

Amaka's Lover

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Aidan Books

USA

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Chapter One

“That’s not what I meant. I-I can’t do this,” she admitted.

His eyes narrowed, nostrils flared. He was a prince. Who was she to deny him? She could see the thoughts just floating through his mind. “You can’t do what? Consummate our marriage? You are my wife, Amaka. You have a—”

“Duty. I know. You and my father will never let me forget who I am.” She sneered. “I’m sorry...who *you* are. Ruling prince, with none to oppose you. Your word is law, and all must obey you lest they suffer the consequences.” She moved to stand near the doors opening into the garden. The scent of flowers reached her, and helped somewhat to calm her racing heart.

She heard him move up behind, but he didn’t touch her. “Do you think I’m an unfair ruler, Amaka? Do you feel any of my laws have been too harsh or for my own selfish gain?”

Amaka closed her eyes and blew out her breath noisily. “No, I didn’t mean it that way.”

“Yet I hear resentment in your voice.”

“You don’t understand.” She whirled around to face him. “You will never understand, Ryethen.”

He took her hands in his. She let him for what use was it to fight him off. He was her husband now. “Amaka, arranged marriages have been happening for centuries within the Tyngdor family. Not one of them has failed. You must trust me; trust your father to know what’s best.”

She shrieked, yanking her hands away. “Trust you? I don’t know you! Our traditions—for which I should be used to by now, but I am firmly not!—don’t allow me to get to know my husband. Oh no, correction, the woman selected to be the princess doesn’t get to know her husband before their wedding day. Every other common person enjoys first choosing the person they may eventually want to spend the rest of their life with, and then they get to know each other. I don’t get that luxury. And how much sense does that make, given the position I am expected to hold?”

The sheepish look in his eyes said it all. “It makes perfect sense to me.”

“To you!”

“Amaka....”

“Don’t. Please, Ryethen, just give me some time. I don’t know how I’ll get through this. I need to walk in the gardens to clear my head. You understand don’t you? Can I have at least that?”

She saw his hesitation. If she were not so angry, she would admit to herself that he was a fair ruler to their people. Everyone loved him, and she knew he didn’t get to choose his lot in life anymore than she did, but at least he loved it. He had glowed with purpose that afternoon when he took time out right after their wedding to settle some local disputes among his people. She sighed. Among *their* people. She was his princess now.

Finally, he nodded. “Yes, possibly the cool night air will help you to see this is not an ending but a beginning of something that can be very special. My parents came to...respect each other a great deal over time.”

Amaka turned away to step to the outside. She hadn’t missed the fact that he couldn’t lie. His parents had never loved each other, and she feared neither would she and he.

Strolling quickly among the trees, she tried to put as much distance as she could between herself and the palace. With each step, the stress of her new life slipped away if only for a moment. As she neared the river, she heard its gentle call, and she slipped her sandals off in anticipation of stepping into the stream.

At the water’s edge, she tossed away her shoes and with no witnesses except the three lilac moons in the night sky; she stripped off her clothing. How many times had she swum in the river? She couldn’t remember. Whether a person was born common as she was or of the royal family, the river was accessible and up until now no law had forbidden enjoying it.

Amaka slipped beneath the rippling surface, shivering from the chill. The last of her worries receded as she dove down deep. All of her people were born able to breathe under water. Tiny receptors in their skin, invisible to the naked eye, extracted the necessary oxygen from the water. If she wanted, she could live down here forever, and never have to open her legs to a man she didn’t know.

Suddenly, strong hands reached around her to grasp her breasts and tease her nipples. A male body pressed against her back. She shoved away and swam to the surface. Seeing the man in front of her come up with a wide grin, she frowned and covered her naked breasts.

“Neth! You have no right!” she sputtered.

He laughed. “I have every right. I have known that beautiful body in every way imaginable for two years now. Come here. Let us make love in the water like we did last night.”

She blushed. “We shouldn’t have. It was the night before my wedding, and I should have been ashamed. Neth, you promised to go away.”

He swam closer and she moved out of reach of his arms. As if to show her what she was missing, Neth, leaned back until his lower half was level with the water. His shaft was stiff, despite the chill. Amaka licked her lips. Even after one night, she missed him being inside her, his fiery kisses and skilled touch. But she had to put those thoughts aside forever. Things were different.

“Neth,” she warned.

He was unrepentant. “What? Okay, okay. I did say I would back off, but it’s hard.”

“It’s been less than a day.” She glanced at his broad chest. “I’m not going to cheat on my husband.”

“But you want to.” He swam closer. “You don’t know him. We can continue our intimacy. Within seconds, I can be inside you.” He groaned. “Listening to that little scream you do when you come for me.”

“Neth...”

He drew her into his arms. She closed her eyes when she felt his erection brush her stomach, and her nipples graze his chest. She had met him first at the river, and he had taken her virginity there. Still they had never been in love. The relationship had been purely sexual.

“Let me make love to you,” he whispered in her ear. She trembled. He covered her mouth with his own, dragging his teeth gently across her lower lip. She mewled, aching for more.

“Oh, Neth, I admit I want you more than any man on this planet. You are the greatest lover, but I just can’t do this. I should be inside the palace right now consummating my marriage. I’m sorry.”

Amaka thought she saw pain in his eyes, but it was gone in an instant, replaced by his usual good nature and habit of not taking life too seriously. It was that upbeat personality that drew her to him in the first place.

“I guess I understand,” he sighed. “We’ve had this conversation countless times after the prince chose you. I think he made a big mistake.”

“Neth!”

He laughed. “I don’t mean you wouldn’t make a great princess. I mean he should have chosen someone else, but then how could he after he laid eyes on you. Maybe he hoped you would come to love him. Hey, maybe he’s good in bed. You do like to get it often.”

Despite her sorrow, she grinned and playfully slapped his shoulder. “I recall you liking to get it often yourself. You’d sneak down to my father’s house to drag me out of bed at three in the morning to get some.”

“Yes, and the sleep just magically disappeared from your eyes at the mention of sex.” Amaka burst out laughing and then all humor left as her former lover calmly exited the water. His hard body was chiseled to perfection, his stiff cock the stuff of every woman’s dreams. The man knew how to use it, that along with his hands and lips—every part of his delicious body.

Amaka wondered how her husband’s body would compare, and then cringed at the thought. Dressed, he was incredibly handsome and his form seemed strong and hard, but one couldn’t be sure what the clothes hid. And would he be as endowed as Neth? Would he be skilled? She doubted it. She hadn’t heard anything about him keeping concubines as was legal for royalty. That law had slipped her mind before now. The prince was allowed to have as many mistresses as he liked before and after his wedding. It wasn’t clear if she was also. They would need to discuss it.

“So, beautiful, you’re just going to stand there and stare at my body all night or come out of the water so I can stare at yours?” Neth called.

She frowned. “You’ll turn your back so I can come out, thank you very much.”

He grumbled. “I don’t know how we’ll do this, Amaka.”

“We’ll get through it,” she said, not sure at all. “We’ll get through somehow. We have to.”

Chapter Two

Amaka tried not to flinch when her husband stroked her arm. She allowed him to lift her chin and kiss her, even parted her lips when he stuck out his tongue to taste her mouth. The feeling of betrayal to Neth was strong. She tamped the emotion down and held herself firmly in her husband's embrace. Soon he drew back, his breathing harsh.

"My love, it would be better for us if you weren't so rigid while I tried to hold you," he suggested. She swallowed, noting how his eyes had transformed, almost ocean blue. Desire was plain in his expression.

At least she didn't have to worry about his attraction to her. Amaka was aware that she was not built like the other women of their planet. Where most of the females of their race were long and willowy, having svelte figures to draw the attention of the males, Amaka was a good foot shorter than any of the women she knew. Her body was plumper, with fuller breasts and a rounded bottom. In a society where a flat-chested woman was considered perfection, she felt less than pretty. The fact that Neth had found her body irresistible had been a big part of what drew her to him, and what hurt the most in having to let him go.

"I'm sorry. You're right. I know it's been three weeks since we got married, and really I'm trying." She twisted her hands in her lap. "Maybe you should just...you know...do it."

He gave her a blank look. "What do you mean? We've been trying to do it. You've been like a board every time I touch you."

"Well excuse me. I wasn't the one who wanted an arranged marriage, my prince!" she snapped. "You should be used to emotionless sex in your family." She slapped a hand over her mouth at her impulsive and rude words.

Ryethen stood up from the side of the bed where they sat, and walked across the room. He stood with his back to her, his wide shoulders tight with stress. "I apologize for my comment. I admit I'm frustrated. I should have more patience."

Amaka crossed to her husband and with effort wrapped her arms around his waist. She planted a light kiss at the center of his spine and felt him shiver. He really did want her. And if he was keeping himself from his mistresses just until they consummated the marriage, then his sexual desires must be screaming to be satisfied. So were hers, for that matter.

"I apologize to you, my prince," she began. "I shouldn't have said what I said. I told you I would try to make this work, and I will." With those words, she stepped back and unbuttoned the front of her dress. After inching it off her shoulders, she let the material fall to bunch at her feet. As was their custom—although not her practice since she needed plenty of support for her breasts—she wore nothing beneath. "Take me now, my husband."

Ryethen turned and nearly fell over onto her. He reached a hand for her breast and kneaded it gently. "You are so beautiful, Amaka. I promise, I won't hurt you."

He drew her close and bent his head to lick her nipple. She trembled, both in fear and in pleasure. Her nipples were highly sensitive. She had come plenty of times with Neth's teasing tongue there alone.

Her husband lifted her and carried her to the bed to lay her down. While she watched, he stripped. His body was as hard as she had imagined it was. Taut skin, with a natural tinge of purple that matched the coloring of all their people, stretched across plains and valleys of muscle shaped just right. She sighed.

The mattress sank from the weight of one knee as he climbed on the bed. "Do you like my body, Amaka?"

His question made her nervous. "I..."

"Don't answer." The sheepish look came into his eyes. "I am not the most handsome of princes."

She laughed. "You've got to be kidding."

"Thank you for the compliment."

He settled on top of her and began to kiss her gently. Their tongues entwined for a few innocent kisses while Ryethen gripped her hips and she slid her hands up around his neck. As he parted her legs with one of his, he whispered in her ear. "I need to be inside you right now."

Amaka gasped and stiffened.

"No. No, Amaka, don't do that, please," he begged.

She whimpered, "I'm so sorry."

He lay flat against her, unmoving. Amaka stared at the ceiling. Neither of them said anything for a long time. When Ryethen leaned back to speak, a knock sounded on the door. He growled.

Another attempt failed. It should have taught them a lesson not to try to consummate during the day, especially with times so crucial in the prince's negotiations for peace with a neighboring people.

Ryethen spoke to the messenger at the door and then turned back to her. "I'm sorry, my love. I have to attend to some immediate business. I would like for us to try again tonight."

She nodded. In silence, they dressed and then went their separate ways, still living separate lives that looked like they would never combine.

* * * *

"I don't know, Chyda," Amaka lamented. "I don't think we'll ever come together. And on top of everything else, Neth hasn't given up. He claims he's scoured the law books, and that there is no law stating the princess cannot take a lover."

Her best friend squeezed her hand. "There's none saying she *can* either. I just don't see the prince as the type to let you have a lover, especially if you two can't...you know."

Amaka groaned. "You're right. I had the perfect opportunity to talk to him about it, but I let it pass me by. I was too nervous. I mean how can I say, 'oh by the way, my prince, is it all right with you if I take a lover'?"

Chyda nodded. "Good point. Not likely."

They strolled along the street leading into the town square. As they drew nearer, Amaka became aware of an unusual rumbling like a machine and voices raised in protest. She and Chyda glanced at each other before rushing around the corner to see what the ruckus was about.

Amaka drew in a sharp gasp at the spaceship taking up much of the open field to the left of the herbal shop she liked to frequent. The ingenious craft was small enough to settle down there in the main part of downtown, but looked hi-tech enough to navigate space. Her people had not developed the technology for navigating space to travel to other planets, and were not naturally curious about other peoples. They preferred their own environment to others. Tyngdor was a paradise few wanted to venture far from.

Palace guards marched across the square to the men standing before the craft. Amaka noted in surprise that her husband was in the midst of them. So this was the immediate problem he needed to attend to. She could see why.

Chyda tugged Amaka's arm. "Oh look, aren't they yummy?"

Amaka didn't take her eyes off her husband, wanting to learn how he handled his affairs. Was he what the people thought? She spoke absently to her friend. "Who?"

"The guards, of course," Chyda told her.

Amaka laughed. “You’ve seen them a million times, Chyda. How about the aliens? From the looks of that crest on the side of the ship, they’re Zeddans. Unlike us, they enjoy exploring the galaxy, and they think for some reason we should be impressed with their accomplishments. Landing in the town is both dangerous and showy.”

Chyda rolled her eyes. “Hmm, I can’t see the problem you are having with your husband, because you already like a princess.” With those words and giving a disgusted sniff, Chyda broke away and hurried forward to be closer to the guards. Amaka followed more slowly. She didn’t trust the Zeddans in any way, and she would share her thoughts with her husband the first chance she got.

Chapter Three

Amaka sat miserable at the breakfast table. Every now and again, she peeked across at Ryethen, but he hadn't said a word to her all morning. She frowned. It wasn't her fault that he had come in late, and she had been too sleepy to even wake up when he shook her. She pushed away thoughts that when Neth had come, she was never too sleepy. The memory of it made her feel guilty about slighting her husband. How long would he wait? Or was he?

"Um, Ryethen," she began.

He grunted.

"I wanted to talk to you about the Zeddans." That was a good start. She still wasn't ready to talk about the mistress and lover thing, but she did miss Neth. She wondered if he had found another woman, maybe a more attractive one.

Ryethen looked up from his paperwork he was reading while he ate. "Yes?"

If she was going to be a support to him, better to start now. At least they could become closer in making policy and discussing foreign relations. "I don't trust them. I think they are showy, and they put our people at risk when they set down in the town. Not everyone is impressed with their latest technology as they seem to think. We still prefer the simple life. Besides that, they seem to be as they say spoiling for a fight with their superior comments."

He set his bread down and brushed crumbs from his fingers. "I do understand your concern, Amaka, but you don't have to worry about such things as that. I and my advisors will take care of it. True, the Zeddans are a more aggressive people. That's why they have to be dealt with more delicately, which is what has taken up so much of my time lately."

Amaka sat in shock at his words. He was insinuating that one, she shouldn't bother her silly head about politics, and two, she should be more understanding of his schedule and be ready to part her legs at whatever time he deemed to come to her bed!

Her anger boiled to overflowing. She threw her napkin down and bunched her fists at her sides. "Is the princess allowed to take a lover if she wishes?"

His eyes widened and he choked on the sip of his drink he had just taken. "What?" he sputtered.

"You heard me. The law states clearly that the prince may take as many mistresses as he chooses before and after his wedding, but there is no mention of what the princess may do. So I'm asking you, *my prince*, am I allowed to take a lover?"

Ryethen's face turned a deep purple in his anger or it could have been embarrassment. She could not tell which. His lips compressed, he pushed back his chair and stood. Had she waited an eternity for an answer to her question, apparently that would have been too soon. Her husband reached for his napkin, dragged it across his lips and then threw it on the table. He turned and stomped out of the room. Somehow Amaka felt like she had just made her marriage a hundred times worse.

* * * *

Neth walked at her side, clearly trying to resist touching her. He put up a hand to her hair and then dropped it. He reached out with his fingers splayed as if to twine his with hers as they had done many times in the midst of love-making, but then he withdrew. He blew out a frustrated breath.

"Neth..." she began.

He shook his head. "No, don't say it. This is hard, Amaka. I'm used to having you when I want, as often as I want." He stopped. "I need to tell you something."

Dread closed Amaka's throat. "N-Not now. I can't hear it, whatever it is, Neth. Please don't."

They stood staring into each other's eyes for a while before they began strolling through the gardens again. Amaka searched her mind for a safe subject, other than their former relationship, and if it would ever be possible to be lovers again. But all she could think of was how foolish it was to be out here with Neth when any of the guards could happen along and report seeing them back to her husband.

Neth came up with a safer subject. "So what do you think of the Zeddans? In town, I have heard the men say they think that this will eventually lead to a war."

She gasped. "A war? That's extreme, surely. I mean the Zeddans are pushy and even spiteful sometimes, but war?"

"Who can trust a people who all have red skin with spikes in their backs?" Neth wondered.

"Neth!"

"I'm just saying," he chuckled. "Makes me think of the ancient adage 'stab you in the back,' is all."

"Well if that's the case, then it would be like someone had already stabbed *them* in the back."

"Or they stabbed each other. All the more interesting though."

Amaka couldn't help but laugh. Leave it to Neth to lighten her mood, even if for a moment. He always seemed to be laughing at the world, and that's just how she liked him. But he did have a great sex drive, and she had to wonder if and when he would take another lover.

"Um, Neth?" Amaka spotted a tree bent with age. The trunk was low and level enough for her sit on. She strolled ahead and took a seat, staring down at her hands. "Have you chosen another lover yet?"

He grew so quiet standing in front of her, that she had to look up. Amaka caught a look of raw emotion in his eyes and the press of his lips together. His color was high so that he looked feverish. "It's been almost a month," he muttered.

"We've never gone longer than a day or two," she reminded him.

Neth launched himself at her. He gripped her shoulders in a painful hold, shaking her slightly. "Damn you, Amaka. I want *you*, not some skinny woman with no breasts. I want to taste your nipples and eat between your delicious thighs until I am drunk with your juices. Amaka, I am obsessed with you."

She gasped and stuttered for several moments before she could find words to say. Did that mean he loved her? No, that couldn't be. They had promised each other it would never be anything but physical. There was no hope for anything else. "Neth, we can't. *You* can't. Your wife..."

He released her and turned away. "I don't care." He spoke to the heavy clouds overhead that signaled a storm coming. "You know what she is—an invalid. We discussed it."

"Not you and I." His dejection and anger was obvious. "*She* and I. When she had the accident that took her mobility—when she refused to even see me more than once or twice a month. She said I should find a lover, since marriage is forever here."

Amaka stood and hugged him from behind. Her body was on fire for him, but he needed a friend and that's what she would be. "You were so young when you married, and the accident with the spacecraft..."

He sighed, holding onto her hands at his waist like a lifeline. "Yes, and us newly married. But she had to be one of the only Tyngdorians with a desire to travel the galaxy. She would have been better off marrying a Zeddan."

Amaka shivered. "Don't say that. She married the man she loved, and who loved her."

"I want you, Amaka," he confessed again.

"Don't."

“We could go away,” he suggested. “Do what my wife longed to do and could have done if she had waited until the technology was perfected. We could hop a Zeddan craft and start our lives over again. Then everything would be perfect. Just you and me, my love.”

“Don’t call me that, Neth,” she whispered. “Please.”

“Why?”

“Because he calls me that and it reminds me that I belong to him.”

“You belong to me!”

“No!” She released him and moved away. Every part of her body quaked, the muscles almost sore with tension. “Neth, I want you to move on with your life. Find someone else. I won’t...I won’t cheat on him.”

“You mean like I did.”

“No, I understand your situation. Everyone does.”

Before she could continue, Neth closed the space between them and took her roughly by the shoulders again. He dragged her against him so that her breasts pressed against his chest, and she felt his excitement. He kissed her hard, forcing her mouth open and driving his tongue between her lips. At first she stiffened her body, not wanting to give in, but his mouth was too good. It spoke of hours spent entangled together in the water, on the land, and in the forest. They chatted and made love, made love and chatted. He was an excellent lover in every way. He knew the call of her body, every point to tease until she sang out her climax.

Finally, she gave in and kissed him back. He lifted her blouse and found the waistband of her pants. In seconds his fingers found her pussy and plunged into the wetness. Amaka cried out with delight. Neth stroked deep and hard. Her climax was eminent.

“Uhn, Neth...please,” she groaned.

“Tell me you don’t want me,” he demanded against her mouth. “Tell me!”

Tears filled her eyes and ran down between their mouths so that she tasted the salt. A voice in the trees nearby followed by a crack of wood made them draw apart, panting. Amaka took one last look into his angry eyes and turned to run back to the castle where she belonged.

Chapter Four

Amaka slipped into the side door of the palace, hoping no one would notice her tears. She struggled to control her emotions, but nothing was working. She hadn't cried before over the loss of Neth, so maybe this wasn't such a bad thing. She had been foolish to think she felt nothing for him. He had been the first and only man in her life besides her father. She had no other siblings and had led a sheltered life. Even her school had been an all girls one. To have met a man so giving and good to her was fortunate in light of her limited experiences. But then crime of any type was rare on Tyngdor. There had been no real threat to her safety or virginity before she offered herself to Neth.

As she entered the small library the side door opened upon, she found a palace guard entering by another door in the room. Both led to the extensive gardens. Amaka froze. Would this man report to her husband that she had been out crying? Then again, it wasn't a betrayal to cry or for her to be out. But she did wonder if he had seen her with Neth, and if he was the one she had heard out there.

While she stood frozen in uncertainty, the man approached her. His uniform, black with golden braids extending from one shoulder, began to change as well as his features. She gasped finding that the guard shape-shifted into her husband.

"Ryethen," she squeaked. "I didn't know you were a shape-shifter."

He stopped before her and lifted a hand to brush away her tears. "The ability varies among Tyngdorian males, but yes, I developed the ability as a child. I do not allow it to get out because I like to visit among my people—our people—from time to time. I can learn how to be the best leader I can be."

Guilt struck at her heart. He really did care. And here she had been out in the gardens allowing another man to stroke her into an orgasm. Fresh tears streamed down her face.

Ryethen took her in his arms. "Don't cry, Amaka. I've been harsh with you, and I'm so sorry. I don't want to make you unhappy." He stroked her back. "If we try harder, we can work everything out."

Amaka swallowed, took a deep breath and pulled back from her husband. "Yes, I would like that. If...If you have time now, I would like to be intimate with you."

He smiled. "I don't like to think that we have to schedule it in, but yes, I am most certainly free. We can use one of the guest rooms where no one will know where we are to disturb us."

"Okay."

The room they selected was on the third level of the palace, far away from their own wing and from the servants' wing. Only during times of celebration, when officials stayed was this room used.

Determined to get right to it, Amaka stepped into the room and began unbuttoning her blouse. Ryethen stopped her fingers and replaced them with his own. "Are you sure, my love?"

She trembled. "Yes."

Ryethen peeled her blouse over her shoulders, revealing her breasts. He stared hypnotized at her nipples. "Amaka," he breathed.

"Yes?" Her nervousness was making her almost mute. She had been easy with Neth, or rather had grown to be. Her husband was a prince. What if he preferred the more common look of women or if he was mentally comparing her to his mistresses? "I'm sorry, they are a little too big. I try to wear slimming clothes more, but...well...naked doesn't hide it." She was rambling but couldn't stop herself.

He moved closer, running his thumb over one nipple and watching it pucker from his teasing. "You think I don't like this? Your nipples are so dark and rigid." He lowered his head to take one into his mouth. He sucked so hard Amaka's knees dipped and she sagged against him. His arm came around to drag her closer and up so that he had better access. After nursing at her breast until she moaned, he lifted his head. "I might want to suckle here the rest of the day. Please, take off the rest of your clothes."

Amaka thought he was behaving as if he hadn't seen her days ago, completely naked, the last time they tried. Granted it had been a brief encounter, but still she remembered her nervousness, her embarrassment at her body laid bare in his sight. Would she ever be comfortable? Or feel like she measured up?

When she had pushed her pants down over her too abundant curves until they settled quietly on the floor, Amaka stood with her hands folded across her pussy. Her husband frowned.

"Move your hands, Amaka."

She obeyed, if reluctantly. "I—"

"Don't."

She glanced up at him, not sure of the emotion in his eyes.

"Don't make excuses again for your body. You are what you are, and just so there is no misunderstanding of what this body, just as it is, does to your husband, I will show you." Ryethen had no qualms about stripping. In less than a minute, he was as naked as she

was, sporting an erection so tight and straight it must be painful. "It's been a long time," he admitted.

She closed her eyes, not wanting to be reminded of lovers. Ryethen seemed to read her mind. He moved close again and lifted her chin to stare down into her eyes.

"Right now, there is just you and me. No one else between us." He moved in closer still until their bodies brushed. His breath warming her ear, he said, "When I close my eyes, I will see and hear you in my mind and in my heart. And you will do the same. Yes?"

Her heart was pounding. She would do her best. "Yes."

Amaka couldn't admit that she had been mentally preparing to think only of Neth in order to get through this first coupling. As time went on, she had intended to focus more on her husband, to get to know him, so that his touch wouldn't be so foreign. But he was asking her to give herself to him fully, right now.

Expecting that she would cooperate with no difficulty, he lifted her and placed her on the bed. He lay beside her, leaning over and placing tiny kisses along her quivering belly. He paused. "I promise I will not leave this room until you are completely satisfied. I have much experience, and believe I know what pleases a woman."

She pressed fingers to his lips to silence him, a rude move to do to the prince, but one he seemed not to be offended by, coming from her. "Please don't say things like that. This is you and me, as you said. No one else. We're learning about each other together."

He nodded. "Of course, you're right. I apologize." Before she could respond, Ryethen seemed to come to the conclusion that all prerequisites were done. He skimmed fingertips over her body and with no preamble pushed them into her already wet tunnel. Amaka gasped and raised her knees instinctively.

"Oh."

Ryethen pulled his fingers free and watched her watching him as he licked them clean. "Tastes as tangy as I expected."

Her eyes widened. The straitlaced prince? Surely not. She couldn't fully process that thought. Ryethen went back for more, but this time with his mouth. Amaka came up off the bed when his lips closed over pussy opening and he began to suck and lick. She screamed and squirmed so much, he had to hold her hips in place.

She came hard and fast, crying out. "More, my prince. Please, I want more." Guilt played at the edges of her mind, but her sexual desires had always been high. Her husband knew just how to rub and suck her nub to make her climax. His rhythm was practiced to make her body dance.

“Call me, Rye,” he told her after lifting his head. “Say it.”

“Rye,” she whispered.

He sat up and plunged his fingers inside her, scooping out her cream. Ryethen leaned forward to push his fingers in her mouth. Feeling wanton, she licked her own cream from his fingers, holding his hand in place so that she breathed in her heated scent.

“We’ve waited too long.” His look was torment.

She agreed. Weeks with no intimacy was unnecessary torture. She forced her lover from her mind, at least for now, to please her husband. He deserved a wife that would give him her all, as he was willing to do to make it work.

Amaka sat up to take hold of her husband’s cock. She ran her hand from bottom to top in long smooth strokes while they kissed with their tongues buried in each other’s mouths.

“I will suck you, my prince...Rye.”

“No.” He placed her on her back again. “Later. Right now, I need to be inside you.” He hooked her heels on his shoulders and placed the head of his cock against her opening. “Ready?”

“Yes.” She closed her eyes.

“No, Amaka. Look at me. Watch me come in you,” he demanded.

She opened her eyes to stare up at him. He drove in deep and hard. His pace increased with each thrust until she felt the friction was too much. Tears spilled down her cheeks. He drew back.

“I’m hurting you?”

Amaka scraped his chest with her nails, so intense were her emotions. “Don’t stop, damn you, Rye. Push it in me. Hard!” she screamed.

This time, he obeyed, pumping until sweat formed on their bodies, and glistening with a pastel hue. Amaka screamed his name as he came staring into her tear-filled eyes. He pulled out but she didn’t let him get away. She fisted her hands in his hair, her expression dark.

“Eat me, Rye,” she spat in anger at him pleasuring her. “Eat your come from me!”

He didn’t question her, but slid down her body to take hold of her buttocks and drive her pussy up to his mouth. His long strong tongue dipped into her passage, and he began to scoop out their blended cream, swallowing it down as if it was a treat meant just for him.

Amaka spasmed and came again, and then again when he sucked her clit. She drove his head down, and rested her heels on his back until he was done.

Only later, when she stood in the shower alone, and Ryethen had cleaned himself and gone back to work, did she allow herself to cry her heart out. She had made love with the prince and enjoyed every second of it. What was worse, she wanted him again as soon possible.

Chapter Five

Amaka woke the next morning with her muscles stiff and soreness between her legs. All she had had to do was rest her hand on her husband's arm at the end of the evening to indicate she wanted him to visit her bed that night. In his eagerness, he had lifted her in his arms—in front of the guards to her embarrassment—and carried her up to her room. They had made love into the early morning hours. And now the insatiable man was waking her up at a ridiculous hour. Surely he couldn't want any more so soon.

"Oh, my prince," she complained. "I just can't do it again right now. I'm sore."

Her husband cleared his throat and waited. Amaka lowered the covers from her face and blinked up at his stern expression.

"What did I do now?" she wondered.

"Nothing. Amaka, I need you to get dressed as soon as possible. We are going to Zedda to visit with the officials there."

"What!" She sat up, throwing back the covers. She didn't miss the light in her husband's eyes at her naked body or the painful regret at the slight bruising to her inner thighs. Wrapping a sheet about her body, she stood. "I don't want to go to Zedda. I don't like those people. They're mean and spiteful, and I think we should keep them at a distance. Besides, you told me to keep my nose out of politics, that you would handle it. Why are you pulling me in now?"

Ryethen turned away and walked toward the bathroom with her following. He flicked on the shower and tested the temperature of the water for her. "Yes, so you told me. I know you don't like it, and believe me neither do I."

She nodded, thinking he meant the Zeddans.

"I don't feel your place involves politics, but the Zeddans have specifically requested your presence." His color deepened. "If I do not bring you, the visit will be canceled. I don't need to tell you how important this is for relations, Amaka."

"My place!" She screamed before dropping the sheet on the floor and stepping into the shower. Let him look and want what he wasn't getting for the next century! "My place?" she sputtered as water ran down over her face.

"Amaka." He sighed. "I'm sorry. I know you don't agree with my belief about my wife and my work, but—"

"Am I just a figurehead, Rye? Why did you even marry?" She took hold of the plant they used for soaping their bodies and tickled the leaf. Pink suds rose in abundance and she

began lathering herself. “Oh, I know. An heir? Yes, I’m just a baby maker and nothing else.” Her anger rose at the tears forming in her eyes.

He reached out to touch her shoulder, but she moved away. “Amaka. I respect you.”

“To be what?”

“You don’t understand.”

She turned her back on him. “You’re right, I don’t. But don’t worry, my father raised me to respect the royal family as they are important to our people’s well-being. I believe that with all my heart. I also know that you were raised in a way that makes you think you are somehow above me, a woman. I think that’s some universal feeling for royalty because the Zeddan males behave the same way from what I’ve seen of them in the town square.”

He frowned. “You are saying I am no better than a Zeddan?”

Amaka swung to face her husband. She deliberately lathered her breasts while he watched. Bubbles glided over her nipples while water droplets ran down between her breasts. His eyes locked on her and his breathing quickened.

“You like what you see, Rye?” she asked softly.

“Amaka.”

She raised her eyebrows but said nothing. Teasing her nipples until they were erect was driving him crazy. He stilled her hands and dragged them down to her sides.

“Stop that. You feel like your only control over me is in seducing me.”

“Now you’re telling me what I feel,” she snapped. “Get out. You’re getting wet. The leader of Tyngdor can’t look like a rumpled peasant.”

Ryethen released her hands. “Amaka.” His voice held a warning. For a moment, she wondered what he would do. “No one has ever spoken to me as you do.”

Amaka leaned out of the shower and kissed him. He responded immediately, sticking his tongue in her mouth. She drew back and stroked his cheek. “Why did you choose me, Rye? You could have had any woman you wanted. There had been mention in my village that one of the upper level women had caught your eye. I don’t even remember seeing you close up before you sent the invitation to my home.”

She watched him remove his clothing, so neat a second before, now sodden. Another factoid about the prince flashed through her mind. He was always punctual. If he was already dressed, it stood to reason they would be late for the meeting, but then why didn’t he wake her earlier?

Ryethen stepped into the shower and took the soap leaf from her suddenly trembling fingers. He ran a fingertip over its smooth surface, activating more bubbles. A fresh burst of lavender scent filled the air. Slowly, he began washing her breasts again. "Can't be too sure they are clean," he muttered.

She smiled.

"I did see you. At your brother's funeral," he told her.

She gasped. "What? But that was so many years ago. I was a child, barely a teen."

He nodded. "My father took me out, one of our many ventures among the people. He too was a shape-shifter. It's rare for one male in a family, still rarer for two. To my knowledge, none have been in my family for at least three hundred years. Anyway, I was there, a young man, ready to take on the responsibilities of becoming the ruling prince, for as you know my parents had me very late in life."

"Yes, everyone was worried there would be no heir," she mused. "I guess that's part of why you are the darling prince."

"With no siblings. And now, with no parents either, now that they've passed."

His sadness touched her heart.

"I longed for a brother or sister, someone who I could just be myself with. That day I saw you crying for your brother like your heart had broken and would never mend. Your parents held you, but you wouldn't be comforted by them."

Amaka stepped into her husband's embrace, remembering. She lay her head on his chest and closed her eyes. He was right. Tyngdor was known for its medicinal plants. Amaka especially loved learning to heal under her mother's tutelage, but no herbs could cure Ekeema of the strange illness that took him from her. He had been her best friend and twin.

Ryethen continued. "I don't know why, but I vowed to care for you, to help you to heal. Back then, I was weighted down with my responsibilities. Later, I learned to love it, to embrace it. I did not forget my vow. When I was ready for a wife, I chose you and had the invitation sent."

She lifted her head to look up at him. "Wait, are you telling me that you didn't even see me as adult, didn't know if I was in love with someone else or anything about my life? Just because you saw me hurting as a child, you commanded that I become your wife."

He frowned. "I did not command. I offered. Your father accepted. And as I said, I made a vow. I keep my word at all times."

Amaka tore at her hair to her husband's horror. "You are infuriating. You are arrogant and...and...cut off. You say you visit the people, but you have no understanding of them. Not really. Rye, you stand on the outskirts looking into something you could never comprehend."

"Why not? I am not un-Tyngdorian. I care deeply for my people."

She sighed. "I don't doubt that. Still."

He stepped from the shower and grabbed a towel, holding it up for her. Amaka walked into his embrace, and he began to towel her off from head to toe before wrapping her snugly in the warm folds. Ryethen was solicitous for certain. He worked hard to make life better, and listened to his advisors carefully before making decisions, but the fact remained that he seemed to be living in a sort of bubble. Nothing truly touched him, she thought. He would never be all that the Tyngdorians needed until he was truly on their level.

Chapter Six

Amaka clutched her basket closer to her side and tightened her grip on the prince's arm. The open look of lust in the Zeddans' eyes when they looked at her set her teeth on edge.

She swallowed, trying to wet her suddenly dry throat. "Rye..."

He patted her hand on his sleeve. "Don't worry. You are mine, and they know that. I will not allow anyone to harm you."

One of the men they faced upon exiting the craft that brought them to this harsh world, was at least eight feet tall. His shoulders seemed to block out half the light of the triple suns as he bent in a half bow toward Amaka. She gulped, seeing the spikes quiver on his back. Upon closer inspection, each garish appendage had tiny craters covering its otherwise smooth surface. The stories she'd heard as a child, of the Zeddans using those spikes to kill their enemies, flooded her mind.

"Princess," the lead general said with a rough kiss to her knuckles. "I saw you in the marketplace, and may I say you are more beautiful close up."

She grimaced. "Thank you, sir."

Ryethen broke the contact and insinuated himself between them. "General, let the ladies enjoy getting to know each other. I would love to talk to you about..."

Amaka breathed a sigh of relief as the men wandered away toward a large, open building within which were couches and a conference table with chairs set around it for their meeting. She turned to the two remaining female Zeddans, but the ladies, after staring in disgust at her, began speaking with each other.

"Can you imagine the nerve of Tyngdorians with their ridiculous clothes?" one of the women said.

The other laughed and nodded. "Yes, and I think they're obsessed with the color purple."

To Amaka's embarrassment, the two broke into loud laughter, giving her pointed looks. For the moment, she forgot that relations with the Zeddans was tenuous at best, wanting only to get back at the rude female barbarians. "You're talking about me? I guess you haven't seen that eyesore of a horn cluster you have coming out of your back, or the clawed toenails so rough you can't wear shoes?"

Both women shrieked in horror at her mean words. Amaka knew she'd taken the insult too far, but she wasn't going to allow them to talk about her and her people and get away with it. Still, she should have shown some reserve. If the Zeddans had no manners, that didn't mean she had to stoop to their level.

Amaka soon found herself standing alone outside the meeting room with the doors closed. The two Zeddans women had marched off in a huff. She glanced around wondering what to do with herself until Ryethen was ready and heard a ship nearing. Not wanting to come across more Zeddans, she spotted a trail through a grove of trees and headed for it. Her personal guard fell into step behind her but remained silent. Amaka would soon shake him as she always did.

“Amaka!”

Someone called from behind and she stopped. Soon Chyda rounded a bend and threw herself into Amaka’s arms. “Hey, I haven’t seen you in forever.”

“What are you doing here?” Amaka looked past her, but no one was escorting her. “You came alone?”

Her friend waved her hand. “You forget, Daddy, has decided his retirement should be spent annoying the prince and his advisors. He’s hopeful he’ll be put on the staff full time after that last idea of his worked out.”

Amaka laughed. “Oh yes. The medicine school. You know, Chyda, you should give your father more credit. His idea was brilliant, and I can’t believe we didn’t have one in place sooner. The school will open up a whole new industry for our people, with more jobs. Rye could not look past a person with such innovative ideas like that.”

Chyda rolled her eyes. “Did you just call the prince, Rye?”

“That’s his name.”

Amaka found herself jerked forward out of earshot of her guard. “What about Neth?”

She frowned. “What about him? We broke it off. It was painful for us both, but for the best. I am married to the prince. I had no choice.”

“You could have convinced your father to—”

“I may act like I’m rebellious, but I respect my father, Chyda, as I know you do yours. I didn’t feel I was in a position to fight too hard. Was I going to run away? Get a job? Where? What? I did my duty to my family. Besides...” Her voice trailed off.

Chyda hugged her. “Besides, your mother is ill with the same sickness your brother had, and your father is losing heart.”

She nodded. “Yes, I’m terrified that they’ll both be gone and I’ll be all alone. Reality says I could not depend on having Neth for the rest of my life.”

Amaka sat down on a fallen tree, then jumped up again with a little scream. Was everything spiked with these people. She glanced up to frown at Chyda laughing, when she saw the man behind her. *Neth*.

Her heart skidded to a halt and then pounded so hard, it almost hurt. She stared at him, knowing she shouldn't with her guard there. She didn't even know if Ryethen knew that she had had a lover. His words to her that morning made her think he knew nothing about her current life before he sent the message to her father.

He glanced at her friend. "Chyda."

Amaka could not figure out what was happening until Chyda screamed and frantically began brushing at her clothes. She ran wildly around drawing the guard's attention. The next thing Amaka knew her friend ran headlong into the guard, knocking the man over with her landing on top.

Neth grabbed her arm and fairly dragged her off deeper into the woods. Amaka tried pulling away, but his hold was firm. "Neth, what are you doing? That was the poorest way to distract the guard I've ever seen. He's not going to fall for it. And what are you doing here."

He didn't answer for long minutes, as they turned down row after row. Only when her legs felt like they were going to give out and her breath was coming in noisy gasps did they come to stop.

Amaka was about to lean a hand against a tree and then drew back. The bark was even rougher than the one she had come across earlier. She rested her hands on her knees while she waited for her breathing to return to normal. Finally, she faced her former lover. "You have some explaining to do."

"I wanted to see you." He grinned, the light in his eyes making her remember how they deepened when he was in the throws of passion. "You wanted to see me too didn't you?"

"Neth..."

"Don't say it." He shrugged. "I know you said stay away, but how could I? I just feel..." He stopped. "You've had sex with him!"

Her eyes widened. "What?"

"You have," he spat. "You were mine. I made you a woman." He gripped her shoulders in a painful hold. She struggled to free herself.

"Ouch, stop it, Neth." When he didn't lessen his squeeze, Amaka stomped on his instep and punched as hard as she could into his muscled stomach. She felt like she'd broken every bone in her fingers.

Her blows snapped him out of his anger, and he took her hand to stroke it. "I'm sorry, Amaka. I didn't mean it. It just drives me crazy thinking of you in bed with him. I know I have no right, not anymore. He's your husband."

"Yes, my husband!"

He took her face in his hands. "I don't want to hurt you. I love you. I dream of you, every day and every night." He leaned in to kiss her, and as much as she wanted it, she turned her head.

"Neth...please...if you care, just go. Please go," she whispered.

He backed away, dropping his hands to his sides. The pain in his eyes made her feel ill. She wanted to hold him, to lay with him here in this rough world, but it wasn't to be. After a last look, he turned and disappeared into the brush. Only afterward did Amaka realize she had no idea where she was or how to get back to the building where Ryethen would be waiting.

Chapter Seven

“You don’t believe me.”

Ryethen huffed. “I didn’t say I don’t believe you.”

“You didn’t say you do either. Do you think I would make it up?”

He placed the foot he had been messaging back inside the warm water with healing oil added to it. Amaka wriggled her toes while he frowned down at her swollen feet. “Well it’s pretty hard to trust what you’ve said to me when my guard reports a man meeting you in the woods on Zedda, one who then disappeared with you after your friend attacked him.”

Amaka pressed her lips together trying not to laugh. “Chyda didn’t attack him. She got a little carried away when a bug or something jumped on her dress.”

Ryethen gave her a doubtful look, but Amaka stared blankly back at him.

“My prince,” she drew him close tangling her fingers in his hair, “nothing happened. Neth was an old friend and I hadn’t seen him in a while. He traveled to Zedda with Chyda and I was simply happy to see him.”

Her husband pulled her hands from his hair and kissed her palms, then kissed her behind each ear in a way that made her shiver for much more. “Have you noticed, my love, that your color shimmers when you lie to me?”

She gaped.

“You go from a hint of lilac to crimson back to lilac. It is extremely beautiful, especially over your breasts, but still a sharp telltale sign.”

Amaka could not find any words to say in response. Ryethen didn’t seem to need any. He didn’t push the subject further. After a while, she found her voice.

“My prince, I saw children. So small and helpless. They were obviously poor and without proper guardians. Some were ill.” She sniffed, trying not to cry again. “I used my leaves to heal simple wounds and the common snuffle, but I am no expert. An herbalist could be a huge help there. Please talk to the generals.”

Ryethen removed her feet from the water now that the swelling had gone down. He moved silently into the bathroom and put away the basin before returning to lift her further onto the bed.

She lay watching him remove his clothing in preparation of joining her. Even after she had made love with him for hours, her eyes fastened on the man’s form like it was the

first time. She wanted to lick him from top to bottom, to take him into her mouth. He placed one knee on the bed and paused.

“Rye?”

“I have spoken with the generals. They were angry that you left the area without an escort to explore their lands. You were in a restricted area.”

She frowned. “I don’t doubt it!”

“Nevertheless, because you are my wife, you were not charged.”

“Charged!”

“The Zeddans are very strict, very unforgiving. Amaka, you could have caused a war just by that simple act.”

“So you don’t care?” She tried rolling away from him, but he stopped her. His expression told her he wouldn’t accept rejection. Amaka bit down on a rude retort. Whatever lust she felt a moment ago was gone, and if he thought she was spreading her legs for him tonight, he could think again.

“I care. You know I care. But my people come first. Period!” She had never seen him angry before, not really. He was angry now, fiercely so. She didn’t get it. He must be exaggerating about war. The Zeddans had been flashing their presence before the Tyngdorians for years. Nothing would come of it. Ryethen seemed to follow her thoughts.

“The talks did not go well, and frankly I’m surprised that they weren’t more upset by the incident, especially if what you say is true. We have been trying to negotiate a simple trade agreement, our plants for their technology.”

Amaka wrinkled her nose. “Technology.”

He settled beside her, pulled her over to lie on her back when she had rolled away. He placed his hand on her bare stomach. “Yes, technology. Not all is for space travel. There is much we can learn from them. In a few days, the Zeddans will come here to resume our talks. You will stay inside the palace at all times. No meeting with friends.”

Amaka ground her teeth. “What about the Zeddans children?”

“Amaka! I have said I’m working on the plant trade. Don’t you think that the Zeddans will actually use the plant to help their people?”

She crossed her arms. “No, actually, I have heard stories. The Zeddans are not just barbaric; they are opportunistic. They will trade with some other people with our plants, and leave their people to suffer.”

He growled. “I suggest you leave this to me. I will not make accusations without proof. I will not go on hearsay. I will, however, work hard to make changes that benefit our people first, and then hopefully the Zeddans.”

Amaka was so angry, she wanted to smack her husband. She tried again to roll away, but he held her down. “You won’t force me,” she spat.

“I won’t have to.”

“Arrogant...”

He flipped on top of her suddenly and pinned her arms above her head. His body was heavy, and despite her anger, he ignited her desires. If he wasn’t going to force her, then he would try to seduce her, and he would fail miserably!

Ryethen seemed to read her thoughts in her eyes. A grin slowly spread across his face. He lifted his body so that there was about a half foot between them. He looked down and Amaka followed his line of sight. There, thickened with his excitement, was his cock, resting comfortably against her mound. Amaka bit off a moan seeing him ready to slip his length into her.

“Hmm, would you look at that.” He chuckled.

Amaka turned up her nose like she wasn’t interested. Of course her body felt like it would combust at any second. Ryethen didn’t need to know his affect on her.

Ryethen drew back and released her arms. He positioned himself on his knees between her legs. Amaka nearly choked when he began to stroke his long stiff rod with one hand. “No, I would never force you to enjoy this, Amaka,” he told her without looking up from what he was doing. “I feel like I want to be inside your tight pussy every minute of the day, can barely concentrate, but maybe you don’t feel that urgency.”

Her mouth watered. During their last session, the two of them had tasted each other, lapped at each other’s cream. So quickly, Amaka had come to crave more of her husband’s juice. She wanted it now. She wanted to tear his hand away so that she could enjoy stroking him and sucking until he filled her mouth.

“Ah,” she cried.

“Yes, my love?”

The bastard was seducing her. Her libido was as high as his. She wanted to spread her legs and have her lover plunge his cock as far and as hard as he could. Ryethen wasn't the only one to want sex every day, every moment.

Amaka's pussy flowed with her cream, and she hadn't even had an orgasm yet. She frowned. Two could play the game her husband played. She could seduce him just as well.

She slid herself higher on the bed and rested her back on the pillows. With her knees raised, she reached between her legs and began playing with her nether lips. Ryethen froze. Seeing his reaction, she leaned back and closed her eyes. With a moan, Amaka slid one finger into her moist center.

"Oh, yes," she cooed. "So good."

"Amaka!"

She pretended she didn't hear his tormented intake of breath. Amaka slipped in another finger, and then eased the two in and out until her digits were moist and coated with her come. She pulled her fingers free and then rubbed first one nipple and then the other. By the time, she pushed her fingers into her mouth to suck and lick them clean, Ryethen was panting and growling low in his throat. Amaka gave him a wide-eyed look.

"Don't you look at me like that," he growled. "You know exactly what you are doing to me."

She cocked her head to the side. "What's that?"

For an answer, Ryethen closed the space between them to capture her wrist before she could recoat her fingers. He held her arm down at her side with one hand and pulled her closer with the other. When his mouth closed over her nipple, Amaka trembled.

Her climax was sudden and violent. Amaka dug her nails in her husband's arm and whimpered as wave after wave pummeled her body. She sagged against Ryethen as he lifted his head to look down at her. "So? You're not in the mood?"

She gritted her teeth. He was supposed to be at her feet begging to come, not have her coming at the first touch of his tongue. Uttering a resigned sigh, she slid her hands about his neck and ran the tip of her tongue along his rugged jawline.

Their mouths met in hungry kisses. Amaka hoisted herself enough for her husband's cock to glide inside her and she settled down on him. "I give," she muttered against his mouth.

They rocked together until it was Ryethen's turn to come, and Amaka pierced him with a triumphant look. But this was only the beginning. She was hot for more now. The mutual seduction might take all night if necessary, and Amaka was all for it.

Chapter Eight

At the first explosion, Ryethen jerked awake and pulled Amaka tight against him. The foundations of the palace seemed to shake and the windows rattled. A pounding at the door brought him to a sitting position and he lunged for the sheets to cover his wife's naked body.

"Come!" he commanded.

The door opened and his chief advisor slid inside, his face drawn and pale. "Pardon the intrusion, my prince, but the Zeddans are attacking the downtown area."

Amaka screamed, "What?"

Ryethen put her out of his arms and slid naked from the bed. He leaped to the chair beside Amaka's bed and began dressing in the clothes he'd worn the day before. "Is anyone hurt? Have there been demands, or a warning? Call together the guard and evacuate the downtown area." As he issued commands, he buttoned his shirt incorrectly, but ignored it to tuck the shirt in his pants. When he headed toward the door behind his advisor, he called over his shoulder, "Amaka, stay put. I will have guards outside your door to keep you safe. Don't worry."

"Rye—"

He closed the door on her protests. Amaka would argue with him later, but for now he would keep her safe. She was the only woman, or for that matter, the only person who felt no compunctions about speaking her mind with him. He respected her a great deal for her strong opinions, but he couldn't ignore the constant worry about her well-being. This was what it was like to love someone. And he loved Amaka deeply, although he would not admit it to her as yet. Not until she loved him for himself, and not because he was the prince or even because he was her husband. He wanted her to love Ryethen, the man.

By the time Ryethen stepped out of the palace in full armor, the skies above his head were teeming with Zeddian ships. Suddenly, he felt inferior to their race. The Tyngdorians preferred peace and healing. The Zeddans were like showy, spiteful children. He had been foolish to think they would trade without incident.

"My prince." A guard hurried forward on unsteady legs and offered a wobbly bow.

He focused on the man, his uniform torn and the armor over his chest dented. "What happened to you? What is the report?"

"Not good. From what we could find out, the Zeddans did not take the princess' wandering off lightly when she visited their world."

The prince frowned, “You’re telling me that Amaka has caused this?” He had told his wife that she could have been the cause of a major incident, but he didn’t truly mean it. He had only wanted to caution her, to recognize that her actions were critical to peace because of who she was.

“No, my prince. Not entirely.”

“Explain, man!” the advisor standing at Ryethen’s side demanded.

“The princess did make them angry and reluctant to trade, but it was the incident rumored to have been initiated by her former lover that truly set off the innate hatred of the Zeddans.”

Ryethen froze.

The guard continued. “This man, Neth, I believe they call him, was on Zedda the day you and the princess visited there. It has been said that the princess set up an assignation with this man.” Here the guard turned dark purple in embarrassment. Ryethen was pressed not to rip into him. He remained silent and nodded for the man to tell him all.

“When one of the generals found the princess wandering in a restricted area, he was not kind to her. My report says he twisted her arm and when this Neth person saw, he attacked the general and beat him until he was almost dead. The Zeddans saw this as an excuse for war, but they delayed only until their army returned from another part of the galaxy. They had limited guards with ships on their planet until now.”

Ryethen stood with explosions around him, and the air turning dark with ash and smoke. He said nothing for a long while.

“Your orders?” The guard interrupted his reverie.

The prince shook himself. “We fight back. With everything we have, and even if it’s not enough, we fight back.”

* * * *

Ryethen returned late to the palace after fighting alongside his men, to the advisor’s protests. He had secured several of the chief leaders in a location where they would be safe. At such a crucial time, he would not hide away while his people died, whom he had never properly prepared for this possibility.

As he crested a hill in the long walk back to the palace, his heart lodged in his throat at the site. The palace was in ruins. The wing his precious wife had been left in was no more than a pile of rubble.

“Amaka!” he cried and then ran toward his home. *No, please no. Not my heart. Please. Let her be safe.*

He was a fool to think she would be okay, that the Zeddans would leave the palace in peace. Of course they wouldn’t. They were little more than wild animals. Coming on the destruction that tore at his heart, he threw his sword away and began digging through the rocks.

“Help me!” he demanded of the exhausted guards nearby. “Please, my wife. The princess.”

Ryethen and the guards dug for hours, even after a light rain began to fall and the moons hid behind clouds so that they could see nothing for a while. The men dropped one by one. He heard the thud as they hit the ground unconscious. Despair weighed Ryethen, and his wet clothes dragged him down. He would never give up. No matter what.

* * * *

“My prince,” the girl at his side whispered. Her warm breath tickled his ear. He ignored her, but she was persistent. “Come, my prince. We can try again. I’ll stroke you.”

He cringed. “No, I’m sorry. It’s too soon.”

“It’s been a year and a half. You must let her go.”

“Why?” he demanded. “Why must I? Amaka is...was...my wife.” He rolled away from the girl and slipped into his bathrobe. He sighed, seeing the ragged edges, the threadbare spots. “One doesn’t just get over it like you seem to think.”

She sat up, her small breasts bouncing. Ryethen diverted his gaze. She did not appeal to him in the least. Maybe that is why he wouldn’t get his cock hard, because she was so thin, so tall. Amaka had fit snugly beneath his chin. Her soft, plump curves had satisfied him perfectly. His heart wrenched thinking of her again.

“Stop it!” the girl almost yelled. Did she think he was impressed with her standing up to him? She was not Amaka. She didn’t seem to care that he thought she was garish rather than brave and headstrong. “It’s been a year and a half. You must face that fact that she left you for her lover. They ran away, actually seemed to have left our planet in our darkest hour. Neither of them cared one bit that most of our people were killed.”

“Be quiet.” His voice was a pained whisper. He knew the truth but didn’t want to face it. He knew Amaka hadn’t left with her lover, but she did leave all the same. He had dug for hours, not stopping until he dropped like his men. And when he had regained some strength he set about the task again. He only proved that Amaka was not in the palace when it fell. A witness who saw her willingly board a Zaddan craft only ripped his heart out even more. “Maybe she was forced. I could build a craft to find her.”

All semblance of respect the girl had for him left her expression. “Build a craft? We are helpless and hopeless! Our great prince lives in a hovel as the poorest commoner. We have no technology. We are grounded on this planet. All those who had the least inkling of space travel are dead! Do you hear that? Dead! Along with your advisors, except one and we can’t even heal him because they burned our fields. Our precious plants are gone. Do you hear me, my prince? Gone, gone, gone!”

When she finally stopped yelling, tears coated her face. She yanked on her dress and stomped to the rickety door keeping little of the cold air out. “I’m sorry, Prince Ryethen, but you are an empty shell, representative of what we have become. Please, don’t call me to your bed again.” And she was gone.

Chapter Nine

They called her Kardraya, but somehow she didn't believe that was her name. She couldn't remember her name or where she came from. Some nights, when it was coldest in the house she shared with ten other people, mostly children, she dreamed of a man whose face was so familiar, but yet she couldn't place him. When her work was done for the day and the exhaustion didn't make it impossible to think, she tried to remember her past, but the images floating in her mind would not hold still enough to examine.

"Kardraya," one the Zeddan generals called. "Come here. There's a new breakout of the virus."

She sighed and wearily pulled her feet from the water where they dangled over the pier. "Yes, I'll be there. I don't understand this sickness. We had it on Tor—" She stopped. *On Tyngdor*? "How did I know that? I remembered something!"

The general took her arm in a tight grip. "Come on. You need another shot."

"What? No, please." She struggled. "Remembering is good. I want to remember. Please."

The man rounded on her, taking both her arms. He shook her hard, and Kardraya could only focus on the extended spikes she could actually see over his shoulder and extending from his back. They had never been cruel to her, but she suspected they could be. For whatever reason, these people gained satisfaction in knowing she was entirely dependent on them.

"Don't you get it, you stupid woman? You caused the breakout of the virus on your planet. You were instrumental in killing all of them. If we had not rescued you when we did..."

She frowned stubbornly. "Then why do you let me practice medicine here?"

"You only heal the littlest cuts and scrapes, sometimes a sniffle. You think we would trust a murderess?" He shook his head. "No, you are to be kept on the medicine that helps you forget the darkness of your past. My other generals only agreed to letting you know as much as we did because you were driving us all crazy with begging to know. Now just be happy you have not been put to death for your crimes. We are generous to keep you. Do your duty."

She nodded and trudged back to the clinic where she worked with the children all day and all night. A Tyngdorian alone with no one sympathetic to her plight at all.

* * * *

Zeddans left and arrived in their crafts all the time, coming and going to new worlds. When a ship landed, she greeted the passengers to see if there were any who would need her services. This was a welcome respite from the overheated clinic.

Today, a man stepped from the nearest craft who was not Zeddian, yet the Zeddian generals laughed and shook his hand like he was an old friend. She moved closer to hear the greeting.

“Neth, you old traitor. What brings you back this way?” one of the generals asked.

The man, who she was sure was a Tyngdorian seemed to hesitate when he saw her standing there quietly waiting. His gaze drank her in as if he hadn’t seen her in a long time, yet she didn’t recognize him. Finally, he turned back to the general. “Couldn’t stay away from the men who should have been my people. And you’re keeping safe something I’ve been craving for a while.”

The men laughed again and slapped him so hard on the back he coughed. The general who had shaken his hand shoved him toward her. “All the sexy women in the galaxy and you want her? She’s tainted. Not right in the head, but hey I guess her body’s good. Bed her if you want.”

Neth winked. “That I will. That I will.”

He walked toward her, looking like he was forcing himself not to run. The others drifted away, and Neth took her by the arm and guided her in the opposite direction of the buildings. “Is there somewhere we can be alone?” he asked urgently.

She nodded. “Down at the water. You are a Tyngdorian,” she told him.

Neth cast her a curious glance, but said nothing until they were out of eyesight of the others. At the water’s edge, she waited silently, almost too afraid to look up at him. So she hadn’t killed all her people. This one hadn’t been on the planet. Small favors to her guilt.

He tilted up her chin, and she looked into his eyes. No memory sprang to mind. He watched her lips, and instead of speaking he covered them with his own, shoving his tongue into her mouth.

She didn’t fight him. When she had first come, at least she thought it was then, the lead Zeddian general had tried kissing her. She thought he might have forced himself on her if not for one wonderful thing she could thank her creator for. The Tyngdorian mouth and it stood to reason their body, was like a poison to the Zeddans. As soon as the general poked a disgusting and tiny spiked tongue in her mouth, he had drawn back in pain.

Enzymes in the Tyngdorian body repelled the Zeddans and caused them pain. Only their rough palms could touch her without hurting themselves. It was poetic justice she

thought, with such a rough people. If she remembered nothing of her people, some instinct told her they were gentle and placed healing high above other things.

Now this Tyngdorian was kissing her without asking, but she had suffered so much all the fight was gone. If he was all that was left of her people, she would maybe form a bond with him.

Finally, he drew back and then pulled her into his arms to rest his chin on the top of her head. "Amaka," he breathed.

She jerked in his arms. A memory flooded her mind. Amaka was her name, and the man holding her, the man who had been her lover, had betrayed her and her people. She had nothing to do with it! With a battle cry, Amaka ripped herself from his arms, and at the same time, she pulled her garden shears for clipping plants from her dress pocket. She plunged it into his shoulder so hard he went backward and she went with him. They tumbled together over the side of the pier into the water.

Amaka would have swum up to the surface, but Neth grabbed hold of her and dragged her deeper. She fought hard against him, kicking and trying to bite him. Her fight, her will to live had returned and she would not let him kill her like he allowed the Zeddans to kill everyone on Tyngdor.

Neth shook her as much as the depths allowed him to. He wrenched the shears from her fingers and dropped them so that they floated to the bottom of the river. He turned her around and forced her back against him. When he caught her chin in an iron grip, she thought he was going to try covering her mouth, which was ridiculous because she could breathe fine as could he under water.

Instead, he tilted her head to make her look up. A slightly distorted lead general stood on the bank obviously searching the area for her. Now that she remembered everything, she knew that the general had been lying all along. She didn't want to be found.

Amaka allowed Neth to pull her deeper. They sank together to the bottom of the water to wait for nightfall.

Finally after what seemed like a lifetime, the moons rose. Several Zeddans had been back to the river, but never did it occur to them to search the water. The Tyngdorians' secrets were not all laid bare before them. The barbarians could not imagine that the Tyngdorians would elect to go in the river and were able to stay beneath the surface infinitely.

Amaka and Neth rose and climbed up on the pier. When she would have walked away from him, Neth held her. He winced when she jerked at his hold. The water had stopped the blood flow but he was still in pain.

"You should worry about your shoulder and less about me," she snapped. "I forgot for a while, but I remember everything now."

He sneered, just as angry with her. “What do you mean you forgot? You left Tyngdor in shambles. You didn’t look back.”

“That’s a lie!”

“You deny you’re here? Living amongst the enemy while our people were slaughtered? We had nothing to fight against the Zeddans, and you left as soon as I turned my back.”

Amaka nearly attacked him anew, but she had no weapon. “Turned *your* back? You turned your back on me. I told you I didn’t want to be with you, that I would stand by my husband’s side.”

“You what?” He staggered back from her, shocked and then...happy. Amaka wondered if her mind was still not completely healed. Why would he be happy at what she said?

He changed. Right before her eyes, Neth became Ryethen. Amaka gasped. “My prince.”

With tears in his eyes, he stroked her cheek. “My love.”

Chapter Ten

“When? How?” she mumbled.

Ryethen drew her in a hungry kiss. They sank together to the grass, their limbs entangling. Ryethen sucked her bottom lip, then teased her mouth with his tongue. When he drew back, he fumbled with the buttons of her blouse in an effort to reach her breasts. Amaka arched into her husband’s palm, aching for more, *needing* more. He pinched gently at her bared nipple and followed with a swipe of his tongue.

“Ah, take me, please, my prince,” she begged. “I’ve missed you.”

He lifted her wet dress before ripping the button from his pants. In seconds, Ryethen had buried his stiff cock deep inside her channel. A year and a half she had waited to be filled with him. Tears filled her eyes. Amaka wrapped her legs around her husband’s waist and latched on to his buttocks as he drove deep inside her and out again. His rhythm increased until they screamed their climax into each other’s mouths.

“Rye...”

He slowed his stroke but kept himself inside her. Staring so hard, he seemed to be memorizing her, he brushed a strand of wet hair from her forehead. “Amaka, my precious wife, how could you leave me. I needed you desperately. I need you now.”

His words angered her, but she couldn’t push him away if she tried. She needed him as much as he needed her. “I didn’t leave you.”

“My reports...”

“Were lies.” She touched the side of her head feeling a dull ache at accessing memories that had been buried in amnesia just a short while ago. “Neth came to the castle the day the war broke out. He wanted me to go away with him, said he had made arrangements.”

Ryethen pulled out of her and Amaka groaned. He sat up and pulled her onto his lap. “Go on.”

“I told him point blank that I didn’t want to go with him, that I had come to love you and I wanted our marriage to work.”

She saw his eyes grow wide and smiled. “Yes, I love you, Rye. I couldn’t help it. You are such a good person. Even when you made me angry with your thinking I was too fragile to breathe, I still loved you.”

He kissed her and tightened his hold. “I love you, too. This time away from you, thinking at first that you had left me for him. I-I tried being with someone else.”

Amaka would have moved from his lap, but he held her in place.

He licked her ear and nibbled on her lobe before saying, "I could not get myself to perform. Tell me you weren't intimate with anyone else. Just lie to me."

Relief flooded her at his words. "Don't worry. More than one of the generals tried." She laughed at his horrified expression. "Who knew we are poisonous to them. The lead general actually threw up and turned a very hideous color I cannot even describe."

Ryethen blinked. "Amazing."

Amaka slid around to face away from him. She pressed down on his thighs to lift her hips so that she could come down on his cock. His erection slid to all the way up to her cervix and she gasped. Arching her back, she rode him, loving the smacking sound and the friction they created.

"Amaka." Ryethen grunted. "You're supposed to be telling me what happened."

"In a minute. Oh, fill me up, Rye. Come in me."

He gripped her waist, pushed forward so that they were on their knees in the grass, and then he pummeled hard inside her. Amaka screamed. Her excitement encouraged him all the more. Ryethen reached around to her nub and pinched it. A shudder rocked her. She would have fallen if he didn't hold on. He pinched again and tugged gently. Amaka tore up the grass closed in her fingers. Her climax slammed her so hard, her arms gave out. She rested the side of her face on the ground while she wiggled her rear for her husband. Soon he followed in his explosion, almost howling into the night.

Her husband settled her on her side, and Amaka lay still, trying to recover her breath. She murmured her comfort and pleasure when Ryethen stroked her rear and gently massaged the backs of her thighs. "Rye, we're supposed to be catching up."

He grinned, she saw through eyes that were opened only as much as a slit. "We are."

Ryethen pushed one of her legs up so that her pussy was exposed to him. He bent down and scooped her juices and his mixed from her moist center and then he lathered her rear hole with his tongue. Amaka's heart kicked back into high gear when her husband began licking her tight opening while squeezing her rounded cheeks.

"Rye, ah, that's so good," she gasped. "What are you doing? We should go..."

He paused, "Right after I lick up every drop from your pussy and make you come again just eating your ass."

At his dirty words, Amaka climaxed. She bucked and writhed, whimpering. Ryethen blew on her wet openings and she cried with pleasure.

“That, my love, doesn’t count,” he told her. “You must come again for me. And he started his sweet torture on her rear until Amaka screamed and came three times back-to-back before he let her rest.

Finally, he dropped down behind her and spooned her body with his own. Amaka trembled in his hold. She wondered if her body would ever recover. “How did I possibly survive this long without that!” she demanded.

He laughed. “I don’t know how I did. I’m as hard as a rock, and I could make love to you for the rest of the night. But you are right. We must make our plans for escape from this place. Amaka, I’m so glad I found you. I love you so much.”

“And I love you just the same,” she whispered before dozing off to sleep.

Chapter Eleven

Amaka watched as her husband cut pieces of the black plant from its rough bark. “I’m not sure this will work, Rye. They’ll know you didn’t beat me.”

He glanced up. “And how will they know that? My love, I will shift to look like Neth and you will have what looks like bruises on your face, arms and legs. You said yourself that Neth left you here when you admitted to loving me. It was his revenge. They saw his true colors that day he left you, and if he wasn’t dead—”

She gasped. “Rye? What were you about to say? Dead? Neth is dead?” She swallowed the lump in her throat. “Did you kill him?”

He dropped the plant in the basket she had supplied him with and stood. “Yes, my love. Neth is dead. But I didn’t kill him. As far as I can piece together from what you’ve told me, Neth forced you on that ship with him. He left a convenient witness that would say you went willingly. But before the ship the two of you were on made it out of orbit, our people disabled it by shooting small rockets at it.” He shook his head in disgust. “They were little more than homemade toys, but they did tear a hole in the hull. I had no idea you or any of our people were on it.”

Amaka nodded. “Yes, that’s when I hit my head, and I was out for a long time. Neth left me here and the generals set me up as a nurse for the children. I didn’t resent that, just that he claimed to have loved me and then punished me for not loving him back. What happened to him? I can’t say it doesn’t make me sad to hear he’s gone, but he got what he deserved too.”

Ryethen pulled her to her feet and held her against him before he spoke again. “The Zeddans could not resist finally landing on Tor again to rub our noses in our defeat. They were only too eager to tell me of Neth’s exploits all over the galaxy, but funny enough you were left out of the conversation.

“Neth had cheated and used more than his own people. And one day, he crossed the wrong ones. I kept that information to myself, although I couldn’t imagine what it would do for me. At some point, I found the strength to crawl out of my hovel and execute my own revenge.”

Amaka’s eyes widened. “Hovel?”

He nodded. “Yes, the palace had been destroyed just after you left, and most of our people are gone.”

A tear slid down her face. “The generals said everyone was dead.”

“No!” He sighed, staring at the ground. “Most. My love, your parents...”

Amaka's knees gave out, and Ryethen caught her. He held her for a long time while she cried for the loss of the last of her family, and she wasn't even there to say goodbye. Nor would she ever learn what it was that killed her brother and was killing her mother.

After she cried out her sorrow, Ryethen spoke again. "We will rebuild. And now that I have you again, I will motivate the people to multiply and grow. This time, we will not pass over technology. We will arm ourselves, and prepare. There are a people who I believe hate the Zeddans as much as we do. I will form an alliance."

She watched him silently, amazed that in so many ways the prince was the same, but she saw that living in squalor had benefited him. He was not so arrogant, so aloof.

He took her hands and kissed them. "My love, I want you at my side, helping me with negotiations when the time comes. You will be my right hand advisor."

Ryethen had definitely changed. "Do you mean that, Rye? I will support you in whatever capacity you want. I don't ever want us to argue again."

He laughed. "Oh I'm sure we'll argue. But yes, I mean it. We must be a team and be completely honest with one another. Together we'll help our people grow strong again. Now, come, we have a show to put on."

Amaka hesitated. "Rye, you weren't Neth all the time were you?"

The shock on his face told her the truth. "Of course not, my love. I would never leave you here. I would never have let you out of my sight. I know where his body is buried, and I will be glad to take you there with the Zeddans ship I and my men stole."

"No, that won't be necessary. I trust you, and I am finished with Neth forever. I love Ryethen, Prince of Tyngdor."

"And he loves you."

* * * *

Four months had passed and finally Amaka was going home. She had happily followed Ryethen it seemed all over the galaxy, but they had succeeded in becoming allies with one of the most powerful people around. The Zeddans would think twice about attacking or even visiting unannounced on Tyngdor.

"I'm so excited, Rye. I can't wait to see Chyda. She must have thought I was a horrible person, or that I was dead." Amaka worried her lip as she peered out the small square window at the side of the craft. They were just passing into Tyngdor's atmosphere.

All of Amaka's life, she had no wish to travel in space, and she was desperate to see home again. But space was a mystery she would not mind exploring now that she had seen it for herself.

Ryethen took her hand in his. "Welcome home, my love. You will find it much different, and it will break your heart. And Chyda is different also."

Amaka froze. "She wasn't hurt was she? I'll use all the medicines I have to help her. I've learned a lot over the months I was away caring for the Zeddan children."

He smiled. "Not like that. She married. Even in the midst of the death and destruction, your friend found love, and from the looks of them, they are very happy. Chyda has twins on the way."

Amaka gasped. "You're kidding! Oh!" She blushed and stared down at her hands she now clenched in her lap. With effort, she tried not to cry.

Ryethen pulled her from her seat and settled her on his lap. "What's wrong? Tell me. I can see something has upset you."

She couldn't help it. She burst out crying and buried her face in his shoulder. Ryethen stroked her back for a long time without pushing her to speak. When she was calmer, Amaka accepted the cloth he handed her to wipe her face before she spoke. "I've been willing myself to get pregnant, but no matter what, nothing."

Her husband sighed. "Didn't we promise each other we would talk about everything? I wish you would have talked to me about a family, my love. I didn't want to rush you. I wanted you to come to a comfortable place where you felt you were whole again after your ordeal. Another little gift I have is controlling my seed's potency. You will not get pregnant until I will it."

"What? I've been upset all this time for nothing?"

He nodded, and she frowned.

"Well just when am I allowed to have a baby, *my prince*?"

He flicked an eyebrow up at the rudeness in her tone, but didn't complain. "Well, I think we can swing around the planet a few times while you and I enjoy some time in our room. His lecherous grin said it all, and the two of them raced along the hall for the room they shared. Amaka hoped the craft had plenty of fuel, for she had no intentions of letting her husband up from their bed for a long long while.

The End