fully. Wanted to come inside her molten heat. Beads of sweat popped up on his face, cooling his cheeks. Yet his inner fire would never be cooled. He roasted in the flames of his desire, even as he tried to take his time.

She rocked, trying to take more of him, which he obliged her with. Her breath hissed through clenched teeth.

With a moan, he finally took himself the last of the way in with one swivel motion of his hips. He rested within her depths, stilling himself for a moment. His brow wrinkled as he stared at her, trying to decipher her facial movements.

Pleasure or pain? Or both?

He'd let her adjust to him before he'd move. Adjust to his possession of her. No matter how good she felt to him, he'd taken his time.

Her tightness surrounding him was heaven. He wanted to move within her. To thrust against her. But he held himself in check. Nothing had ever been harder than sitting above this woman and waiting for some sign that she was ready for more.

He needed her first time to be more than he'd ever given to a woman before.

She raised her hips up, eliciting a gasp from him. She threatened his hard won control. "What are you waiting for?"

"You to adjust. To me." Each word struggled to get out of his mouth. His thoughts came so jumbled, it was a wonder he could speak at all.

His body quaked with knowing he'd been the first to breach her. To take her to pleasure. Which was why he had to take his time. He'd not hurt her for his own desires. Only her next words took away any control he had.

"Fuck me."

He'd not heard her use such coarse language before. The words lit his blood like quicksilver, and he couldn't stop the answering of his hips to do what she wanted. Oh, he'd fuck her all right. He'd take her as many ways as he could and then some.

He thrust against her with rapid movements, as if he couldn't get close enough to her. Truth was he couldn't. His entire self could be lodged in her. It would never be close enough.

He wanted to sit inside her soul. Take her into his.

Never had sex filled him with so many longings that went beyond the physical. This woman was his and always would be.

Forever.

A squeak rolled from her lips as she climaxed again, sending him over his own precipice into the oblivion of pleasure.

When his orgasm hit, he went blind from the intensity of the act. He saw stars and moons twirling about his head as his seed poured forth. A roar of her name escaped from his lips along with a growl.

He plastered her with his limp body against the shuttle wall. Her quivering legs slowly slid down from him. He'd barely registered they'd been around him. Not much beyond being inside her had gotten his attention.

He rested like that for several seconds, eyes closed, jerking as an aftershock or two coursed through him.

Her hands pushed against his chest, and his eyes opened to look into her beautiful orbs. They windowed her soul, leaving her emotions bare before him.

The side of the shuttle couldn't be the most comfortable place for her to be, especially with wild body movements. He could see where an edge had dug into her side.

As his senses filed back into him, his eyes widened with the full picture of what had happened between them.

What in the hell had he done?

He'd taken his future wife, a virgin seeker morph, like an animal against a piece of cold metal. Even though he'd gone slow, this had not been the place or the time. Dammit, she deserved better than that. He might have been against this union, but he'd planned on treating her like a true princess. With respect. He hadn't planned to use her like some beast in heat. Hell, he'd treated whores better than this. "I... We ... shouldn't have done this."

She laughed, the sound ringing around the shuttle as she stretched out her back. "Yes, we should have done this." She moved against him, and his body groaned with protests. "In fact, we should do this again."

Despite his earlier frenzied climax, he felt himself grow hard. Never had he been ready again so quickly. Could this woman be a witch as some said all seeker morphs were?

"See? Even your ... cock agrees with me." Her mouth fanned into a huge smile. That mouth had joined with his. With delicious results.

He'd wager it was the first time she'd said the word "cock" from her look of pride. What a mix in a minx. Bravado and naivety in the same package. "I should have waited until we got back to my planet. My palace." He shook his head. What had been thinking? Or maybe the problem was he hadn't—at least not with the bigger of his two heads. They'd crash landed here and instead of figuring out a way to keep them safe, he'd fucked her.

"Circumstances being what they are, waiting wasn't an option." Her hand pressed along her breasts, enticing his gaze. He couldn't tear his vision away. "I was supposed to sleep until we arrived at your planet. But plans have changed. And I have needs."

Needs. That hit him in the gut like a sucker punch.

"Now that I'm awake, I'm in my cycle." She wiggled her hips closer to his. "I need to bond with you. I need to assuage this heat. I'm here now instead of later."

Had it not been for the betrayal of the Engosians, she would have slept until they'd reached his home and safety. Then, the bonding would have gone as scheduled.

Betrayal.

That's when he heard the sound.

Engines. Flyer engines.

He dashed to the shuttle's front window. Fighters flashed across the sky. In the direction of the burning space dock.

The Engosians would be investigating why it had blown up. When they realized one shuttle had exited right before the dock had exploded, they'd be after that shuttle for answers. This shuttle. He hadn't expected them to arrive to investigate so soon, but depending on their technology, it might not take them long to sift through all the ashes. They'd probably use DNA scans and figure out he wasn't there.

Which meant they'd come looking to catch him if they had been in on the treachery. He couldn't chance that they hadn't been in on the scenario. Couldn't trust anyone but people from his own planet.

Their means of transport off this rock, the little shuttle, was dead. It was too damaged for him to fix with limited tool kits and hours.

They needed to get into the forest and take cover before the flyers trailed the shuttle to here. Blackguard wasn't sure how much time they had. They could have a lot or none at all. Either way they needed to get moving.

"Shit." He grabbed for his pants, wrestling with them to get them up. "We need to get out of here."

"But, Blackguard..." She approached him with a slinky little walk that engorged his cock once more. "What about..."

"Your cycle means nothing if we're dead." He grabbed her arm and pushed her to get her going. "Wear my shirt. We need to go." Not that the garment would cover her enough for him not to react with lust. He'd have to be dead not to respond to her. But he had to do something to keep his libido in check.

Her heady scent drifted to him, filling his nostrils. They flared. He couldn't escape or mask her scent like he might her body. Her scent was as intoxicating as the rest of her, and he couldn't get far enough away to avoid smelling her.

Did her musk have something in it that called to him? He should have paid more attention to Moses' babbling on seeker morphs. Maybe Moses had known something that he hadn't. The man usually did. Much as he hated to admit it, Moses was usually right.

Moses.

He swallowed. He'd never thought the old man would die. Not ever. He'd known the man since he was a boy. He'd thought the codger would live forever.

He strapped weapons and a lone canteen of water on his body. Had to protect them, so they wouldn't meet the same fate as his men. Maybe if he could hold out long enough, the other ship would come looking for them.

His head came up. There was a communications array about one hundred clicks from there. Moses had mentioned the box. Maybe they could send out a distress signal from there to his ship.

It was the best plan he had, so they'd go with that.

He turned to face his companion.

Annalisse had pulled on the shirt. It swallowed her. He was bigger than her, so he'd thought the too big shirt would hide most of her lovely shape and curves. Hardly. If anything, the clothing called more attention to the beauty underneath its cloth. But it was all he had to work with.

His cock engorged to the point of pain.

His gaze dropped to her feet. No shoes. The terrain might be rough. But his shoes would not stay on those tiny feet and would trip her up.

Morphs didn't wear shoes. He didn't know why, but she'd have to be okay in bare feet. He had nothing for her.

Her gaze went to him, and she licked her lips.

The motion made his cock jump and a shudder landed all the way at his toes. He groaned as he hit the button to open up the shuttle, his cock heavy under the too snug pants. Yes, he'd have to be dead not to react to her.

"Come on, we've got to go." He grabbed her again and pushed her down the opening plank.

Brimstone from the fire hung heavy in the air with its acrid scent even this far away

from the docks.

Her nose wrinkled.

He led her toward the forest, making her struggle to keep up with his long strides. He kept careful watch to make sure she stayed close.

When they entered the tree canopy, he looked back. His last view of the docks was an orange glow.

How much time did they have?

The whine of an engine powering up came through the trees. It haunted his ears and seemed to echo through the waving leaves. He pushed her into a run for the complete surrounding canopy of the forest.

Apparently, not much.

## Chapter Four

Annalisse's whole body hummed as she picked her way through the forest floor. Her feet had been hardened by years of barefoot time, but the small sticks still pricked her as she couldn't take her time and avoid them.

Not while being yanked along by the large man in front of her. He kept picking up the pace.

He'd been inside her pulsing out his seed only a few moments ago. A shiver raced down her spine, but he relentlessly tugged her forward so she couldn't give into cravings.

Her skin itched. Her body burned. Her pussy tightened, letting her know it wanted more than he'd given her. Or at least, the same as he'd given her before. Hell, she'd take his hand touching her. His mouth on her. Anything to release this pressure inside of her that was building up.

His broad back moved its muscles as he led her through the forest.

Trees blew in a slight breeze overhead and birds called back and forth. The scent of smoke still caught her nose from time to time.

His back tapered to a trim waist and a butt encased in tight brown pants. With his legs strutting forward, she became enamored of watching the muscles move under the cloth. The way they scissored back and forth intrigued her.

She felt the skin between her thighs slicken with more of her own excitement. If she didn't find release soon, she'd go crazy. But she couldn't help staring at him. He captivated her gaze.

He stopped, peering around a tree trunk. He motioned to her to be quiet.

She held her breath. He'd not explained to her all that had happened yet. He acted like they were in danger. But from what? Or whom?

He lowered his head, listening. Looking predatory with shining eyes. His face tightened in concentration.

Like a tiger stalking its prey. Yummy.

Her throat moved up and down in a swallow. She couldn't keep her mind on much besides sex for long. Her entire body was still jazzed from the endorphins left over from her orgasm and from the heat, which compelled her to want to mate. With him.

Though what they'd done hadn't been painful, she'd been stretched in directions she never had before. She ached for him again, though slight twinges of soreness slid into her consciousness. Her body would ignore them. Would try and mate again. Soon. Despite any circumstances.

She shouldn't have been awakened without the conditions being right for her heat to assuage itself. This burning inside her threatened to consume her. She'd be fried in her own juices if she didn't release soon.

A blue animal on four hooves with horns walked by.

He tugged on her hand again. "Come on." The touch inflamed her. His skin made hers prickled in that slight contact.

She resisted. "What was that?" She looked at the animal switching its tail as it crashed through some undergrowth.

"It doesn't matter. We need to leave."

Somehow knowing what the animal had been became important to her. "What walked by us?" She refused to go forward until he answered her. She deserved to know. He shouldn't be putting her off like this. Somehow challenging him had become a part of her. Was it from her or from his psyche? She didn't know.

He turned to face her with a distinctly unhappy look but he answered the question. "A Engosian deer." His brows furrowed.

She stared up at him, resistance fading now that he'd answered her. Angular face. Square jaw. Expressive eyes. Her hand reached out to caress along his cheek bones. She could feel stubble down around his chin.

He drew his head back, trying to escape her touch. "Don't have time for that." He backed up a step.

"Why?" Her blood rushed through her parts, enlivening them yet again. The shirt billowed around her waist. The cloth annoyed her, tickling her nipples and slapping against her stomach.

His gaze drew down and then up to her cleavage. A tell tale bulge grew in the front of his tight pants. He groaned. Then, he grabbed her shoulders with tight hands. He said in an even tighter voice, "What is it with you?"

She strained against his rough hold, trying to rub her body against his. Needed to be close to him and have that connection. Needed him to take her again. Needed to come. "What do you mean?"

He dropped his hands from her body and moved away. His throat worked around his Adam's apple. "You're a seeker morph."

"We established that a while ago." She didn't want to talk, but he did have some answers she wanted. That only he could give her. She attempted to get control of the desire surrounding her core. Would avoid contact with him to keep her mind clearer from rising lust. "Didn't we?"

He gritted his teeth together as though annoyed. His gaze had drifted down again to her body. He winced and adjusted himself under his pants. "Yes. Your scent. Every time, I smell you ... you, it sets me off. Makes me crazy."

"You mean my musk?" She pushed down the shirt. She could smell it, too, over the spices, which had been applied before she'd left Morpho, the smoke and dirt. It was the scent of her desire. For the man standing in front of her.

Yes, he'd brought on this cycle. Her instincts had recognized him and let the burning begin, condemning her to misery because of the timing.

He nodded as though he couldn't say more right now. A tic started in his jaw.

"It's been told to me that seeker morphs have ... something in their ... musk that could drive a man or woman to distraction once they come into their cycle. Into heat." She moved closer to him, but he didn't back away this time. A point for him because so many had done so already. The other morphs had worried about her effect on them, even when she'd not had her heat. "I never knew if it was true." Her body kindled more musk as her arousal grew being so close to him. "Until now."

His nostrils flared with growing intensity.

"I guess it is true." She couldn't control a smile breaking free from her lips. Such a powerful man. He could break her apart with hands. Yet, she had power over him. Such a heady thing. He liked to be in control. His loss of that to her would bother him on many levels. Yet in a way, he liked the fight to keep control. He wouldn't want a woman who



would acquiesce to him without a fight.

She was already becoming his greatest desire. Becoming the woman he wanted. Becoming his.

"Dammit." He ran a hand through his hair. "I need to be focused. Not on you. On getting us out of here. But I can't stop myself."

A twig snapped. The blue deer had returned and surveyed them with baleful, curious eyes.

"Can you stop ... leaking? Stop yourself from putting out ... musk?"

She chuckled, moving closer to him again. He still didn't back away from her. "Can you stop your erections?"

"Point taken." He grumbled something under his breath. "This is going to be harder than I thought."

"Oh, it is." Her hands reached for his cock, but he grabbed them before she reached her destination. "Much harder."

"Stop that." He spoke through gritted teeth. Seemed to be a permanent manner of speaking for him.

"But I don't want to." She wanted a roll in the leaves. With the biggest man around. Him. She'd never realized how much longing came with a cycle. How it would overtake any rational thoughts. How it would control everything she felt or experience. How it would control her and lead her to him all the time.

"We. Have. To. Run."

"Why?" She pulled her hands away with difficulty. They shook, trying to reach back for him, longing to touch him. But she couldn't think with her hands so near to him. She pushed them behind her back. She needed some answers, even as the heat told her she didn't. "Why was I awakened before arriving at the palace? I thought..."

His face grew lines of tension. Whatever had happened, it hadn't been pretty. "That was the plan. For you to awaken at my palace. In my bedroom."

Where they would have bonded without interruption.

"What happened?" She stepped away to give them both time to think and talk. It wasn't the hardest thing she'd ever done.

"They ambushed us."

"Who?"

"Engosians." He grasped his weapon tightly with clenched fingers, as though he needed to be ready for a fight. Whatever had happened had angered him. "Tangara, the intermediary, was in on it. I'm not sure who else. He... There were many men with weapons. More than my men had. Moses put me in a shuttle." He straightened his body as though an idea had hit him. Tangara's shuttle for escape. I must have taken his shuttle. He planned to take you." His voice rose even as he began to pace. "This was all over you. That's why he ambushed me and my men."

She ignored a slight blame tossed her way. His emotions were raw. She could sense them. Almost taste them. "Where are your men now?"

He'd been alone since she'd met him. If he had men, they would help them fight against his enemies. Maybe even free him up so he could help her with her heat. These burning fires within her had to be quenched. Or they'd drive her mad. Even now, as far away from him as she dared, trying to control her thoughts, she wanted to be with him. Against a tree, on the ground, in a tree, she didn't care. Sex wouldn't leave her alone for

long. Her pussy felt like a stocked fire.

His gaze flew to hers. Sadness and anger enveloped him and blasted to her as if on rockets. How could she tell what he was feeling? Was that part of the bonding process? His eyes grew storms the size of hurricanes. "Dead." He moved away to a tree.

The fire at the building. He'd gotten out but his men hadn't. Had they told him to leave? It sounded as if he'd been made to leave against his will. Was he to bring them help? Only the dock had burst into flames before he could go back for them. They would have given their lives for their future king. Only he didn't seem to be one to cut and run so someone had forced him. Moses. He hadn't liked leaving them behind. Guilt had taken him over now that they had perished.

His body tensed as he grasped the tree like a lifeline.

She moved to his side, wanting to do something for him, but unsure of what. Placing her arms around his stomach, she laid her head in the center of his large back. She didn't say any words and neither did he. He didn't turn to face her but didn't pull away either.

They stayed like that for a few seconds.

Odd how turned on she felt, but right now, she offered him comfort from her body without it being sexual. He took what she offered without question.

Somehow, that put out some of the burning within her. Contentment ceased her within its grasp. She could think without lust intruding on every thought. So odd to want his touch so much, yet in this case, the contact calmed her more than she'd expected from something so short of sex.

She'd gone to help him, but instead, he'd helped her.

If only she could ease the pain within him as he'd eased her. If only she could quiet his anger.

A motor sounded in the distance.

He stilled and broke her hold. "We need to get out of here."

"The Engosians."

"Probably." He nodded. "I don't know whose side they're on. I don't know if Tangara was acting alone or with others. I can't trust them." He moved forward again before stopping. "My people depend on me."

For the first time, she realized what a big role she'd stepped into. She'd never had anyone depending on her. He had a whole planet. That had to be difficult to handle. She'd have to find ways to assist him. Be the princess he deserved.

He sniffed the air. "Dammit. Your scent again..." He shook his head violently as if to clear his mind. A growl escaped from his lips.

Power was sexy. He'd exuded it in spades from the beginning. His thoughts of his people along with her realization of the extent of his power had caused her to exude more of her arousal. "I can't help my scent."

"Well, stop getting aroused then." An unreasonable request to ask of her. Which he had to know.

But he had to feel like he was doing something. Controlling something even if he couldn't.

Her understanding of him filled her with astonishment. She'd never known someone, as well as she did him, and she'd only just met him.

She had to understand him. Completely. Or she'd never become what he wanted. Each piece of the puzzle of Blackguard would help her become the woman she was to be.

At first, she'd feared her metamorphosis. Now, she embraced the changes bubbling within her. She wasn't losing who she was, only taking herself to the next level. Blackguard was the catalyst.

She chuckled at his attempt to find control. "I can't help that either." Any more than he could help the bulge in his pants, which had never settled down from earlier. "You stop, then we'll talk."

"Dammit" He cursed again, moving away from her. "I need to find the communications array before they find us." He grabbed her hand and tugged on her. "Come on."

He took off at a frenzied pace that had her struggling to keep up. She didn't have to be able to mind read to know he figured if he kept them moving, she couldn't stay aroused. Therefore, she wouldn't broadcast her scent. Hardly. The fire in her blood wouldn't cool for several days.

He was both the catalyst and the kindling for the fever racing across her. No matter what he did, she'd desire him. Pump out that desire in her juices.

What a strong, smart man to attempt to resist her allure in the face of danger. He fought to keep himself safe, so he could return to his people because he meant something to them in the grand scheme.

Which made him that much more desirable to her.

What a paradox.

\* \* \* \*

Blackguard stopped to catch his breath. Only in with that breath came the sweetest temptation known in all the seven galaxies.

Her musk.

God, if only he could get away from her scent for five fucking minutes. Then he could think clearly, without lust inciting every pore to toss her on the ground and make mad love to her until she couldn't stand up.

His.

His mind kept centering on that fact and little else. From the moment she'd first popped from that pod and he'd first laid eyes on her, something deep inside had told she was his. Was that how his father had reacted to his mother? Or was it because she was a seeker morph? He didn't know and wasn't sure if he cared.

Yet, she'd been the cause of all the current problems.

Tangara had planned to abscond with her in that shuttle. Planned to take her away and fuck her for his. Good thing he'd been killed.

But perhaps the alliance wasn't dead. Had Tangara been acting of his own accord or with other Engosian's or Morpho's support? Unknown at the present.

The real question Blackguard had to ask himself was had Annalisse been in on any of this?

He blew out a breath. His gut said "No" but he couldn't be sure of that answer. He didn't know this woman or when she'd been put into stasis. His mind was confounded with lust and that was confusing any answers he might come up with.

He should have paid more attention to discussions on seeker morphs with Moses. And discussions of Morpho beyond the alliance.

Her voice came from behind him. "How much further?" Her breathing slowed down

from the rasping of earlier.

He'd pushed her hard and fast since he'd met her, between their tryst in the shuttle and having to run through the woods.

"I don't know." He could go in the general direction of the communications array, but he didn't know the specifics of its location. He could spot the tops of the towers periodically over the trees, so that was a good sign they headed in the right direction. He took a quick sip from the canteen. They had to conserve their small supply of water.

So far anyone who pursued them hadn't been heard since the beginning of their run or been spotted. The tree tops rose to the sky as birds and mammals skittered overhead, chattering at the interlopers. They'd never be able to sneak up on anything with all the wildlife.

"Come on." He turned to offer her a sip from the canteen, so they could get going again. He tried to ignore her lustful smell that drove him to distraction.

She rubbed at her feet. Her small, delicate feet. They were beautifully arched, if a bit dirty. Small toes. Slim ankles that led up to curved calves. Further above rested the source of his distraction. Her pussy. All its delights. The scent of her musk emanated from there. Driving him nuts.

She straightened as he pulled his gaze back to her face, her earthy gaze seeking him out. Her plush mouth parted as she stared at him. Her hand came up to close but not before he saw something.

Her hand had a smear of blood.

## Chapter Five

"Are you hurt?" Putting the canteen back on his belt, he approached her closer than he'd been since their last chat. It was as close as he dared. He didn't want to lose himself again. In her scent. In her. It would be too easy.

Her fingers clenched. "It's nothing."

"Show me."

"I told you, it's nothing." Her mouth closed to purse up. "Let's go." She took two steps before he caught her arm. Her skin felt so warm and silky under his finger tips. Like dipping his fingers into warmed wax.

"Let me see." Weren't seeker morphs supposed to be submissive? This one was anything but. He'd expected some mousy little woman who would bend to his every will and whim. Not this one who argued about most things.

Only that was what he wanted in a woman, hadn't he? He'd thought about a woman who would challenge him. Seeker morphs became whatever their man wanted.

Damn.

"I told you, I'm fine." She glared up at him, eyes snapping fire. "Move out. We need to keep going. Like you said."

"Not until you show me where you're bleeding." He planted his feet so she couldn't move him, even if she tried.

She stood for a second, before lowering her hand. "Fine." She lifted her foot to show him. She'd stepped on something, which had torn the skin. Not a huge wound but it had to have hurt.

Yet she'd not shown one ounce of pain nor had she stopped when it had happened. Instead, she'd kept going, only checking her foot when they'd stopped for a moment to catch their breath.

He carefully inspected the cut, kneeling to take her foot in both hands and letting her lean against him, so she wouldn't fall.

"It's nothing." She didn't move back from him. Instead, she let out a soft sigh at his touch. Her eyes closed briefly before opening again.

His hands moved up to caress her heel. He should be letting her go. He'd done what he'd intended, checked her wound. It was small and would heal. Only his hands wouldn't seem to fall away from her. "I think you'll be fine."

"I already told you I would be." A note of pissed off irritation entered her voice as it raised.

He quirked a brow at her, making her head duck again, before he pulled out a rag from his pants pocket, put a taste of water on it from the canteen on his belt, and cleaned the wound as best as he could. It had been struggle to do that action and stop touching her with his fingers.

She flinched at the first contact of the rag but slowly relaxed.

He cleaned her foot, stroking up the fine arches of her heel. "There you go." His voice had thickened beyond even his recognition. Her skin was softer than anything he'd ever encountered. Smooth. He had a lot of soft things, but never anything like this. Not to mention, her skin heated him, wherever he touched. "Better?"

"Oh, yes."

He looked up her body as his hands caressed her calf. Bad move on his part. He should have kept his eyes down. The sight that greeted him was spectacular.

She'd parted her legs. The shirt had slipped open and displayed her lovely pussy for his view. It glistened, shining pink and fresh. The apex between her thighs invited his stare and more. It was the place otherwise known as paradise. He'd been there once, but hadn't gotten a true taste of her.

What would she taste like? Ambrosia? Honey? Cream? He'd wager she tasted of heaven above. Her aroma hinted at the sweet, succulent delicacy she'd be under his mouth.

Even from his position, he could see her sex spread open. Pink. His gaze shifted to her face. Which had softened into a look of pleasure.

He moved his gaze back down. Damn him but he couldn't help but look at her. Couldn't not seek out the delights she offered.

She opened her thighs wider. Spread apart her pussy for him to see. See her every fold.

Her scent beckoned him. Motivated him. Made him want her. Made him crazy with the need to slurp her essence.

Why shouldn't he?

She was his for the taking. Meant to be his and his alone. That was why she'd been brought here. Why he'd come to pick her up. She was more than he'd ever dreamed. Her body was beyond his wildest imagination. Her emerging personality was everything he'd ever wanted in a woman. Why shouldn't he give into her charms?

Every sense told him that she was his. Even as he tried to argue with himself, she'd lodged in his soul.

Why shouldn't he take a taste of her?

No one pursued them yet. With each passing moment, no one appeared behind them, their need to hurry abated. The communications array couldn't be too far away, though he couldn't be sure of that.

What did it matter to hurry right now?

He had no one in imminent danger to save.

God, her scent permeated all his senses. His body took flame, burning with an all consuming need for her.

No wonder a war had been fought over the last seeker morph. He'd kill anyone who challenged him for her at this moment. Good thing he was the only man around. She was the only woman.

It wasn't only her scent that spoke to him, telling him to claim her. Not only her body that cried out for his touch.

The woman inside her called to him. So much about her attracted him. So much about her appealed to him.

He wanted to answer her call.

Now.

Not later. Wanted to take her up on every offer she could possibly give him. But for now, a taste would have to do.

He moved his hand up to place his hands on her bottom, yanking her closer to him. Putting her pussy at his eye level.

She stumbled but caught herself before she fell on him.

He helped to stabilize her and get her feet situated in the closest position before he went further.

She shook her head and hair flew in a cascade around her. A smile carved across her lips. She wanted this as much as he did. Such a willing woman.

He grabbed one leg and eased it over his shoulder to spread her wider and give her purchase, so she wouldn't fall.

She spread herself as wide as she could in that position as if knowing his intentions. A shudder rocked her. She did know what he intended her to do.

Such a bounty lay before him. He'd never seen something begging so much for his attention as her pussy. He could see the shine to her folds. The arousal making her wet. Never had anything made him want to be everywhere at once more than her body.

He laved up her slit with his tongue.

Her breath choked before a groan broke forth.

That was the beginning of her pleasure. He'd see her screaming before he was done with her. Hell, he'd never be done with her.

He smiled before diving back in.

\* \* \* \*

Annalisse couldn't move. Couldn't think. At least not coherent thoughts. Didn't want to be coherent anyway.

Not with his tongue raging up and down her sex.

She wanted to give herself over to the pleasure being caused by Blackguard. Wanted to give herself over to him. And she would.

Up he went again, landing his tongue on her bud, which was the source of so much pleasure. She thought she'd come right there, so powerful were the vibrations rocking across her skin. Her legs shimmied but she managed to stay on them and not fall down.

Only he didn't press hard enough or stay long enough before dragging his tongue back down her slit to cause her to plummet over the edge.

He teased her while he tasted her.

He wouldn't give her enough to take her over the edge. Wouldn't let her reach the apex of her pleasure. When she got close, he'd back off. He knew how far to push her before he pulled away. No one knew her body this well. Not even her.

Her leg flung over his shoulder quivered.

She couldn't take much more of this torture. Even as she loved every minute of his mouth on her. On her sex.

Her swollen folds gave everything up to the tongue caressing them as he worked his way down.

His tongue probed into her channel, diving deep. Piercing her open. Launching inside like a rocket.

A shudder racked her body. He filled her but not as deeply as she wanted to be filled. He held back from her, trying to prolong the moment. This making her wait was making her crazy. Longing swamped through her veins.

The man knew how to expertly use his tongue. For more than speaking. Not that he talked that much. But put him on her sex, and he made up for it with so many motions to drive her insane.

He licked up again to her nub.

Her hips flinched as her breath came out in a metered gasp. Silently, she begged him to finish this. A wretched sob broke from her lips.

Quickly, he rapidly flicked the flesh back and forth with the tip of his tongue. All her attention flung down to the mouth on the most sensitive part of her body.

Her back arched. Too good ... too good ... too good... "Yessss." The orgasm rested out of reach. If she could careen up and snag it, she would find her bliss.

As her body reached up with a hum and the beginning of something wonderful, he abandoned her nub to move back down again.

Leaving her with a frustrated moan sounding deep in her throat. A few more seconds. That was all she'd needed. She wanted to yank his mouth back up to where she wanted him. Where she needed him. She'd use his hair as a rope if he didn't hurry up. He had to give her what she needed.

Only he wouldn't let her come. He wrung enough pleasure from each pass of his mouth to incite her but not take to heaven. He'd take her to edge and back away from it every time.

Instinctively, he seemed to know more about her than she did herself. If there were any doubts this was the man she was supposed to bond with, his actions took them away. How could someone she'd recently met tease her with such expert care? How could he know how far to take her and then pull her back from the edge? How could he know so much to prolong this moment from happening? To push her to the edge of her control.

He knew her too well. Knew what she liked. What drove her wild. What would take her to climax.

He knew enough to take control of the building fires inside her and make the act his. He was in control of her entire being right now. She'd do whatever he asked. He dominated her with his entire being.

Considering how crazy the scent from her sexual heat made him want her, how sexually charged the heat made her for him, that he could wrest control from her over her own climax was downright scary. She was going to lose herself to this man. Maybe not the way she'd feared but in a different sense.

That made her want him all the more.

"Blackguard..." His name fell from her dry lips in a whisper that turned into a whimper at the end.

"What?"

Another pass of his tongue went up to her nub. He paused with his tip stroking her in fast passes.

She held her breath. Maybe he'd give her what she wanted. Maybe he'd realize how crazy he'd made her. Maybe he'd let her come without her having to ask. A foolish notion that was shown to be false by him pulling back.

"What?"

Yes, he knew everything he did to her. He had to. He did things deliberately to keep her off balance. To keep her anticipating. What would make him deliver her to edge of her pleasure and over.

"Please." She rasped her words this time. Her body trembled. Her breath wouldn't exit her lungs, instead bubbling up and overflowing by necessity not because she could.

"Please what?" His voice rumbled near her center. He sounded so innocent as if he



weren't doing what he was doing to her. As if they were out for a stroll in the woods instead of her straddling him while he covered her pussy with his mouth.

She looked down at him.

His brown eyes shone in the light with a mischievous flair. His mouth looked wet from the drippings of her arousal. His tongue came crept out to lick at his lips and take some of the wetness inside.

To lick away her essence. To taste her most intimate fluids.

Her head swiveled almost as if she'd swoon. She'd never suspected desire could be so strong, so all consuming. Or maybe it was only that with this man. A man whose presence affected her so strongly, it had kicked her into her cycle. A man who'd tended her hurt foot so lovingly. A man who grieved for the loss of his men. A talented pilot. A man who knew his own power but didn't abuse it. There was a lot to this man besides the obvious.

His eyes narrowed and fired small sparks in the irises. "Please what?" He almost snapped the words. Now he was impatient? After bringing her so close so many times and then backing off?

"You know what." She panted, trying to catch her breath. An impossible task. She couldn't seem to keep up with the air needs of her body. Her hands clenched into fists by her sides.

"Say it."

Why would he make her ask for what she wanted? He'd make her beg. Why? Because he could. She'd cave eventually. Her body screamed at her to do anything to take herself over the edge. So why fight it? "Blackguard ... please."

"Say. It."

Two options loomed in front of her. Challenge him. Lose the impending climax. He wouldn't give it to her, unless she did what he wanted. If she questioned, he'd not take her where she wanted to go. The other option was that she could acquiesce without question, which was not her developing nature.

Only there was no real debate on what she would do even as she rolled the choices around in her mind. He left her no choice. She needed that orgasm like breathing. If that meant submission right now...

"Make me come."

His lips twirled up into the sweetest smile. A smile that melted already gooey insides. "As you wish." Out his tongue strolled to center on her nub. To poke and prod her center of arousal. To suckle it into his mouth with strong lips. To press it back and forth and back and forth.

Her whole body locked into a giant spasm as she rode the climax from beginning to end. A cry tore free from her lip in a sound that sent birds flying away. It might have brought down trees for all she knew. For all she cared. All she could focus on was the planet shaking orgasm that would have brought her to her knees if he hadn't helped her stay upright. All she could feel was the place between her thighs as her world boiled down to that one part.

Weak and trembling as the orgasm crashed her over the finish line, she hung onto him, her anchor. Her lifeline. He was the most stable thing in her world. How much had she come to depend on this man already?

A shiver rocked her. Barely into the cycle, and the changes in her had already begun.

How far would they take her?

He moved from his knees to straighten up, even as he still supported her weight. Such a strong man. He pulled her against his hard body.

Her sensitized skin pulsed with electricity from the contact.

A different shudder raced across her than before. She'd had an orgasm, why the spasm of desire? She shouldn't want anymore. Need anymore. She should be sated. Yet, she did want more. Need more. Almost as if she'd never be whole without him. As if she'd never be complete without the man in front of her.

As it should be. She was bonding to him already.

He blew out a breath over her head, tickling her hair. His hand tightened on her back as though something changed for him, too.

He'd been into bringing her pleasure to her as much as she'd enjoyed him kissing her pussy. Only now, he needed to be sated.

She'd have fun taking him all the way. Teasing him as he'd teased her. Her hand pressed on his chest.

Suddenly, he stiffened, cocking his head to the side as if listening. His face took on a serious cast.

"Wha..." She looked in the same direction he did. Nothing could intrude upon them now. Not when she had plans for him. She almost stomped her foot in frustration. Heat spread back over her body. She'd get relief but it never lasted long. She needed to spend days in bed with him, not run around this planet.

"Shh." He froze, still holding her close but definitely on alert. What had he heard that made him get so serious?

She didn't ask again but listened herself. Her body still pulsed with the desire to finish what they'd started. Nothing seemed more important than landing him in her body. The heat was already starting to build again. A shiver rocked her, but not from cold.

Softly, from far away, she heard what he had.

Motors.

"Damn." He moved away from her and took off, making sure she followed close behind him by holding onto her hand. He kept them linked, making goose pimples rise on her sensitized skin. The pace went even faster than before. She had trouble keeping up with his long legs, but he never released her.

The noise sounded like ground speeders, the only motorized vehicle that could navigate the thick forest floor. They would navigate it faster in ground speeders than she and Blackguard could on foot.

Maybe they now had pursuers, who could catch up to them quickly. So much for finishing what they'd begun.

## Chapter Six

Stupid. Stupid. Stupid. Each pound of Blackguard's foot into the earth rattled with the pounding in his brain. What had he been thinking? Problem was, he hadn't been thinking. Hadn't since the first moment she'd popped out the damn pod.

He never should have tongue-fucked her. They'd lost countless minutes they could have been further ahead than they now were.

Though he still didn't know yet that anyone pursued them. Hell, he didn't even know if the people who might be looking for them were friend or foe.

He couldn't take the chance to find out either. He had to reach the array to put out a call to his ship. Had to stay ahead of those who might be after them. Once he was back on his planet, he could sort out whether Tangara had acted alone.

He licked his lips.

He still tasted her cream. The flavor lingered on his tongue, doing nothing to cease his arousal. Her essence had been the best tasting thing he'd ever had.

God, she was an addiction. Her scent. Her taste. The feel of her body against his. Even now, that the motor sounds still echoed, in the distance, he wanted to stop and fuck her. His body screamed at him for not going all the way earlier.

He wanted to toss her down in the underbrush and ease his body into her depths. Take her against a tree. The ground. In the air. Standing on his head. He didn't care as long as he got inside her.

She made him feel out of control, a most unpleasant thing. He didn't turn around, but he frowned. He'd never imagined this little woman he'd been sent to retrieve would turn him and his emotions upside down, sexual heat or not. He'd thought he could stow her away outside of him. Keep her at a distance. Instead, she kept making inroads inside of his psyche. Getting in his head. She'd not be easy to ignore.

He couldn't take her again. No matter how addictive her sexual heat was to him. No matter if she put her hands around his cock. Her mouth around his head before teaming down to his balls until he was ready...

He shook off those thoughts.

No more sex or sexual exploits until they'd made contact with his ship. If that didn't speed his legs to get moving to the array, nothing would.

He still needed to know if the Engosians had supported Tangara's treachery. There'd be no place for them to hide if they had.

"How close are they?" Her voice came from behind him, laced with a dose of fear. She'd kept a rapid pace with him, despite his longer legs and her foot injury, without one single complaint.

The urge to ease her emotions settled in his chest. With a knot. Why was she that important to him? He hadn't counted on this aspect of the bonding. But yet, the need to ease her fears took him over. "Not too close." The motors didn't seem to be getting any closer either, at least as far as he could tell. They hadn't seen any signs of Engosians either. If the motors had been close, they should have caught up to them by now. They had to be using ground speeders, which were much quicker than people on foot. Maybe they weren't even looking for him. He had no idea how far those who had arrived at the

space dock had gotten in their investigation. At any rate, he didn't want to be in the forest long enough to find out whether they looked for him or not. He surveyed the woman beside him again. "They aren't close at all."

"Good." She picked along the matted sticks and leaves without a noticeable limp, but he did detect a slight favoring to her cut foot. It was only detectable because he was looking for the action. Otherwise, he'd never had noticed.

He'd been watching her off and on to make sure her foot didn't bother her. Not that they had a choice about keeping moving, but he didn't want her needlessly suffering. "Is your foot okay?"

"It's fine." She bestowed upon him a magnificent smile, which showed all her teeth and lit up her face. "Thank you for checking on me."

His heart pounded. She was even more beautiful when she smiled. His cock grew even harder. None of that.

Her scent strengthened.

He groaned as her musk overwhelmed his senses. Her taste still rested on his tongue, making him even crazier for her. No.

Her smile softened into a smirk. "Sorry."

She knew what her arousal did to him. Dammit. Why couldn't he keep better control of himself? "When will your heat end?" May it be soon. Like in a minute. An hour. Hell, two hours would suit him. Then, maybe he could think clearly to get them out of this mess. Any other time, he might have welcomed the free for all sex, but right now, he had to concentrate on other things. The desire to take her, to write his name with his tongue all over her body didn't help.

"A few days." Her lips pursed from the smirk into an unreadable expression. Her eyes clouded over. Why? What had he said?

During the few days time of her heat, they were supposed to bond. Would she always affect him like this? He grabbed her hand to get them moving faster again. He didn't want to know. Nor did he want to see the pain in her eyes. He'd hurt her, and he didn't even know why. Another thing they didn't have time for. Emotions. "Come on." He took off with her in tow behind him.

\* \* \* \*

Annalisse kicked herself up and down from her dumb mind to her tiny toes. Why had she let what he'd said upset her? He'd wanted to know when the effect of her sexual heat would wear off. That was all he'd asked. A simple question. But somehow, it seemed as though he couldn't wait to get away from her. To distance himself from her and his loss of control around her.

What did you expect?

Sexual heat or not, they'd only known each other for hours. She couldn't expect him to feel more than lust for her.

What if he never did?

Her heart shuddered even as it pounded inside her chest. Her foot missed a step, but she caught herself.

He looked carefully at her, having felt her almost fall. He didn't stop but called, "You okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine." Even as her stomach wrenched as though it lay in a pretzel knot, she

was okay.

The bonding had begun. She'd felt it when he'd taken her for the first time. When he'd babied her hurt foot. When he'd slurped her with his tongue. Every time she'd bucked up to his statements, she'd felt the bond growing stronger inside her.

What if the bond only went one way? What if he never bonded to her? She had no one to ask how this seeker morph stuff played out. The last seeker morph had been eons before her time. The stories didn't sound like the scenario had played out well so no one wanted to talk about her.

Annalisse wanted him to care for her. If she admitted the truth freely to herself, she wanted him to love her. To feel the emotions she'd read about in morph tales of love and loss and have them returned by her mate. That was what she wanted from this. From him. He was the man she'd love for an eternity. She wanted that back from him.

They reached a clearing in the woods. The communications array rose up from a small stone building in the center of the cleared land.

They'd reached their destination.

It would also be a prime location to land a ship with its open spaces. Good place for a rescue.

What would happen to them once they got off the planet? It would be easy for him to stow her in a room by herself on the ship and ignore her. Even easier for him to take her back to his palace and entomb her inside a room with little to no contact with him. She bit her lip, raking her teeth over the skin. Way too easy for him to forget about her entirely once they got off this rock of a planet.

She couldn't let that happen.

He took a step, turned, then stopped in front of her so quickly, she almost ran into his back. He moved to the side to let her come up beside him as he scanned. Something had caught his interest.

"What's wrong?"

He didn't answer but started off again toward the array and shelter.

As she followed him, she looked around the array for anything that would have captured his attention.

About twenty yards from the shed, a thick spread of rocks started, instead of the grassy floor. Some type of gravel, it spread to the shed, encircling the array like a white circular cloud. Probably enhanced the communications effect in some manner.

They approached the pattern of stones.

He bent down to pick up a rock in his giant hand. Jagged, sharp edges flung with abandon about the stone surface. His mouth pursed in a frown as his gaze shifted down to her feet.

Her bare feet. So that's what was troubling him. The rocks would hinder her progress across the stones and might hurt more than the stick had done earlier. She ignored the furious pace of butterflies in her stomach over his concern. It was merely because she would now slow him down. That was all. So she told herself but she couldn't help wanting there to be something more.

She looked at the short distance to the building while cocking her head to the side. "I can make it." Her tough feet would take the punishment doled out by the rocks. Wouldn't be the first time she'd suffered pain. At least, this was for a good cause rather than a punishment doled out by the priestesses at the Caverns of Lucidity where she'd spent her

life until now.

She started to take a step onto the rocky part of the ground, but he grabbed her elbow, halting her. "You'll tear up your feet."

"They'll be fine." She waved a hand over top, as if she could make the stones disappear. As if. "All I have to do is get in the array, right?" While his active concern for her touched her in places she couldn't begin to name, the urge to be her own person welled up inside her. The urge to challenge him over this issue rang forth like a pealing bell. She needed him to know she was capable. So she ran with her gut feelings. She would do this herself.

He nodded, still looking troubled. "But you'll have to get out again when the ship comes."

"The ship can land nearby. I wouldn't have as far to go the second time." She started again, shaking off his tight hand. "I'll be fine."

Again, he pulled her to a stop. "No." His voice grew firmer, more commanding. His face pinched into a tight line while his eyes glowed his resistance to the idea. His back straightened. "You won't."

She lifted her head with a nod of open defiance. She snapped her spine into line, so she stood up to her full height. "I told you, I'll be fine." Her words came clipped, even to her ears. Why had this need surfaced to defy him like this? Had danger been right behind them, she would have let him have his way. But in the relative safety they seemed to have found, she needed to assert herself. Much like she had back on Morpho when the walls have been closing in around her. When she'd stood up the priestesses over her care and concern. Her throat closed up. Maybe what he wanted in a woman was line with the woman she was. Or maybe she could keep some part of her true self intact.

She swallowed evenly. Maybe her psyche didn't all belong to him. At least not yet. Another reason why she couldn't let him forget about her anytime soon or ever. If the bond didn't take before they reached his palace, it would leave her vulnerable. To someone who might overtake her and place his will on top of her own with a personality she didn't want.

He shook his head. "No." His eyes flashed with determination and anger. He didn't like her defiance.

Only he brought out in her what he wanted in a woman. So, this must be what he wanted, whether he remained conscious of it or not. He'd wanted a woman who'd stand on her own two feet when the situation called for standing. That was what he was getting.

"Blackguard..." She trailed off as he moved into her space. His big body heated hers with his nearness. Her mouth ran dry. She wanted to press her curves against him. Wanted to press her everything against him. Her heart came on a ground speeder racing fast. Her entire body shuddered. "B-B-B-B..." She stuttered, unable to make the word form, much less put it into speech.

He put his finger over her lips. A searing touch that closed off whatever, she might have gotten past her trembling lips. "I won't let you hurt yourself. Not when I can do something about it." The finger stroked along the seam of her lips. "Let me help you."

This was different. He might not have asked the question but the phrase was a question. He wanted her to acquiesce to him. She got the impression he wasn't used to asking. So this was a huge step for him, even if he hadn't technically asked. She nodded, still unable to form any words, but letting know she'd let him. He'd recognized her will

and ceded to that, but wanted to assist her. That was okay.

With that, he swung her up in arms and took off for the array.

Instead of resisting, she settled into his strong arms and relaxed. Enjoyed the feel of his body next to hers.

He grunted with her submission. Took a few more steps in the direction of the array. His nostrils flared as his gait slowed.

Her arousal had increased the instant he'd stepped into her space. The instant he'd begun to dominate her, she'd begin to moisten. He now could smell her essence. Scented the proof of how he affected her. It wasn't anything she could help.

His breathing increased, flaring out his nostrils even more. Of course, knowing that she affected him like this, made her arousal flow that much freer.

A few more steps in the array's direction, and he said hoarsely, "God, your scent." His chest puffed in and out against her.

Being in his arms would set her arousal going every time. Her face smoothed out. The power she had over this man. Before they left, she intended to use any means necessary to have him. "We're almost there." Of course once they reached inside, he'd put her down unless she could prevent that from happening.

He shook his head as if to clear it. "Yes, we are." That wonderful mouth of his drifted up into a half smile. One of victory? He'd be glad to get away from here.

From her?

She swallowed. That couldn't be the case, could it?

"What's your plan?" She placed her hand on the back of his head to stroke through the fine strands of his hair.

His head shifted to the side to give her access, even as he didn't break stride. "Call my ship. Get them here. Take off."

"How long will it take them to reach here?" Once they were onboard that ship, he could pry himself away from her. Her teeth clicked as she closed her mouth. She had to make one more mark on him. One more chance to take her sexual heat with him. To cement the bond further before she went around other men. Before she chanced losing him for good.

"Couple of minutes to a half an hour." He frowned. "Probably the latter. It will take them a while to find the coordinates, and they'll come carefully."

Not a lot of time, but it gave her time enough. It would have to.

\* \* \* \*

The woman in his arms shuddered against him again. This had been a mistake. Picking her up had brought their bodies into contact. Raked her skin across his. She still wore nothing under the long shirt. A fact which had been seared across his mind along with the views of her nakedness.

Carrying her like this also put her scent directly under his nose. To tantalize him. Drive him insane. By the time he reached the array, he'd be crazy with lust for her pooling up inside him. The need to be inside her drove him to distraction. How could he think with all the blood pooling inside of his thick cock?

She rested so close to him with her curves easily accessible. Not to mention viewable. Touchable. Tasteable.

Must. Call. Ship.

He reached the shed that housed the equipment for the array. How had he managed to do that without ripping her clothes off? Without sinking into her hot depths? He didn't know. But his body remained tense like he could go off any minute.

A holographic lock rested on the outside of the doors. It pulsed with a blue glow in a regular rhythm.

"I need to put you down. Can you stand?" He glanced down at her bared feet. Pretty toes winked at him.

"I can." Her voice sounded strong. Sure of herself. She met his gaze with sparkling eyes. An uplift of her chin.

He shifted her down to her feet, being careful not to drag her body across his. He didn't want to ignite the sparks in him any more than they'd already been. The tinder would catch fire without much prodding. He had to call the ship. Couldn't stop to do anything to the woman beside him. They were almost to safety. He'd not do anything to jeopardize them both again.

She winced but found her footing on the harsh rocks.

What bastards had placed them around the array? Though he saw what had been intended. The stones probably served two purposes. They help conduct the signals of the array. They helped to keep animals away from the sensitive equipment. Maybe barefooted women, too. With attitudes.

"It won't be long." He withdrew a communicator. It wasn't long-range, wouldn't reach beyond a few meters so it had been useless until now. But he could use it to break the code of the lock, which wasn't difficult to crack with the right knowledge.

"I'll be fine."

Her throaty voice stirred up the cinders of his desire, as did her scent sweeping across him with gusto. If only she were downwind.

He straightened his neck out, shaking his head. Must concentrate. He pressed several buttons on his comm and attached it to the lock. It clicked into place. Pressed a few more buttons to initiate the code sequence finder.

The square comm blinked red lights and whirled with a humming sound. The lock blinked in time with it and made whirring trill.

He watched the lights blink. Didn't want to glance at the woman beside him. Her body did too many things to him when he wasn't watching her. Looking at her would cause a meltdown in his libido.

The lock popped open. He left it on so that the door looked as though it were still locked. That way if anyone saw the shed, they'd not be able to tell from a distance that it had been breached.

He turned toward her to pick her up again and take her over the threshold. His arms itched to have her in them again. Must call ship.

She grinned up at him. "Nice work."

His chest couldn't help but puff out a little. No one complimented him. He did what had to be done. Even his father had expected things of him and hadn't considered complimenting him when he'd done them. Blackguard hadn't expected this from her or his reaction to her simple words. A surprise. Like her.

He shrugged, swinging her up into his arms again. She felt so right against him, like she'd been made to fit.

She wrapped her arms around his neck.



The contact of her touch inflamed him. Set him on fire. Nothing heated him as much as her touch.

What she could do with one slight touch couldn't be lawful. Her words to him still rung in his ears. Making him burn that much hotter from the small contact of their bodies.

He managed to get inside the shed and not pin her to the wall to take her. He dropped her to her feet. For a brief second, she pressed herself against him. Her curves intimately complimented his. He almost pulled her further into his embrace. His hands fisted at the struggle to keep himself separate.

But he managed to keep control even as she pulled away from him. Though her absence against him made him feel bereft. He shook his head to clear his thoughts.

"How are you going to get out a message?" She took two steps away, rubbing her hands up her arms. In the small stone building, the crisp air chilled his skin. Her nipples puckered, and he could see the steel points even through his shirt.

His body prickled in response. "I'll hack in." He took the communicator and hotwired it into the array. Within seconds, he'd transmitted a message into space. His ship would be monitoring the airwaves.

He only had a moment to wait before his ship came online with a rasp of the radio and whine of the controls.

"This is Pegasus, over and out."

"Bolero." The code name for a rescue.

"Ten four." The voice came over again. "Anticipated in forty."

Forty minutes? They must be further out than he'd previously thought. "They'll be here in forty minutes. We should lay low in here." They'd hear anyone coming because of the rocks. The building would keep them protected and also hide them until his ship could arrive and transport them.

"Okay." She sidled up closer to him. "Sounds good to me." Her body came within millimeters of his. Her heat blazed him. Her face took on a look of teasing. "Forty whole minutes. That's a long time."

He didn't move away. It wasn't long. Not nearly long enough. Not when he wanted to toss her against the wall and take her as many different ways as he knew. He didn't say anything. Once they got back to his ship, they'd have all the time...

Actually they wouldn't. When he got back to his ship, he'd be involved in finding out what he could about the betrayal. Smoothing over political factions. Punishing those who'd killed his men unless they'd already perished.

There would be no time for her until that was settled. He frowned. Didn't like having to wait for his pleasure with her. But duty came first.

She placed her hand on the left side of his chest. Didn't stroke, only laid it there. But even that contact affected him. Made his skin tingle. She was such a sorceress.

He sucked in a breath. How could she be so warm in a room that had such a chill? Maybe her sexual heat gave her warmth. But how did she make him burn when they were in a cool place? Fire licked at the roots of his desire. The root of his cock.

Her hand lightly pressed into his chest. "I feel your heart beating."

He swallowed. Still didn't respond. He could stop her from touching him. But why? The ship had been called. He'd been tortured during their whole run from the shuttle with the desire of her. Nothing indicated they'd been spotted or were in any danger at the moment. They had forty minutes before his ship would touch down.

Maybe there was a lot they could accomplish in forty minutes.

Her other hand crept down to his pants, lingering over his stomach and lower chest before she stroked his skin under the waistband of his pants.

She tilted her head to the side. "Your heart sped up."

"Your hand went close to my cock. Of course my heart rate sped up."

"What do you think my hand is going to do now?" Her voice sounded mischievous. He'd never heard her use that tone before, though she'd teased him in the short time they'd been together.

"Touch me."

"Is that what you think I'll do? Or what you want me to do?"

## Chapter Seven

Blackguard's cock rose on its own as if it would seek out the woman's hand.

Annalisse's hand continued to caress the skin under the waistband of his pants. The sensitive skin tingled.

His cock tightened even more. His breathing increased. Heart rate elevated. He could smell her, not only the musk but the scent of the woman. He still smelled the spices they'd covered her body with.

"Your heart sped up again." Her voice became full of wonder. As if she couldn't believe her effect on him. Like her touch wouldn't set him off. Unlikely. The woman could set off dead eunuch. "Is that a speculation to what I'm about to do? Or a command?"

He swallowed, a hard thing to do with his mouth so dry. "Speculation."

"Oh. I don't have to touch you then." Her hand withdrew from under his pants, leaving his skin tingling from the loss of contact.

Dammit. What way to tease him. His cock yearned for her hand. Wanted it so bad, he almost hurt. "You could touch me."

"But you said it was only speculation." Her eyes batted at him. Concealing a twinkle in the spring green irises. He'd never look at her and not think of the season where everything bloomed out on his planet. It was his favorite time of year. His planet bloomed in the color of her eyes. "You said that."

"Didn't mean you couldn't touch me."

"Oh." Her teeth raked over her lip. "Do you want me to touch you? Do you want my hands on you?" Her face turned serious.

She wanted him to want her. And want her, he did. He rushed in to make that clear. "Yes. Yes." He repeated the word, so there'd be no doubts in her mind as to what he wanted. Her.

"Good." Her hand went to his waistband again. Stroked the skin underneath with her fingertips. She moved her hand from his heart, stroking down his torso, and went down to the button on his pants.

His breath held as he waited for her to act.

One flick of her fingers, and she had him unbuttoned.

Her hand stroked the now exposed skin with careful consideration in a circular pattern. She played in his hair.

Only she wouldn't come close enough to where he wanted her hand. Wouldn't come close to where he needed her to touch him.

His cock.

She still teased him. Few in his life had not been serious with him. In fact, he couldn't call to mind anyone who'd ever teased him like this. People either gave into him or acted disappointed in his actions.

He didn't know how to deal with this woman.

Didn't she know what she did to him? How she played with fire by this game? His need for her escalated.

He'd teased her earlier. Played with her clit while he'd given her pleasure but not

enough to take her the edge. Now she was paying him back.

He let out an intense growl. Never had he imagined a woman who would do such things to him.

As if his noise acted as a signal, her hand slipped down into his pants to take his cock. Her hand cupped it before sliding up and down.

His head rocked back as he balanced himself. He had worked himself up into such a state, he almost came with her finger's first touch. But managed to keep himself together. Wouldn't spill his seed so quickly.

She pulled away her hand and put one hand on one side of his pants, and one on the other side. Slowly, she inched them down, waving his eager cock into her view.'

Her eyes lit up and that pulsed an electric thrill through him.

"Like?"

She nodded with a smile curving up her lips. "Your boots?"

He shook his head. "Not coming off." Despite the fact they didn't appear to be in any danger, he didn't want to risk his pants coming all the way off nor taking off his shoes. After all, his pockets held a bunch of weapons. It would take him seconds to pull them up and get to his stash, but if he took them off, that made it much harder to get to his phasers. If he wasn't wearing shoes, that took time to get ready to run. That might be time they didn't have.

One pretty shoulder shrugged, and then the other did the same. "Okay." She knew why he wouldn't strip but didn't comment other than that. She dropped down to her knees. Looked up at him with an even more kittenish grin. She placed one hand on one hip and the other on his other side.

He couldn't tear his gaze away from her warm mouth as she puckered and engulfed him with wet lips.

His entire body shuddered with the contact. It wouldn't take him forty minutes to spill his seed. At this rate, not even a minute would pass before he erupted into her sucking wet mouth. "Damn."

She didn't answer but sucked him more into her willingness. Her mouth began to move against him, suckling and pulling back against the suction.

Her tongue raked along the side of his cock.

He made a noise low in his throat. Wanted to close his eyes but wanted to watch her, too. Watching won.

After all she was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen. With her mouth on him, she was even ten times more so.

How could he not watch as she gave him more pleasure than he'd ever known?

Of all the women he'd been with over the years, not one had ever seen to his pleasure like this. Oh, they'd given him head. Good head. But not without being asked. Not without prodding. Not like this, where the whole thing had been her idea. They didn't have the gusto that she seemed to have.

Annalisse was an enigma.

One that he constantly saw having different sides. She could be a seductress, yet she had a naivety to her. She could be tough and challenged him at every opportunity. Yet she had vulnerabilities and a desire to submit. She could tease him with abandon even as she listened to his every word and offered him comfort for the bad times.

She could be the exploration of a lifetime for him. If he wanted.

He gave himself over to the pleasure as she sucked him deeper and tossed off serious thoughts. She moved that mouth up his length. Then, back down again.

His hips bucked, rolling around as she continued to suckle him.

His hands came down to grip her hair. Hold her into place. Not that she was going anywhere.

Not until she finished this.

She would and with a flair. He didn't have to read minds to know she'd take him over the edge.

Her silken strands wrapped around his fingers.

Her mouth sucked at him. Her tongue caressed his tip, driving into it before moving around to encircle him with quick movements.

He moaned, rocking his hips back and forth. Such sensations washed over him, it was like being in a pool of water and drowning. Only a waterfall perched at the edge of the pool. All he had to do was drift over the edge of it, and he'd fall to the depths of his climax. He shuddered, needing to come. Needing to explode. He'd never needed anything more.

Another suckle, and he found himself teetering on the edge. So close. His entire body tensed on the brink.

A play of her tongue and over the falls, he plummeted. His orgasm came fast and hard. His hands tangled into her hair as his hips thrust against her face, driving his cock deeper into her mouth as she took him as deeply as she could.

He spent himself into her mouth. She took all of him without pulling away. Without wincing.

Nothing compared to this woman. Not now. Nothing ever would compare to her. He'd never known bed play could be like this. That he could lose himself so effortlessly in someone else.

When the last aftershock had rocked him, he pulled out of her lovely mouth.

She smacked her lips together. She'd taken his seed and swallowed. She gazed up at him with proud eyes. Her lips gleamed wetly in the light.

Take her. His blood thundered through his veins, echoed in his ears. He wouldn't take that long to recover from his orgasm. He could soon spear her against the wall. Mark yet another claim on her body. As she'd marked her claim on him, with her mouth, a few seconds ago. He could make her his against that wall.

He swallowed. She had marked him in ways he didn't understand with this sexual play. He couldn't get fucking her out of his mind. Even as he looked down to see how much time they had.

She rocketed to her feet as she saw him looking at the time. "We'd better get you dressed."

"But..."

"We don't have time for more." Her hands touched his hips, causing his nerves to jumble up, so electrified were his endings. His skin had never been this jazzed. "You must get dressed. They'll be here for us shortly." A wad of pain rolled through her words. She didn't want to leave here. Didn't want to end this sexual tryst.

Why?

He didn't know. Maybe in time he'd be able to read her better and know all the intricacies of her thinking.

But she was right, they didn't have time for anything more. Not now. He was good but not that good with recovering his erection. The last thing he wanted was for the ship to come, and he was still lodged inside of her.

"Annalisse..." What could he say? He didn't know why she'd react this way to leaving here. They had to get out of here before they were caught. Before he found out first hand who the traitors were.

She reached down to help him yank on his pants, pulling them slowly back up his body. "It's all right." She ducked her head to concentrate on his button and zipper. "We must go to be ready for your ship."

He lowered his hands to rest on hers. Tightened his grip around them. "We do. Have to go." He could make promises. To be with her on the ship. But that wouldn't be fair. He knew what his limitations were. So he promised her nothing.

Her hands quaked under his. The trembling shook his hands even as she shook his hands from hers.

The zipper came up with a whirl sound.

"We'll be safe on my ship. I can find out who the traitors are there and deal with them if they need to be dealt with." After that was done, he could bond more intensively with this woman. His cock did reharden at that thought.

A motor sounded from nearby the array.

She cocked her head. "Hear that?"

He did. Speeders were nearby. How close were they?

They wouldn't be able to see them. The building had them well-covered. But, the ship would land, drawing their attention to it and consequently them.

"Dammit." It wouldn't be much of a rescue if his ship got shot down on the way to them. What the hell should he do now?

\* \* \* \*

Annalisse looked at the tight lines etching themselves onto Blackguard's face. Those fine lips curled up into a frown.

He ran a hand through his hair. He looked toward the door as if thinking about what to do. How to get them to his ship if the speeders were as close by as they had sounded. His eyes darted between the communication controls and the door.

Her knees ached from being on the floor. She took a step and winced. The stone had abraded her skin. It would take a few steps to work out the kinks.

Somehow he saw her expression, though he didn't appear to be watching her. "You're hurt? Your foot?" His eyebrows furrowed.

"No." His concern for her well-being continued to surprise her. No one had ever asked how she felt before. No one had been concerned enough to ask if something hurt her. Not even the brothers back on Morpho whose job it had been to look after her. They'd been the closest thing to friends that she'd had, and they hadn't come close to exhibiting behaviors like Blackguard did toward her.

He looked expectantly at her, waiting for his answer.

"No." She ducked her head to bite her lip. "My knees." Goddess, she'd enjoyed his cock in her mouth. Enjoyed tasting him. Taking control of his pleasure. She'd brought him to completion and held his seed in her mouth. A salty taste lingered on her tongue, reminding her of her actions. Reminding her of his loss of control. Of the cementing of

the bond between them even further.

His eyes powered up with passion. "We'll have to take care of those later. Coat them in liniment." He blew out a breath. "The ship will be here soon. To take us away."

Its landing would bring the attention of the nearby speeders to them. Could they make it to the ship in time?

"How much longer until it lands?"

"I don't know." He strode to the door and cracked it open, peering out. He tilted his head, scanning. "I don't see them, but I still hear the speeders."

"Should you warn your ship?" She moved forward, experimentally stretching out her legs to help her knees recover. "Tell them they what they might encounter."

"This close even speeders could pick up a comm signal." He continued to peer from the door. "I don't want to alert them to our position until I'm ready. The ship should be able to deal with the speeders roaming the woods." His mouth turned up in a frown.

"Why aren't they guarding this place? All things considered, this has been too easy."

He had a point. Why weren't they keeping watch on a communications array? This would seem a prime place for someone to come who was being pursued. Did they know Blackguard had been running?

Unless...

He turned to her with a speculative look. A look of a dawning idea spread across his face. "It's a setup. Dammit." He'd come to the same conclusion she had but had voiced it first.

What better way to flush out who you were pursuing than to let them think everything was going well and call in their backup? She nodded in agreement. "You might be right." They would try to shoot down his ship. Then, drop in for the kill of their prey. Her body chilled not from the coolness but from the thought of Blackguard dying. She couldn't allow that to happen. Wouldn't allow that to happen.

He paced the small shed. "Dammit, I've called the ship into a trap. I could warn them but either way our position will be blown. If I warn the ship, I don't have their firepower here yet." He ran a hand across his face. Stood there for several seconds being quiet. "But they don't know we know it's a setup." His voice took on a tone that said he was coming up with a plan. His gaze went skyward.

True. The people out there wouldn't know they knew about the trap. Those on the speeders were probably hoping to get lucky. "How does that help us, though?" Her thighs clenched unexpectedly. She twitched, trying to shoo away her arousal as he worked around a plan. She didn't need to distract him with her desires. Yet, she couldn't help responding to him, especially with him being clever. Anymore than she could help breathing.

"They won't be expecting me to attack back." He paced some more. "Or the ship to be aware enough to fight back." He pulled out his communicator. "I can signal the ship before it swoops down, that the planet is on to us. They'll wait until our position is confirmed." He typed on the small keypad. "I think that will give us the best chance of getting out of here." He looked up at her. "I need you to run as soon as the ship comes in. We'll only have a couple of seconds before the speeders come in to attack. They've been waiting for a rescue to show up to reveal us."

She nodded to give him confirmation she'd heard him. "You'll be running for the ship, too?" She looked into his dark eyes, which always mesmerized her with their depth.

With the fire burning inside.

"I'll be covering your escape."

She frowned. That didn't sound like a "yes." In fact, the use of the word "your" sounded as though it was an outright "no." "What does that mean? How will you cover us?"

He waved a hand dismissively and went back to the communicator. "Run when I say so."

Her head came up as she glared at him. Dictatorial ways didn't work with her, even in a situation of danger. Looked like he'd have learned that by now. "Not unless I know you're right behind me."

He didn't glance her way. "I'll be making sure you get out."

"What about you?" She put her hand on her hip, pushing aside the material of the loose fitting shirt.

He pressed a button that made the comm beep. Didn't answer her question. Pressed another button, ignoring her.

Already.

"Oh, no." She folded her arms in front of her chest. "I'm not leaving this planet without you right beside me. I won't."

He continued to look down at the communicator. "You'll do as you're told."

"I don't think so." She reached over and put her hand on the comm, almost pulling it from him because she had the advantage of surprise. "You are the future king of your people. I will not let you sacrifice yourself in any way for one seeker morph."

He tried to shrug her hand off but she wouldn't let go. Couldn't let go. "The important thing is you..."

"The important thing is both of us surviving." She pulled the comm closer to her. "This is nonnegotiable, Blackguard. Either we both run for the ship with both of us covering the other. Or neither of us goes for the ship."

"You can't be serious."

She arched a brow at him. Pressed her hand to her hip and stared at him to let him know how serious she was. He was important to his people. She could see that. She would not let him endanger himself for her.

"Annalisse..."

She still liked the way her name tripped from his lips. But she wouldn't be responsible for his death. Ever.

"You're the most stubborn woman I've ever met." He let out a string of curses after the declaration.

"Yeah, well, you made me that way." He'd molded her into his perfect woman with his own perceptions of what he'd wanted in a female. So, he was to blame if there was something about her, he didn't like.

She couldn't help being grateful, though, that his ideal was so close to her own personality. She'd managed to keep herself intact for the most part. It was beyond even the most she'd hoped for.

"Fine." He gritted the word through teeth that clenched tight. He didn't look happy about the agreement.

Time to clarify she'd gotten what she'd wanted. "We'll go out together? Right? Both of us?"



"Yes." He pulled a small phaser from his belt, which looked particularly small in his large hands. He clicked a few buttons before handing it her way. "Point and shoot. It's easy to use."

She'd never held a weapon in her hands before. He knew it, which was why he'd given her something easy to use. She took the hard metal, letting it slide against her fingers. She'd never have been trusted back on Morpho with one of these. Her body warmed at what he'd done for her. At the trust, he'd shown to her.

"I'll be by you the whole time." His nose twitched. "Dammit." He let out a low moan as his breathing escalated. Her scent affected him again as her thigh's apex grew slickened with her desire.

"I'll be by you the whole time." She tightened her hand on the trigger. Best to ignore his response to her arousal. There wasn't anything she could do about how he reacted to her. "When we get back to the ship, will you have to run off?" Maybe they could have more bonding time before he left her alone.

He didn't answer because the array crackled with loud noises. "Pegasus. We are a go. Confirm?"

He shoved a big button on the comm before clipping it to his belt. Whatever messages he'd programmed must have been sent. "Come on. We need to run..." He paused at the door before slipping through it. "...now."

The ship roared over their heads. It looked like a great gray beacon in the sky. Wasn't a huge ship, but looked like a savior to her none the less

Speeder sounds came from all over as the pursuers saw it and headed to intercept both the ship and them.

Her eyes adjusted quickly to the brighter light of the outside. She went on alert, looking for anything that would reach them before they hopped on board. The ship hovered above the ground, not landing.

They moved in synch at a dead run, despite the pain in her feet. Had things not been so dire and her feet being cut by the rocks, she would have paid attention to how easy it was for them to move in such synchronicity. She'd never before been so in tune to someone that when he stepped, she did, too.

The blasts of shots ringing out echoed all over the clearing. Some came from the speeders pulling up in all directions. The ship aimed a few well timed blasts around them as they kept pace, never wavering in their path to the ship.

Blackguard fired, knocking a speeder rider from his perch.

She shot blindly, hitting a speeder and knocking it and its controller to the ground in a flurried rush of limbs. Her body quaked. She'd never shot anyone before. She stumbled, trying to see if the rider got up. Sighed with relief when he did stagger to his feet. She'd been defending them. And had done it well.

Shots clamored around them like incoming bees accompanied by buzzing sounds as they split the air. She could hear the ship's high pitched shots and the bangs as they rocketed into the ground.

She turned to gaze at Blackguard to tell him she'd acquired a target and fired. Somehow his pride in her accomplishment would be the greatest thing about her feat. She'd helped to keep them safe.

That's when she saw the phaser aimed at him from behind, held in a speeder controller's hand, and ready to shoot Blackguard down.

Time stopped in that instant.

No time for thought, she leaped on top of Blackguard, knocking him out of the way even as pain exploded in her backside. The world went dim as she heard Blackguard scream her name, right before everything went dark.

## Chapter Eight

Blackguard pushed Annalisse from him as he fired at the one who'd shot her before he could shoot her again. Red shuttered his eyesight. He wanted to shoot the man a thousand times for what he'd done. A million times wouldn't be enough.

Please be okay. He begged her even as he had to focus on the danger rather than her injury.

The man went down with a hail of phaser fire that didn't all seem to come from Blackguard's gun. The man dropped his weapon but tried to pick it up almost as soon as he'd gone down. He couldn't reach the gun, but still his fingers continued to twitch toward the object of his attention.

The ship fired several bursts in many directions, hovering, waiting for Blackguard to get into position to pick him up.

Turning his attention away from the man, Blackguard grabbed Annalisse, slinging her over his shoulder. He didn't care about the man who'd shot her now that he was no longer a threat to her. Only cared about getting her to safety. Getting her healed. He needed to hurry and get her onboard.

Damn you.

She'd jumped him, taking him by surprise and pushing him to the side so she could take the hit. She'd taken the wound that should have been his. Brave little idiot. He wasn't worth her death.

"Don't you dare die, damn you."

She didn't answer.

They had to get inside the ship. He took mincing steps, trying to vary his movements so that he was harder to shoot. He was weighed down by the woman he carried.

She moaned in his arms. He'd probably hurt her picking her up like he had, but he had no time for gentleness. The movement probably didn't help her either. He couldn't look at the wound. Mostly, because they had to keep moving. But he didn't want to look either. Didn't want to see the damage that had been caused. He focused on putting one foot in front of the other and making his ship. There'd be time later to assess the damage. Damn you.

The ship suddenly swung around. Leveled guns behind him and fired a quick succession of shots. He didn't duck though he briefly twisted his head to stay out of the line of fire, but kept himself moving forward. He briefly looked back to see what his ship fired upon.

The ship had taken out the man who'd shot his woman, though he hadn't been a further threat to Blackguard. They'd fired on the man who might have taken what belonged to him permanently.

No. He wouldn't think that way.

The ship touched down and the doors opened as he reached them. He struggled inside.

A soldier stood with guns ready to cover his entrance as he hauled Blackguard up into the ship. The door closed behind him with a swoosh.

Painbridge called into the comm. "I have him. Go!" Then, he turned to Blackguard.

"Sire. Where are..." He started to bow to his prince.

Blackguard stopped him. He had no time for such formalities. "Painbridge. No others to be retrieved. Just us. Take off. Now." He shifted the woman in his arms, being careful not to touch where she'd been shot. Still couldn't look at the wound.

"Take off." Painbridge spoke into the comm before he turned even as the ship swung around and took off, jolting them forward in the hold of the ship.

Blackguard shifted his weight, keeping himself standing. "She needs medical attention. Now. Call for it."

"I need the doctor up here stat."

Blackguard wouldn't relax until he had Annalisse back home at his palace and comfortable. Speaking of that, the man had given the pilot no orders other than to take off. "Tell the pilot to head for home." His arms ached from carrying her but he wouldn't put her down. Not yet. Where was the damn doctor anyway?

Painbridge looked curiously at the woman in Blackguard's arms. Painbridge stared at her, making Blackguard want to shield her from his gaze. "Is that..."

"Yes. We need the doctor. Now. Tell the pilot to plot a course for home." Painbridge had always been distractible. That was the only reason he hadn't been chosen for the mission of retrieving Annalisse.

When had she become Annalisse and not the seeker morph? He wasn't sure.

"Oh." Painbridge turned to speak into his comm again. "Head us out of here. Home. Yes, the Prince ordered that."

The ship settled into a static pace as they must have broken orbit. The pace would even out and become stable now that they'd left the planet's atmosphere.

Blackguard laid her on the floor of the hold. Now that turbulence of orbit wouldn't come back, he would get her more comfortable. Get her taken care of. Where the hell was the damn doctor? "Blankets."

"Huh?" The soldier looked at him as if he'd spoken gibberish.

Blackguard gritted his teeth as he made sure she rolled on her side so the wound was accessible, but not on her stomach, so throwing up would be easier to deal with, and she wouldn't aspirate. "Get me what we need. Blankets. Med kit. Make sure the doctor is coming this way." He snapped at the man, ready to go find the doctor and what he needed himself.

"Oh, right." Painbridge picked up his comm and barked orders into the microphone. "I need a med kit. Doc, hurry up. I need blankets ASAP."

A voice barked back at him. "Is the Prince hurt?"

Blackguard didn't recognize the voice, but it sounded panicked. Unfortunately, he didn't have a scratch. She'd taken the brunt of everything. He pushed her hair back from her beautiful face. Brave little idiot. He was bigger. Had been in combat. He could have taken the blast. What was taking that doctor so long?

Painbridge looked at him with a questioning look.

He'd never told Painbridge he remained unhurt. The man had probably never seen him be so gentle with anyone before. Not like he was with her. "Negative." If only it had been him. "I'm not hurt."

"Negative." Painbridge sounded relieved as he spoke back into the comm. "The Prince is fine."

The voice came back across. "Thank God."

Not hardly. It never should have been her. He cursed the man who'd shot her and the whole damn war. Of course if it hadn't been for the war he never would have met her. What a paradox. "Where the hell is the doctor?"

"Right here." Doctor Dee walked over with her own quiet, arrogant air, carrying a med kit. "What happened to her?" She got right down to business with her patient, usually ignoring anyone else. She was the best. If anyone could pull Annalisse through, she could.

"Phaser blast." Blackguard moved aside to let the doctor work. Though he didn't want to leave Annalisse's side. "In the rear."

Painbridge shoved blankets at him that had been secured from another location.

"Finally." Blackguard moved them around her legs and some around her upper body. Her skin felt so cold. He placed them carefully to avoid getting the doctor's way.

The doctor held some sort of round gizmo and pushed up his shirt, which Annalisse still wore, so she could examine the wound.

Blackguard couldn't look to see how bad it was. The woman was still unconscious so it must be bad.

Doctor Dee hemmed and hawed. Made a clucking sound while holding the blinking machine to Annalisse's rear. "She's the seeker morph?"

Blackguard took Annalisse's hand in his, stroking his fingers over the soft skin. "Yes. Yes, she is." Her hand felt so cold. She looked pale, too. Why didn't the doctor say how bad it was? Why wasn't she saying anything to him?

"She's already in her cycle I take it? To bond with you? In a state of sexual heat?" Dee didn't look away from Annalisse.

"Yes." He stroked the soft skin of her hand. How clinical that sounded. Having been through this ordeal with her, the words hardly conveyed the reality. Had she bonded with him already? The bonding took some time. His throat closed up. If only she'd bonded with him before this. If she hadn't, she would be as soon as she awoke. He'd see to that.

Dee leaned over the unconscious woman. "I didn't know what to expect from a seeker morph."

Neither had Blackguard. He hadn't known his life would be turned upside down by one small woman. Or that his world would shrink down to one thing and one thing only. Making sure she was okay. He'd never known his heart could beat so fast or his breathing could come in spasms. Or that his stomach could pull in so many different directions with knots. How bad was it that his damn doctor wouldn't even talk to him about her condition? "Dammit, Dr. Dee. How is she?"

"Her? Oh, she's fine." Dee blinked at him with puzzlement, then comprehension dawned. "Didn't you look at it? It's a flesh wound, nothing more. You've had worse during fire fights." She held up the gizmo. "I'm healing it already." She grinned. Not anything he often saw from the woman. "I was analyzing her. Not often I see a seeker morph in the flesh. More like never have I seen a seeker morph in the flesh."

"Dammit, you could've told me." His chest constricted. She was going to be okay. His Annalisse was going to live a long life. Become his in every way possible. His cock stretched out. Wanted to get started.

"I figured you'd already looked at her wound and knew. You've assessed battlefield wounds many times before I was brought in." She looked down at the woman and back at him. Her eyes twinkled with a knowing glance.

He changed the subject, unwilling to admit to this woman why he hadn't looked. He couldn't have stood to see Annalisse hurt. He'd checked over his men countless times, but that was different than looking at this woman's wound. Dee might be his best doctor, but she wasn't his confidante. Not like Annalisse. "Why is she still unconscious?"

"Her own physiology seems to be healing the wound by leaps and bounds already. I'm speeding that up with the healer bot. I would guess that when she was hurt, she went into shock so that her body could deal with the repercussions of healing. She'll probably wake up once that process is finished." Dee ran the gizmo over in one more pass. "But that's a guess. We don't know enough about seeker morphs to tell you the truth." Her face lit up. She was probably thinking of all the studies she would do on Annalisse.

He'd have to limit the doctor's access to his future wife. He didn't want Annalisse to spend all her time as a lab study.

"Don't worry." The doctor smiled again as she closed up the healer bot. "I know she's not a science experiment. And a real person."

"Is she done with the healing bot?" His woman would be fine. They'd been lucky. He'd have to have a talk with her about who was to protect whom when she woke up. He looked forward to seeing her eyes open and seeing her smile again.

"She is. She'll probably start coming around any time now." Dee looked behind him at Painbridge, who stood guard over them. "Sire..." She broke off as though she couldn't continue with the sentence.

"What?" He couldn't take his eyes from Annalisse. She looked so peaceful. So beautiful. He'd never seen her equal.

His.

She was his.

"You were the only survivor." Dee's voice broke. Her men were her family. His men. She'd been the military's doctor for ages. Her eyes didn't tear up as he ran a hand through her graying, dark hair.

His heart skipped a beat. "Yes, I was. Well, she and I." But they didn't know his little seeker morph, especially not the way he did. They could only be glad that he had survived and grieve for the men they'd lost.

Dee and Painbridge knew every man who'd perished in that explosion. They'd been friends and worked together for years. While death was always a risk of the job they did, losing that many men at one time, was a blow to them all.

"Moses?" Her voice stayed controlled but her eyes now filled with tears. Moses had been the captain for more years than anyone. He'd served under Blackguard's father and shown no signs of slowing down at his post. Everyone expected him to live forever.

Even Blackguard. Now, he'd perished. In a senseless betrayal of trust. He nodded, without saying a word. Didn't have to say anything.

Dee's lips pursed together.

Blackguard had a job to do. His men needed the justice served that only he could provide. He had to get to the bottom of their deaths.

He hated to leave Annalisse before she woke. But he had to find out who'd betrayed his people and how far that deception went. In the long run, that information would help to keep her safe as well. Tangara had almost gotten away with the woman Blackguard might have never known if the traitor had been successful.

"Can you two see her to quarters? See her to the palace?" He gritted his teeth. "I have

some things to sort out." For good men who hadn't deserved to die. At least, Annalisse would be fine. She was now with people he trusted to keep her safe.

He couldn't glance backward as he left them. Or else he would have stayed with Annalisse despite the job he had to do.

\* \* \* \*

Annalisse stood at the windows, looking out across the gardens that surrounded Blackguard's palace.

It was a beautiful planet. Completely different from Morpho. There were lush green plants instead of brown rocks and no caves in sight here. Everything seemed to happen above ground. Flowers bloomed, showing their sunny faces to the warm sunshine. The whole feel of the planet was different, open and fresh. Not closed off and hard like Morpho.

His people had been warm and accepting of her, too. They were open and sunny like their planet, despite the war that had been ravaging them and her reputation as a seeker morph. Such a positive people. Another complete difference from her time on Morpho. Blackguard's people had made her feel like she was already home.

She could see why Blackguard loved his home so much. Why he was so willing to give of himself to protect it.

After their adventure, she hadn't seen him but once since. That had been altogether too brief a glimpse.

She sighed, pulling her arms up around herself. Always got a chill when thinking about why he'd not visited her.

After she'd been shot, she'd come to in the hold of the small ship. A soldier and a doctor had been with her. Not Blackguard. She'd immediately asked after him. Tried to rise to look for him and make sure he was whole.

"He had business to attend to. Matters of our planet." The gray-haired doctor with the kind blue eyes had been so curious about her life that she'd immediately begun asking questions. "May I ask you a few questions? About being a seeker morph? When you feel up to it, of course." Then, she'd launched into queries one right after another.

Annalisse had never been asked so many questions as the tall doctor had asked. She seemed to want to analyze every facet of Annalisse's life. She'd refused to answer anything about Blackguard then or now.

The doctor had accepted that with a knowing glance.

The soldier had done little but stare at her. He'd stuttered when she'd talked to him. Avoided saying much back to her as if his tongue had frozen. But his eyes wouldn't leave Annalisse.

Until the doctor had smacked his arm and told him to stop it.

They'd landed on Blackguard's home planet and for a brief moment, she'd seen Blackguard from behind as he'd hurried into the palace. She'd almost called to him. But he'd strolled away, leaving her to walk with her two handlers.

She'd not seen him since. Two whole days.

They'd put her up in a grand room in the palace. Big bed and bathtub. Her small space on Morpho would take about a hundred duplicates to fill this big room.

She'd had to rest the first day so she could finish the healing process. Seeker morphs could apparently heal themselves better than the general population. The doctor had been

all flutter about those properties.

At first, Annalisse had thought Blackguard must be letting her heal before he came to her. But as time passed, she had to accept the facts.

He'd done what she'd feared he would do.

He'd stuck her in his palace, her prison, and forgotten about her. Would for the rest of her life, making his life flow much easier. He would only come to her when he needed something from her.

She stroked her hands up and down her cold arms.

It had been too easy for him to ignore her. Too easy to drop her off and apparently not think of her.

While she couldn't ignore him.

She'd known the instant that she'd jumped in front of the phaser fire that the bonding had completed. She'd bonded with Blackguard and was his woman. No other man would ever imprint upon her senses. No other man could ever do for her what he had. Be for her what he was.

The bonding must go in only one direction. He hadn't been affected.

Blowing out a breath, she scanned the gardens, watching the butterflies and small birds, trying to take her mind from her sadness. An impossible task. She'd been swamped with that emotion since she'd come back to consciousness.

Not to mention, she'd been lonely.

And she couldn't forget, horny.

Though perhaps getting shot had taken the edge from her sexuality. Her drive had turned into something that wasn't an overpowering need like it had been at first. The arousal still pricked her. But she could deal with the lingering effects of her lust.

Even so, she missed him. More than she'd thought possible.

For all her trying to make an impression on him, he'd set her aside like some decoration he hadn't wanted to start with.

Eventually, he'd have to see her. At their wedding. But getting married didn't mean he'd not set her aside again. Forget about her. Leave her alone while he went about his business, untouched by the bonding they'd shared.

Damn me for caring. For being a seeker morph.

If only she could stop herself from the former. If she hadn't been the latter, maybe he'd have accepted her.

She closed her eyes, shunning the beauty of the planet so that it couldn't soothe her. She didn't want to be soothed. Thought of nothing but him. Nothing but the man who she'd bonded to.

Who'd forgotten her existence.

The door opened to her room.

She didn't turn to look to see who'd entered. "Go away, please."

Probably Dr. Dee with seventeen hundred more questions. Or the soldier seeing to her wants. He wouldn't bring her Blackguard, though. He'd offered to bring her anything to make her more comfortable. She hadn't asked for the prince only because of her pride. Give her a few more days with no sign of Blackguard, she might forget her pride and ask anyway.

How pathetic could she be?

The person didn't speak.



She heard footsteps coming across the wooden floor. They stopped right behind her. She could hear the person breathing, but still they didn't speak.

She opened her eyes and squared her shoulders. The person she most wanted to see would not be there standing before her. "Dr. Dee. Come to ask me more..." She turned and the line died on her lips.

Her heart stopped for an intermittent second before beating in a thunderous cacophony of noise.

Blackguard stood with his hands behind his back.

"You're not Dr. Dee." She couldn't believe he was there. She wanted to touch him. Make sure he was real. Her hands stretched out to him before she caught them and brought them back to her body. They wiggled against her skin.

"Not the last time I checked." He reached out to cup her cheek. His fingers felt warm as he caressed her skin. "Hello, Annalisse."

She couldn't fathom he was there and therein lay the problem. If he'd communicated with her, she wouldn't be so stunned now. She reached up to knock his hand away.

"Where the hell have you been?" She moved away from him to pace. "You dropped me here without one word. Without one visit. I haven't seen you for days."

"I know." His head swiveled to watch her movements.

"Not one word. You didn't even check on me after I'd been shot." She didn't add "saving your life" because that didn't matter. "You didn't even see if I was going to be okay and if I would heal. Or if I have a scar."

"Do you?"

She stopped to center her gaze on him. His masculine scent took over the room as did his presence. He looked too good. Too edible for her tastes. His muscles looked as she remembered them. She could still feel the weight of his arms around her as they'd cuddled. Still feel his skin against hers when they'd lain together. Her lust flared up in a second, igniting the fires of her need.

Wait a minute, her sexual heat was over, wasn't it?

His nostrils flared. He smelled her arousal. He cleared this throat. "Do you have a scar?" His voice caressed her with its deep melodic quality.

"No." Her body quivered under the tone. "I don't have a scar."

"Good."

"If you'd asked me, you'd have known that already."

He approached her again to touch her arm.

She again pushed him away. "You think you can come in here having not contacted me for days now and think it's all okay? It's not. You left me..."

He grabbed her shoulders and pulled her against him, not giving her a chance to pull back. "I know." He pressed a quick kiss to her lips. Too quick for her liking. "I'm sorry I left you alone so long. I didn't realize it would take this much time to clear things up."

Her body curved into his like a traitor. She shouldn't be cozying up to someone she felt such anger toward. "What things?" Only she enjoyed his touch. Her heart beat that much faster. All her physical parts launched a betrayal of her emotions. She cursed herself. Stop it. But she couldn't. She'd missed him too much. How had a man who'd she only known for hours get into her psyche like this?

"Who betrayed me. Who set me up."

He'd been looking into the death of his men. Into the traitorous actions of the race

who was supposed to have handled her transfer. She'd figured that out, but he still could have seen her, if only for a minute. "Did you find out anything?"

"Two men spearheaded the treachery." His voice lowered to a sneer. "One of them is already dead. Moses and I shot him. The other has been captured by his own people. He'll face a trial. An execution. His people won't be lenient on him." His face went from anger to something that looked like longing as he looked at her.

The longing stripped her defenses, but she rallied them. "That's good I guess." What did he want her to say? He'd still left her alone. Ignored her. Now that he was here, what did he want? Should she dare ask? Why not? "Why are you here, Blackguard? What do you want from me?"

"To finish making you mine."

Her ears hummed as all the blood rushed to them after his bold statement. "You think you can waltz in here and take me after the time that's elapsed." He could, of course. She was already bonded to him, though he didn't know that yet. But a part of her couldn't let go of the anger of being left behind so cavalierly. "Suppose I've started a bond with another man?" Again, if he'd bothered to check in with her, she could have told him that the bonding was finished between them.

He didn't react to her dig. "I knew you didn't have a scar. I know you haven't bonded with anyone but me." He pulled her tighter despite her pushing against him.

"How did you know that?" Unlikely. If he thought he was going to walk in here and go back to where things had been on the planet, sexual heat or no sexual heat...

"Dr. Dee has been in constant contact with me since you've been here. Had anything happened with your wound..." He cleared his throat. "...or another man, she would have contacted me immediately. I gave her strict orders. I sometimes talked to her on an hourly basis."

Her insides melted into a string like, gooey candy. "You did?" Maybe they would go back to being like they had been on the planet. She'd had no idea. Dr. Dee hadn't let on, even when she'd asked about Blackguard and Annalisse wouldn't talk.

"Of course. You were wounded. Did you think I'd walk away without checking on you?" His face looked pained that she'd thought that.

That was what she'd thought. "But you didn't talk to me." There had been nothing from him. She couldn't keep the hurt out of her voice. Hated laying herself bare before him. But who else could she reveal herself to like this? She'd bonded with him after all.

He pulled a hand through her hair. Her scalp tingled as did her sex like the two far away parts had become connected. "I'm sorry about that. I will do my best to keep in contact in the future when I have to be away from you." She luxuriated in the touch of someone she'd sorely missed. Greatly desired. "But as my wife, you're going to have to get used to my being out of contact sometimes."

Her eyes closed. Hearing that word from his lips, made her whole body pump full of desire. "His wife" sounded so much better when he said the words. "I will if I know you won't ignore me on purpose. Forget me."

He arched a brow at her. Challenged her with his expression to deny his next words. "Like I could forget you."

Her legs clamped together. She'd thought her heat was over. But now her need spiraled out of control as if it had only getting started. The ache roamed through her in search of a salve to ease her.

He groaned as he rolled his head around. "I can smell your arousal. God, I've missed it. Missed you."

"I thought my heat was over." She blew out a shaky breath. She'd expected it to be finished now that she'd bonded with him. Only her desire puffed her up until she thought she'd go mad with the wanting. The longing. It was ten times worse with him in front of her than it had been when she hadn't had contact with him.

"We're mates, Annalisse. Because the sexual heat passed, it doesn't mean the heat between us is gone."

He was right. The warmth she felt between her legs was different than the sexual heat she'd felt before. This was manageable, though, still a force to be reckoned with. Still strong and overpowering. Maybe it would help her slow down the lust that exploded between them, whenever they were together. After all, they couldn't spend their whole lives in bed. She looked at his delectable body. Or could they?

He moved closer to her. "Your scent still drives me wild. Makes me crazy." He rubbed his erection against her. "I want you."

Words she hadn't expected to hear again from him. How she loved them falling from his lips. She wanted him more than she'd wanted him before. Hard to believe that was possible. She rubbed her body right back against him with abandon as an answer and cemented her response with her words. "Then have me."

\* \* \* \*

Blackguard reached out to touch her cheek. He caressed the soft skin, loving the feel of her against his rough fingers. She was so soft. Like down on a puppy. "Oh, I'll have you." He picked her up into his arms. "I'll have you now."

The action was too much like carrying her injured body into the belly of his ship. Hefting her up not knowing whether she'd live or die.

He closed his eyes. It was the first time he'd held her since then. Her weight thrilled him in ways he couldn't describe.

She was real. Alive. She was his. His and his alone.

"You all right?"

He'd stopped and hadn't moved for the bed. Time to rectify that. He opened his eyes. "I'm fine. Though you and I have to have a talk."

"About what?" She sounded confused.

He tossed her down on the big bed where the sheets were neat and tidy. Something they soon wouldn't be. His bed. She'd been placed into chambers next to his offices. Not that he'd slept since he'd been back.

She stared up at him, green catlike eyes sparking. "What?"

He leaned down in front of her with his hands by her knees. "You ever put yourself at risk like that again, I will ... punish you."

She grinned and raked white teeth across her ruby lips. "Could be ... fun."

He shook his head. "Not that kind of fun. I'm serious. I don't ever want you to do that again." It might kill him, if he had to worry like that again.

"Okay." She leaned back on her pillows. Too easy an answer.

He missed his shirt on her. It had covered a lot less than the dress she wore now. He leaned back on his legs and ran his hands across her calves.

She shivered from his touch.

He crawled up the bed to lie down beside her.

Her hand reached out to caress his face. Gently, she stroked his cheek with smooth fingertips. "You look tired."

He nodded. "A little. Not much time for sleeping lately."

"Maybe..."

He cut her off with a kiss. "No." He needed to be with her. Needed to reassure himself that she was okay. That she was in his life.

"But..."

He kissed her again, tracing his tongue against the seam of her lips before plunging into play with hers. His breathing had become rapid when they finished. "No."

She swallowed and ran her hands across his back, stroking up to his shoulders.

"Okay. But afterward, you're going to rest."

Not with her beside him. She could wake the dead with her touch. But he'd not argue with the wily woman. With her, actions mattered. He'd show her how he felt.

Her fingers trembled at the top of his shirt before unbuttoning the top button. She moved on to the second one, her fingers getting more confident.

He'd never imagined that she'd get so mad at him for being out of contact. No one had ever cared about him being there or not before.

She reached the final button and spread his shirt wide. She ran her hands up and down his chest. Her eyes rolled back.

"You okay?" Could she relapse? Doc had told him she'd been fine. His eyes scanned her face for any other look of pain.

Her voice was deep and throaty when she replied. "You feel good."

Not pain but pleasure. There was plenty more of that to come. He shrugged off his shirt and rocketed to his feet. Took off his pants to let them fall to the floor.

Her hungry gaze ratcheted his desire up a few more notches.

He grasped the bottom of her dress in his hands, and she sat up to help him draw it over her head.

She wasn't wearing any underwear.

His gaze fixed on her body. Her exposed body. Her bare creamy skin. Her kissable flesh. He moaned. Wanted to be everywhere at once. Tasting. Touching. Nipping. Lips lavishing every exposed inch of her.

"Only going to look?" She arched a brow at him.

"Hell no." Where to feast first?

He lay back down beside her to caress a breast. Her nipple stabbed his palm; it had reached such a point. He circled her nipple with his thumb, making large passes that slowly grew smaller.

Her breath came out in a quivering mass.

He reached down with the other hand to his cock. Drew the moisture that had slipped from the tip. He placed the wet drop on her other breast and massaged.

She swallowed. Her throat moved up and down with the motion.

Keeping that hand massaging her breast, he leaned over to nip her other nipple. He drew it into his mouth with ample suction.

She cried out his name as her hips bucked against him. So, he did it again to elicit the same reaction.

As he suckled and nibbled on her, his other hand dipped down the planes of her

stomach and into the wetness of her desire.

So warm. So wet. So responsive that her hips bucked against him again, probably in anticipation of what he was about to do.

When he'd finished with that breast, he slid down the bed to just above her pussy. Spread her thighs wide for his gaze.

So pretty and pink. A pearl of moisture leaked out as he watched. Her scent still drove him wild. Still made him crazy.

He allowed his full tongue to lick her once all the way down her slit.

Her body twitched.

"I'm the only man for you." He licked again, slower, taking his time and touching every part of her.

She gasped.

He removed his mouth. "Say it."

Her eyes grew wide as she lifted her head to stare at him. "You're the only man for me." She bit her lip. "Blackguard..."

"What?"

"I bonded with you before I was shot."

His chest constricted as his heart rate elevated. She'd bonded with him and was his. "You're sure?"

She nodded. Her teeth slipped back over her lip. "I am." Her voice dropped down low. "Are you okay with that?"

Okay? He was great. Was she kidding? She asked if he was okay with that? He was more than okay, he was ecstatic. "Yes."

To let her know, he wasn't kidding, he flicked his tongue across her clit and sucked it into his mouth.

She was his. Her taste filled his mouth, the sweetest cream he'd ever tasted. Her scent covered him like a blanket.

He suckled several times in between flicking her button up and down.

She would always drive him crazy. For forever and a day. He'd enjoy every damn minute of it.

Puckering his lips, he drew her in for a long suckle until her body wrenched into a stretch along with her crying out.

Her taste inflamed his taste buds. Inflamed him. Made him crazy with wants and needs that would take years to finish.

He had to be inside her.

Now.

Couldn't wait another damn minute for what he'd been wanting since the second he'd left her behind in the hold of his ship.

She panted, her chest heaving with the mere effort of breathing.

"Turn over." The words came out in a hardly recognizable growl.

She didn't argue or give him any lip but rolled onto her stomach.

Good thing, too. He wasn't sure what he would have done had she argued with him right then. He grabbed her hips and arranged them up in the air. Put her ass up as far as he could urge her to place it.

Inspected her skin.

She had a small scab but even the skin around it was already healing. In a few days,

no one would be able to tell where she'd been wounded.

She was okay. He'd been told she wouldn't have a scar, that she'd mostly healed, but hadn't had a chance to see her wound since they'd been apart.

So beautiful. His hands caressed the twin globes, being careful to stay away from the scab in case she was still sore.

She was so his.

He leaned over her back to drape himself across her. Pushed her further up in the air. "Put your hands on the headboard."

She whimpered as she complied, drawing herself up even more. Her body swayed back and forth as she shook.

He lifted up more to position his cock against her entrance. Drew himself across her wet slit.

She made a noise like her voice had stuck in her throat and couldn't get out of her mouth.

He rotated up again against her, making contact but not going inside of her. One more pass and he achieved his goal.

Her wetness coated him as he slipped into her channel with a pop. Her walls encircled him as did her heated slickness. At the different angle, she felt even tighter around him than she had the first time.

He closed his eyes, trying to slow down his reactions. If he didn't, he was going to pop open with arousal.

She moaned again. Her hands pulled on the headboard, making it squeak in time to the rhythm between them.

Slowly, he moved again against her as he opened his eyes to see her back. Didn't want to miss a moment of this woman against him. He pushed into her damp folds before drawing back, only to begin to go inside her again.

He worked himself like that again and again until he'd seated his cock fully inside of her. He gritted his teeth together at the feel of her surrounding him.

"Oh, Blackguard."

With his name tripping from her lips, he picked up the pace of thrusting against her. Kept it quick. Soon, he began to pound against her. He'd no sooner get all the way inside that he'd lift up again and out.

With each slap of him against her, one word echoed inside his head.

Mine.

No one and nothing would ever take this woman from him.

She keened, coming with a spasm of her body against him.

Her orgasm brought his along so that his seed poured out within her as he roared her name.

They collapsed in a puddle of limbs and sweaty bodies.

Who would have ever thought love could be like this? He'd somehow he'd found his life within her. He'd sought a mate, but never expected to find one in the woman he was to marry.

"Rest up. Round two won't be long coming. You have a wedding to plan." He tucked her into the curves of his body.

She cuddled into him with a smile.

Seek and you shall find, echoed in his head as he drifted off to sleep. Because he'd

found what he'd sought. In her.

## **The End**

### **About the Author:**

Mechele Armstrong lives in Virginia and writes while technoing with a computer geek hubby, chauffeuring two girls, ball throwing to a spaz cat, playing psychiatrist to a neurotic dog, and serving one diva kitty.

She loves open bedroom doors and things that go bump in the night, which is why she probably writes what she does. She's always looking for new worlds to play in so she never knows what will come up next. Her world is where sensuality and wonder collide.

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