



Changeling Press

VAADEN CAPTIVES

Sorchha

Jessica Coulter Smith

Vaaden Captives 1: Sorchu

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A sex slave on another planet, Sorch does the unthinkable -- she falls in love with her owner's brother.

Captured on Earth and transported to Vaaden, a planet in another galaxy, Sorch Richards awakens to a nightmare -- or is it more of a fantasy? As a captive, she has no choice but to follow the rules on Vaaden -- choose a male to serve, or face prostitution. For Sorch, the answer is an easy one, but when she finds out the male she has chosen is married, things become complicated. While Vaaden men might not be faithful to their spouses, Sorch believes in fidelity. Knowing she's the other woman hurts.

Thale chose Sorch for her sexual allure as a beautiful human female, even if she's inexperienced in the ways of men. But when his brother, Valen, is introduced to her, Sorch only has eyes for him.

Chapter One

I woke to a pounding in my head and found it hard to open my eyes. I remembered screaming about Earth's invasion, but after that, everything was a blur. I discovered I had been lying on a blanket on a cold, hard stone floor. I surveyed my surroundings. A pot sat in the corner and I winced, realizing its purpose. Bars ran the length of what I had determined was a prison cell. Two other women occupied the space with me, a small redhead, and a tall blonde who had a hard and calculating look in her eye.

"Where are we?" I asked as I pushed myself to my feet.

"Vaaden." The blonde looked me over and then promptly dismissed me.

"Vaaden? Where's that?"

The redhead looked at me before answering. "In another galaxy. From what we've heard from the guards, it's a planet made up mostly of men."

"You can understand them?"

The redhead nodded. "They speak our language, or have a way of making it sound like they do."

I shivered and wrapped my arms around myself. Looking down, I frowned at my attire. Instead of the jeans and tee I had been wearing at the time of my capture, I now wore a short cotton dress; although there was so little material it was more of a shirt.

The redhead, seeming to read my mind, said, "While we were unconscious, they changed us out of our clothes and into these dresses."

"What are they going to do with us?"

"You'll see soon enough," the blonde answered.

"I'm Sorch. What are your names?" I thought talking might help keep my fear at bay.

"I'm Enid," the redhead responded.

"Susan," was the terse response from the blonde.

"Susan, what did you mean we would see soon enough? Do you know what they have planned for us?"

"While the two of you were sleeping, I listened to the guards speaking with the women across the way." She gave me a cruel smile. "They made them strip and then looked them over like cattle. Some are being forced into prostitution."

"What?" I stared at her, stunned by her words. How could she remain so calm about it? Terror gripped me and my insides turned to ice.

"It seems the men on this planet are very virile and need to have sex on a daily basis. The few mates they have can't handle it, so the men go elsewhere for their entertainment."

"Do we have any other options?"

She shrugged a shoulder. "If you're lucky, one of the males will want you to himself. Either way, you're going to spend the rest of your life on your back."

I fought down the nausea that welled inside me. The idea of being someone's whore revolted me. I'd dated precious few men in my life, and none had sparked enough of my interest for me to have a sexual relationship with them. Yes, at the age of twenty-three I was still a virgin. To know I would lose my virginity to a savage from another planet, that I would no longer have any say over my life, was a blow to my mind and my heart.

Enid whimpered. "I won't survive."

I hunkered down beside her. "Yes, you will. We all will, even if it isn't a pleasant existence."

She shook her head. "You don't understand. I can't stand to be touched."

The fear in her eyes suddenly made sense. She knew what was to come, what we faced. If she couldn't stand to be touched, it was possible she would die at the hands of

our captors. I doubted they would be caring enough to soothe her fears and ease her mind. The monsters would probably take what they wanted no matter the consequence to the young woman.

"Maybe they'll understand," I offered, knowing it was a lie. I wasn't sure what would become of her, but I knew it wouldn't be pleasant.

A metal door clanged open at the end of the hall and heavy footfalls sounded down the corridor. A guard with three men stopped in front of our cell. The men looked us over, as if deciding whether we were worth their time.

The tallest of the group had shaggy golden brown hair and turquoise eyes, an athletic build and golden brown skin, as if he had been working in the sun. On Earth, he would have passed for a model or actor. The second man was a little shorter but just as fit, with chocolate-colored hair and eyes the brilliant orange of a sunset. The last man left me feeling cold. Tall with a swimmer's build, his long black hair and violet eyes were striking, but he had a hardness to him that bespoke of cruelty. I fervently hoped he didn't select Enid, but I didn't want him to select me either. Honestly, I didn't want any of them; I just wanted to go home.

The guard opened the cell and gestured for us to line up along the back wall. The chocolate-haired man followed him, eyeing each of us from our head to our toes. When he stopped in front of Susan, he leered at her and reached out to fondle her breasts. Appearing to be satisfied, he shoved her to her knees and unfastened his pants. His thick, hard cock sprang free. "Suck me," he commanded.

Licking her lips, Susan did as he bade without the slightest hesitation. In appalled fascination, I saw her mouth move over him, heard the sounds of her sucking and licking him. He grabbed a handful of her hair and forced himself further into her mouth. I was unable to tear my eyes away as he ejaculated and told her to swallow every drop. Even more horrifying, she seemed to enjoy it.

Lowering my head, I gazed at the floor. Was that what would be expected of me? My heart was beating wildly in my chest and bile rose up in my throat. While Susan hadn't seemed to mind the act, I wasn't sure it was something I would be able to do.

The man refastened his pants and helped Susan to her feet. Grasping her arm, he faced the guard. "This one is mine."

The guard turned his attention to Susan. "Is that what you want? Or would you prefer a life serving many?"

"I'll go with him."

The guard nodded and motioned for them to leave the cell. Next, he allowed the black-haired man to enter. He stopped in front of me first, but dismissed me quickly enough. Stopping in front of Enid, he reached out to touch her red hair. When she recoiled, he stopped and his hand dropped back to his side.

"Why do you flinch away from me?" he asked in his cool, clipped voice.

She stared at him with frightened eyes and opened her mouth, but fear kept her from responding.

"She doesn't like to be touched, by anyone," I answered softly, hoping he wouldn't punish her for keeping silent or me for speaking out of turn.

The man's gaze never strayed from her face. Slowly, he moved closer, watching as her chest began to rise and fall rapidly and the color seeped from her face. When she fainted, he caught her in his arms. "I'm taking this one," he told the guard and headed for the door with long strides.

"Bastian, you know you're supposed to give her a choice."

He gave the guard a cold look. "She fainted when I was still inches away from her. How do you think she'd react in a room full of men?"

The guard let them leave without another comment, obviously deciding Bastian was the lesser of two evils. For Enid's sake, I hoped he was right.

I was the only prisoner left, and there was only one man.

"Thale, you'll have to take this one or wait until next week to see some others. Assuming she wants to go with you."

The man called Thale stepped into the small space, stopping when he was a mere inch from me. With gentle hands, he traced the contours of my face and neck. Gripping my dress, he ripped it in half, exposing me.

I gasped and tried to cover myself, but to no avail. He pushed my hands out of the way and spread the dress open. As his warm hands caressed my breasts, I felt my nipples harden. I was embarrassed that my body responded to him when my mind was screaming for him to stop.

He fingered my long dark hair. There was something in the turquoise depths of his eyes I didn't quite understand, but I had a feeling I would soon. Whether I wanted to go with him or not, I knew the other option wasn't possible for me.

"I'll take her."

The guard looked at me expectantly and I knew he wanted my confirmation.

"Yes, I'll go with him."

Thale swung me into his arms and carried me from the cell. With long, determined strides, he carried me from the prison and out into the light.

I closed my eyes, the brightness of their planet's two suns too much for me after being in the darkness of the prison. Trying to force myself to relax, I laid my head on his shoulder. It was better to accept my fate than to fight.

Chapter Two

We entered Thale's home and he carried me to his bedroom. Setting me gently on my feet, he turned to a set of double doors. They slid open revealing a neatly organized closet.

He selected a knit shirt and handed it to me. "This should work until I can get you something else to wear."

My face flamed in embarrassment. *If you hadn't ripped my dress, I wouldn't need something else.* I knew voicing my opinion out loud wouldn't end well, but I figured making snarky remarks in my head was okay.

Accepting the shirt, I slipped it over my head, removing the tattered dress in the process. Sufficiently covered, I stood awkwardly, not knowing what he wanted from me. My eyes strayed to the bed, a large round thing that dominated the middle of the room. I hadn't seen anything quite like it before, but it looked comfortable. Would he expect me to share it with him? Or, as a slave, would I sleep elsewhere?

The floor under my feet was soft, but the material was foreign to me, something between carpet and fur. I noticed a beveled mirror on one wall, running from ceiling to floor. Upon closer inspection, I realized it was part of the wall and not hanging on it. Another metal door was off to the side and I wondered if it was to the bathroom.

Thale noticed my line of sight and smiled. "Would you like to clean up a little?"

I nodded and waited.

He walked over to the door and pressed a hand to its surface. The door whooshed open, disappearing into the wall much the same as the closet doors had. Inside, everything was a bright white. To the right was an open area with jets both above and below. I assumed it was some sort of shower and watched as Thale placed

his hand over a small knob, and water began to stream from the jets. "You can get in; the water comes out nice and warm." He nodded toward the shower.

I realized he wasn't leaving and assumed he was going to watch while I undressed and bathed. With shaking hands and a flaming face, I removed the shirt I had donned just moments before and stepped into the watery paradise.

Closing my eyes, I tried not to think of the man watching me. I let the water stream over my hair and face, trickle down my body; I let it soothe my shattered nerves. So much had changed in such a small amount of time. The life I knew was gone, and now I found myself living a new one, a life in which I was no more than a captive, a slave to the whims of the man who had claimed me.

I shrieked when I felt hands on my arms and looked up into Thale's face. He had stripped out of his clothes and had joined me in the shower. A quick look had my face flaming, as his hard cock was difficult to ignore.

"Shh, easy," he whispered. "I'm not going to hurt you."

I tried to keep myself still and calm as his hands brushed over my skin. From a fount built into the wall, he acquired soap, and then proceeded to lather my body. Again, my nipples responded to his touch, much to my mortification. I didn't want to desire him, didn't want him to touch me, and yet my body called me a liar. He was handsome, I'd give him that, but was he kind? I guessed I would find out soon enough.

He bent his head to my neck and gently kissed the skin under my ear. Trailing kisses along my jaw, he finally claimed my lips with his.

Whatever I had expected, this wasn't it. His lips were firm but gentle as they caressed mine, coaxing me to join him. Tentatively, I kissed him back.

"You taste so sweet," he murmured against my lips.

I lost myself to the heady sensations of his lips and his hands, but reality came crashing back down when I felt his cock brush against me. Panic set in as I realized what he intended.

"Wait."

He stopped and looked at me in surprise. "Wait?"

"I... there's something I need to tell you."

His eyes narrowed. "Are you diseased? Will I catch something if I mate with you?"

I shook my head.

"Then there is nothing to stop me."

I felt him slowly begin to press into me and I whimpered. When he slid into me with one long thrust, I cried out and felt tears sting my eyes. I'd heard that it could hurt the first time, but I hadn't understood how much. I forced myself to stay still, hoping the discomfort and pain would go away.

Thale stared down at me in surprise. "You were an innocent?"

Silently crying, I nodded. I burned and hurt, and wished he would stop. I wished that I could return to my home, but I knew that would never happen.

"Is that what you were trying to tell me?" he asked softly, stroking me with gentle hands.

"Yes."

He caressed my cheek. "I'm sorry I didn't listen. I never meant to hurt you."

Slowly, he slid from my body, only to ease back in. He continued his slow, steady rhythm until the pain faded and pleasure returned. It didn't take long before I lost myself again, his touch consuming me, revealing a woman I hadn't known existed. His hands caressed my breasts, teasing my nipples as his cock slid in and out of my pussy, creating wonderful sensations I'd never experienced before.

As he possessed my body, his softly murmured words of comfort made me want to relinquish much more to him. As liquid fire scorched my veins, I felt myself spinning out of control. Thale thrust into me again, deeper and harder than before and I shattered, crying out as my orgasm tore through me, leaving me spent.

He held me against the wall and continued to thrust into my body. Abruptly, he stopped and slid from me. "Turn around."

On shaky legs, I did as he commanded, bracing my hands on the wall. His hands circled my waist and he entered me again, hands cupping my breasts. I gasped. I was a

little sore, but my body didn't seem to care. It responded to his expert touch, sensation sweeping through me. I felt him plunge into me again and again, his hands caressing my skin as if it were delicate silk. Throwing back my head, I called out his name. A wave of ecstasy came crashing through me, leaving me shuddering and shaking in his arms. As my tremors subsided, he thrust into me to the hilt and I felt the warm rush of his release.

After helping me rinse, he turned the water off and lifted me into his arms. Carrying me as if I were precious cargo, he gently laid me on the bed, drawing the blanket over me. "Sleep now. You've had a rough day."

He smiled at me, displaying even white teeth, his turquoise eyes lighting up. Obviously, he was pleased with me, and I took that as a good sign.

I murmured something as my eyes drifted closed and I tumbled into a dreamless sleep.

Chapter Three

I awoke later to the sound of male voices. Feeling disoriented I looked around at the foreign room, before focusing on the two men standing in an adjoining chamber.

I recognized Thale immediately. The man arguing with him was just as tall, a little broader, and had the same sparkling eyes. His hair, however, was more of a honey color and longer. Why were they arguing?

Thale gestured toward me and glanced my way. When he noticed I was awake, he smiled and stepped into the room. "It's nice to see you awake, little one."

"I hope I didn't sleep too long."

He shook his head. "My brother has just stopped by and I wanted the two of you to meet."

I started to get out of the bed, but remembered I didn't have clothes on. A furious blush stole across my cheeks and I turned my head away.

Thale chuckled. "You don't have to hide from Valen."

Reaching for the covers, he pulled them back and brought me to my feet. As if displaying a naked woman in his house was an everyday occurrence, he proceeded to make the introductions. "Valen, this is the slave woman I picked up today." He frowned at me. "What's your name?"

I nearly strangled on a laugh. The man had slept with me, taken my virginity, yet he had no idea who I was. It was priceless. "Sorcha."

He nodded. "Valen, this is Sorcha."

Valen's cool gaze raked over me before returning to his brother. "A slave? Was that really necessary?"

"As if my wife would be enough to take care of my needs," he snorted.

Wait a minute. Wife? My eyes grew huge. It hadn't crossed my mind that my owner would be married. It made me feel wretched, knowing I had slept with another woman's spouse. I knew things were different here, but it was difficult to absorb.

Valen's gaze returned to me, thoughtful. "You didn't tell her you were married, did you?"

Thale shrugged. "What does it matter?"

Valen nodded toward me. "She seems surprised and not the least bit happy about it."

Thale looked at me with a frown. He studied me a moment, then turned back to his brother. "Why should I care if she's happy about my wife? She's a slave."

Valen sighed and stepped closer, his finger stroking gently down my cheek. "It seems my brother still sees women as property." He gave me an apologetic smile.

Thale gave a bark of laughter. "She *is* property, you idiot. She's a slave."

"She's a woman," Valen argued.

I shivered, both from the cold and the thought of these two arguing over me. No good would come of it, of that, I was certain. But how would I stop them? Thale was correct. Whether I liked it or not, I was his property. No amount of screaming or fighting him would change that. I had no rights, and no reason to be upset about his marriage. It didn't stop me from feeling that way, but I couldn't very well voice my opinion.

Valen noticed my chilled skin and pulled the blanket from the bed. Draping it around me, he gave me a kind, understanding look.

Thale watched us closely before narrowing his eyes at his brother. "Don't you have somewhere to be right about now? Aren't you paying court to Maia?"

Valen grimaced. "Only at your urging. Honestly, I can't stand the woman."

"You know you need to marry soon."

"Yes, but I will choose my own wife. I'll go have dinner with her and her family tonight, but it will be the last time."

"I don't understand you, Valen. Maia is beautiful and would be a wonderful wife and mother to your children."

"I want something more. I don't expect you to understand, how could you? Your wife is the ice princess Staisha, both feared and loved throughout Vaaden."

"My wife may be a bit cool to most, but at least she's a proper wife."

"So when is your proper wife going to make me an uncle? You won't have legitimate children by bedding your slave."

Thale cursed at him before grabbing his arm and dragging him to the door. "I'll thank you to mind your own damn business."

Valen grinned at me and gave me a half bow. "It was delightful to meet you, Sorch. Perhaps we'll meet again soon."

"Not likely," Thale grumbled as he shoved his brother out the door.

As he walked toward me, his eyes burned into me. Even clothed, I could tell he desired me and would bed me again. If I hadn't known about his wife, it might have excited me. Instead, I tensed, waiting for the inevitable.

"Alone at last," he said with a smile.

"What is it you want with me?"

He tugged on the blanket, dropping it on the floor. "What do you think?"

I swallowed and stared up at him, feeling uncertain. What had I gotten myself into? What he was asking of me went against everything I believed in. I had saved my virginity for someone special, and instead the handsome stranger took it from me. Granted, it had been pleasurable once my body had adjusted, but now... how could I give myself to him knowing he was married? "Thale, I..."

His face softened a moment. "Are you still sore?"

Thankful he had given me an out I nodded and dropped my gaze to the floor. There was no reason for him to see the relief in my eyes. It was better for him to believe I just needed a respite instead of thinking I didn't want him.

He pulled me close and wrapped his arms around me, causing my heart to thump wildly. "I'll let you rest tonight."

Pressing a kiss to my hair, he released me and smiled. He walked to the bathroom and picked up the shirt he had given me previously. Handing it to me, he watched as I put it on. "I'm sure you're hungry. My brother brought something over if you're ready to eat now."

I smiled and nodded, interested in the type of food Vaaden had to offer.

I followed him into the other room and was surprised that his table was similar to a Chinese tea table. Sitting down beside it, I waited, not knowing what I should or should not do. Did he expect me to serve him? Or did I wait?

Opening the large containers, Thale served our food. Instead of the forks and spoons used on Earth, he handed me something long and flat. I stared at it, puzzled, and watched as he scooped his food onto it. Following his example, I tried some of the meat. The spices were unfamiliar to me, but not unpleasant.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

"Very much."

He smiled and watched as I slowly ate every morsel on my plate.

Once I was full, I found that I was tired again. Trying to stifle a yawn, I looked at him apologetically.

"It seems you still need more rest." Rising to his feet, he held his hand out to me. "Come on, we'll head to bed."

I grasped his hand and let him pull me to my feet before following him into the bedroom. I was surprised when he stripped the shirt off me, and couldn't stop the gasp that slipped between my lips.

"It's all right, Sorcha. I know you're sore. I just want to feel you beside me while we sleep."

"You aren't going to sleep with your wife?" Some small part of me had hoped he would leave, even if it meant I was alone in a strange place.

He shook his head. "I'll go to her tomorrow, but tonight is your night."

"My night?" Surely, he didn't mean...

He nodded. "I'll stay with you tonight, and then visit my wife for two days. During that time, I'll have my brother stay with you. It isn't safe for you to be left unprotected."

I snapped my mouth shut and crawled into bed. When he settled himself behind me and draped an arm over my waist, I stiffened.

"Easy, relax."

I tried to obey, but his words wouldn't leave my mind. He meant to visit me, for the express purpose of slaking his lust, every few nights? It was a nightmare! And yet, I found myself relaxing as he had said, my body responding to his. It was embarrassing to say the least. One day as a slave and I already had lost my ability to think for myself. This didn't bode well.

Chapter Four

In the morning, I discovered the bed was empty. Staring around with blurry eyes, I saw a man in the next room. My body went on alert, but I remembered Thale was leaving his brother to watch over me.

I grabbed the shirt off the floor and donned it quickly. Quietly padding out of the room, I smiled when I saw Valen reading what appeared to be a newspaper of sorts. It was nice to know that some of the men on Vaaden were similar to men on Earth.

I walked toward him and sank onto the chair next to his. "Good morning," I said softly.

Surprised, he set the paper down. "Good morning, Sorcha. Did you sleep well?"

His eyes seemed to be asking so much more, and I blushed. "Yes, thank you."

"My brother wasn't..." He blew out an exasperated breath. "He wasn't too rough was he?"

My blush deepened and I shook my head. "It hurt the first time, but he left me to rest last night."

His jaw clenched. "He hurt you?"

I looked away. "It was unavoidable."

He looked perplexed for a moment, and then his expression cleared before quickly turning to one of horror. "Do you mean to tell me he was your first?"

I nodded, still unable to look him in the eye. I don't know why I felt embarrassed over my situation; it wasn't like I had any control over my life. But for some reason, I wanted Valen to think well of me.

Valen fisted his hands and looked fierce. I knew he wasn't angry with me, but it still made me a little nervous. I'd heard the Vaaden men were lustful, and I wondered if that meant they could also be cruel, letting their anger run away from them.

"I'm okay," I assured him, hoping he would drop the subject.

He studied me, as if memorizing my every feature, before nodding. "If you say you're all right, I'll believe you. But I don't like what my brother has done to you."

"If he hadn't chosen me, I would have been forced into prostitution." I could tell he didn't understand. Maybe they didn't call it that here. "They would have made me sleep with anyone who came along and I wouldn't have had any say in the matter," I explained.

"Things are not done that way on your planet?"

I shook my head. "Some women choose that profession, or it chooses them. But for the most part, we try to find someone who makes us happy, someone we can love and we get married, raise families... is that not how things are done here?"

"No. I don't know anyone who has married for love. Here, the wives are chosen based on looks and breeding."

"Sounds horrible."

He grinned. "It is. My brother is trying to force me into such a marriage, but I refuse. He doesn't understand."

"Why have you refused if she's beautiful?"

"Because I want more."

Now it was my turn to be surprised. He had mentioned as much yesterday, but I hadn't thought anything of it. "You want love?"

"Yes, I suppose I do. Very unfashionable of me, but there it is."

"It's not unfashionable to me."

We stared into one another's eyes for a moment before he broke contact. He was an attractive man, one who held similar beliefs to mine. Being around him for two days wouldn't be easy. I had a feeling if I was going to lose my heart while living on Vaaden, it would be to the man sitting next to me.

"What about slaves?" I blurted out. "Do you have any?"

He shook his head. "I visit the public harems when I feel the need, but I don't keep anyone."

"Will you still do that after you're married?"

"I don't want to, but it's impossible to stay faithful to a Vaaden woman. A Vaaden male has insatiable needs and our women aren't built to withstand such attention. You aren't the first women we've abducted. Slavery has been part of Vaaden for longer than I've been alive."

"But if your wife could, would you be faithful?"

"Yes."

After a moment, I swallowed down the knot of pain in my throat. Why couldn't I be with Valen? It seemed we were perfectly suited to one another. I knew I could never come to care for Thale, but Valen was another matter. "You're very different from your brother."

"I'm sorry this was done to you, Sorchia. I'm sorry you were brought here, and sorry that Thale is the one who claimed you."

"Would you have claimed me?" I wanted to curse the moment the words left my mouth. Why had I asked such a question?

"I never visit the prisons so I wouldn't have seen you." He paused. "But if I had, I doubt I could have left you there."

It wasn't the answer I wanted, but it would do. Although, I don't know why I was flirting with disaster. I belonged to Thale and would remain his until he tired of me; the thought led my mind down another path, one that was terrifying. "Where do the slave women go when the men no longer want them?"

His fingers caressed my hair. "I won't let that happen to you. You have my word."

I closed my eyes and nodded, a tear slipping down my cheek. His kindness was unexpected, but so very welcome.

Clearing his throat, he stood. "I think I should find you something to wear. You can't run around in my brother's shirt all day."

"I'd like that."

"I'll return shortly."

Panic seized me. "But... Thale said it was dangerous for me to be left alone."

"Yes, but not as dangerous as taking you out in that," he said, pointing to the shirt. "If a Vaaden male was feeling lustful and saw you dressed in such a way, he could abduct you and I doubt you would survive the encounter."

Horried, I simply stared at him. These people were downright barbaric! And here I'd thought people from other planets were supposed to be more intelligent than humans!

He knelt before me and cupped my cheek. "I promise I won't be long. I'll even engage the special lock Thale had installed. It will only open for him or me."

"Please hurry."

He nodded and was out the door before I could change my mind.

* * *

It took Valen longer to obtain clothing than he had said and as the hours ticked by, I became more and more nervous. Several times, someone had pounded on the door, demanding entrance. I had huddled in a corner the first few times, terrified of making a sound. Now, I just glared at the door and cursed Thale's brother under my breath.

Finally, the door opened and Valen hurried in, shutting and locking it behind him.

"Where have you been?" I demanded, and then winced as I realized I sounded like an angry wife and not a slave.

"It took longer than expected, but I think you'll like what I found."

Setting a cloth bag on the table, he withdrew dresses in lavender, emerald, and aqua. The material was soft like silk and shimmered. I stared at them in fascination, never having seen anything so exquisite.

"They're beautiful," I murmured. My eyes rose to meet his. "Do all slave women wear these?"

He looked away. "No."

My hand dropped to my side. "Then who wears dresses like these?"

“Vaaden women.”

I backed away. “I can’t accept them, Valen.”

His eyes narrowed at me and he strode forward. Grasping the hem of my shirt, he lifted it over my head and tossed it into a corner. Not letting his gaze leave mine, he reached over, grabbed the dress on top and slipped it over my head.

I sighed as the soft material glided over my body; my eyes closed from the sheer pleasure of it. “It’s lovely, Valen, but truly... I can’t accept it. What will Thale say when he sees me wearing something his wife would wear?”

“I’ll handle my brother.” There was a steely look in his eyes that brooked no argument.

I hesitated a moment more and then gave in. If Thale was going to be angry with someone, surely it would be Valen. And besides, the dress was too lovely and felt heavenly. I didn’t want to part with it.

Chapter Five

Later that night, nightmares interrupted my sleep and I woke screaming. Valen came running from the other room and wrapped his arms around me, trying to comfort me. "Shhh, Sorcha, everything is fine. It was just a dream."

I whimpered and burrowed into him, needing his strength, not remembering that I slept naked. His hand stroked down my back as he murmured words of comfort in my ear.

"Please don't leave me, Valen."

He pulled back to look into my eyes. "Sorcha, I don't think I should..."

"Please." I took a shaky breath. "I remember your Vaaden warriors coming to my planet. Everything I had forgotten after that I remembered in my dreams." The rough treatment, leering faces, roaming hands... I remembered it all, every last detail the subconscious part of my brain had buried.

His arms tightened around me and he nodded. Pulling the covers back, he slid into bed beside me and wrapped his arms around me. He wore loose pants and nothing else. As we lay together, I could feel his arousal.

My eyes sought his and I could see desire burning in their depths. For the first time in my life, I wanted to be part of something bigger, to be able to care about the man who shared my life. I wanted to belong to Valen. I knew it was wrong, and yet I wanted to know what it would be like to have someone like him in my arms, someone passionate and caring.

Hesitantly, I leaned forward and brushed my lips against his. He resisted for a moment, then he gave in to temptation, tunneling his fingers through my hair. With trembling hands, I untied his pants and reached inside to cup him. The steely length of

his cock felt like velvet under my fingers. Curious, I stroked him, my fingers caressing the length of him. Desire rushed through me making me feel frantic in my need.

One of us moaned, or possibly both of us did, and Valen reached down to shove his pants down his legs. Now free of clothing, we lay skin to skin as passion consumed us.

My fingers explored every inch of him, delighting in the hair that dusted his chest, the flex of muscles as he pulled me closer. I draped my leg over his hip, needing more, needing to feel closer. My body had a mind of its own as my hips rocked against his, making his cock brush against my pussy. I felt myself grow wet at the thought of him burying himself inside of me.

Rolling me to my back, Valen spread my legs and thrust into me with one long stroke. He groaned and opened his eyes. "You're so sweet and so wet."

"Please, Valen, I want more."

With a grin, he drew his hips back before plunging into me again.

I grabbed his shoulders and arched against him, meeting him thrust for thrust. I wrapped my legs around his waist, taking him in deeper. My pussy gripped him like a vise, wanting more of him, never wanting to let him go.

His thrusts became harder and deeper. As he slammed into me to the hilt repeatedly, I felt a fire build inside of me. I felt as if I were being consumed.

As I felt him explode inside of me, my orgasm tore through me, leaving me sated and happy.

Valen rolled to his side and pulled me into his arms, cuddling me.

"So that's what it's supposed to be like," I murmured against his chest.

He groaned and pulled away, getting out of bed to pace. "Thale is going to kill me."

"Why?"

"Because you belong to him and I violated his trust."

I wasn't sure how to respond to that, so I watched him silently. After a moment, he stopped and stared at me. I wished I could ease his worry, but knew it was impossible. He had a good point.

His gaze raked over me, down my body to the proof of our coupling dripping down my thighs. He winced. "We should get cleaned up."

Holding out a hand, he helped me out of bed and ushered me to the bathroom. He started the water and motioned for me to go first.

"Valen, how does the soap work?" I asked as I stared at the contraption on the wall. I should have paid closer attention when Thale had worked the thing earlier. Instead, I'd been focused on the large man standing in the shower with me.

He grinned and showed me how it worked. Cool gel oozed into my hands and I lathered my hair. As the water rinsed the suds from my long curly tresses, I felt his hands smoothing the gel across my shoulders.

"Valen?"

"I know I shouldn't touch you, but I can't help myself. Once wasn't enough."

Swallowing, I didn't argue. How could I? My appetite for him was insatiable, as his was for me.

He soaped my skin, making every nerve tingle, paying special attention to my breasts. When he reached between my legs, I gasped, pleasure shooting through me clear to my toes. I was still sensitive and it took only that one touch for me to be ready for him again.

"Wrap your legs around me, Sorch."

Bracing my hands on his shoulders, I did as he bade me, feeling his hard cock slide inside of me as I crossed my feet behind his back. He took me fast and hard against the shower wall, but made sure he gave me pleasure. As I felt the delicious friction of his cock sliding in and out of my pussy, I worried that I would always want him, knowing it wasn't possible. I was on the edge of an orgasm when I felt him come, warmth spreading through me as he ejaculated inside of me. When he finished, I felt him grow hard again while he was still inside of me and my eyes widened in

fascination. I might not know much about men, but I had friends who talked and they'd always said it took a guy a while to get hard again. Apparently, they didn't know men like Valen.

"I want you again, but I won't take you if you're sore."

I was a little sore, but not enough to stop him. He'd awakened a sleeping monster within me, one that craved his touch... craved passion... craved *him*.

"I want you again, too," I admitted softly.

Claiming my lips in another kiss, he loved me slowly and tenderly, taking us both to new heights.

* * *

The next morning, I woke to find myself snuggled against a hard body. I smiled, remembering the countless times Valen had made love to me. He'd been insatiable, but I'd loved every minute of it. I had aches and twinges here and there, but they only served to remind me of the wonderful night I had spent in his arms.

I moved closer to him and felt his hard cock press against my belly. Just the thought of him inside of me was enough to make me wet. I reached for him, thinking to wake him, but something stopped me. I listened, hearing a faint noise, and turned to face the door.

The front door opened and I froze, the smile slipping from my face. Why was Thale back so soon? When he looked my way and saw Valen wrapped around me, his eyes blazed in fury, terrifying me. I only hoped he wouldn't hurt me.

Storming into the bedroom, he glowered down at us. Frightened, I couldn't move or speak. Would he blame me? What was going to happen to me? To Valen? I realized how very little I knew about my owner and suddenly he seemed very scary.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded harshly.

Valen's arms tightened around me when I tried to sit up. I stared up at Thale helplessly, uncertain what to do or say. There wasn't much I could do to change the situation.

"I rush back here to spend the day in bed with you and find that my brother is already there. Explain yourself, Sorchia."

"I..." What could I possibly say? If he knew how Valen made me feel, I doubted he would take it well. But what other excuse did I have?

Valen stirred, kissing the side of my neck. "Good morning."

"Valen..."

He pulled me closer, oblivious to his furious brother. His hands cupped my breasts, teasing my nipples, and I closed my eyes against the delightful sensation. "Valen..."

"You said that already," he replied sleepily and I felt him grin against my shoulder.

"I believe she's trying to tell you to open your damn eyes," Thale growled.

Valen sat up and stared at his brother in confusion. "Why are you here?"

"I had thought to slake my lust with my little slave, but it seems you've already worn her out."

Valen winced. "It wasn't intentional."

"How do you unintentionally sleep with my slave? And don't pretend you didn't."

"I don't deny it. I guess she was just too tempting to pass up. I held out until last night, but..." Valen shrugged as if to say *can you blame me*.

Thale growled. His eyes narrowed on me. "Go wash his scent from your body. Whether you're sore or not, you'll pleasure me."

I jumped out of bed and fled to the bathroom, fighting back tears along the way. I had known my time with Valen would come to an end, but hearing his easy dismissal of what happened between us was hard. The thought of his betrayal, and having to sleep with Thale, brought more tears to my eyes. I'd made such a wreck of things, and all for nothing.

I turned on the water and sank to my knees in the shower, sobbing, crying harder than I ever had before. Life had just gone from bad to horrible. I might have

found a way to be content with my life before sleeping with Valen, but now I knew what it could be like between a man and woman, and I wasn't ready to give it up. One night with Valen had changed everything, at least for me. Apparently, he saw me in the same light as his brother. It wasn't easy to swallow my pain, but I didn't want to wallow in misery either.

As the water sluiced over me, I tried to prepare myself for a night with Thale. Instead, more tears slipped down my cheeks. It was a flood I couldn't seem to stop. I hated not having control over my life, hated it with a passion. Being someone's possession was not an easy pill to swallow.

Thale knelt beside me outside the shower. As he stared at my puffy eyes, some of the anger drained from his face. "You've been crying." He frowned. "I didn't mean to make you cry."

I stared at him, unsure what he would say or do next. I should have told him that life was making me cry and not him -- well, he wasn't directly responsible anyway. He was merely the catalyst. Not that his brother was helping matters, I thought bitterly.

Standing, he turned off the water and wrapped me in a large, fluffy towel. He scooped me up into his arms and carried me to the bedroom, laying me down on the now empty bed. It was obvious Valen had fled and left me to deal with his brother on my own. Bitterness welled inside of me.

"If I scared you, I'm sorry," he said quietly.

"A little," I whispered.

"It was a shock to find you with my brother. If I had known what little control he had, I wouldn't have asked him to stay with you."

"It wasn't his fault." I looked up at him, bracing myself for his anger. No matter the outcome, I knew I had to be honest with him and own up to my portion of the evening's events. "I had a nightmare last night and he came to comfort me. He tried to deny me, but I kissed him."

Thale's jaw tightened. "Do you know what the punishment is for seducing another man?"

"No." My eyes dropped to the bed. "I figured I would be punished, but I couldn't stop myself. It's just... he was so nice to me, so tender. I wondered what it would be like to..."

"If I reported your behavior, you would be flogged. And they would make Valen do it."

"If?" My eyes lifted to his. Did that mean he wasn't going to punish us? Was he going to forgive my transgression?

"He's my brother. Regardless of what he did, I can't turn him in. It's hard enough trying to get him married as it is. If word got out that he'd slept with my slave, a woman entrusted to his care, I'd never find him a wife."

"Maybe you shouldn't."

He raised an eyebrow. "You're telling me what to do?"

"No, but Valen and I talked, and he doesn't want the same kind of marriage you have. A pretty face isn't enough for him. He's told you as much, but he says you never listen."

"He told you this?"

I nodded.

He blew out a breath and sat on the bed next to me. "What else did he tell you?"

"He wants someone he can love."

He gave a bark of laughter and ran his hands through his hair. "Love? Is he serious?"

I nodded again. I could tell that something had changed, a shift had occurred, and I wasn't sure where that left me. His mind was no longer on taking me to bed, for which I was grateful, but it made me a little nervous too. If he decided he didn't want me, what would happen to me? Valen hadn't told me so I was unprepared.

Thale looked at me, a strange light in his eyes. Pulling me closer, he kissed me, his tongue delving into my mouth. His kiss was gentle, as if he were trying to reassure me that things would be okay.

I held myself still, forcing myself to endure it, and slowly I felt the stirrings of desire. Maybe I hadn't been far off in my assessment of my situation. Maybe I was a whore after all. Wanting two different men in the same day seemed a little tawdry, but then I *had* been a virgin a mere two days ago. Perhaps I was just seeing a different side of myself, a side I'd never explored before. Or perhaps the men on Vaaden were just too delicious to resist.

Chapter Six

Thale broke the kiss and smoothed my hair back from my face. "You're in love with him, aren't you."

Since he'd made it a statement, I figured he didn't need an answer. I waited to see what he would say or do next. Besides, I wasn't certain you could qualify my feelings toward Valen as love; I'd just met the man! True, he incited a passion in me I hadn't known was possible. Did that mean it was love? I wasn't sure.

"What exactly happened yesterday?" he asked softly.

I motioned to the stack of colorful dresses in the corner. "He went out in the morning to buy me a few things; at least that's how it all started."

Thale's eyes widened when he saw the dresses. "He bought you the clothing of a Vaaden woman? Has he lost his mind?"

I winced. "I told him you wouldn't be pleased."

"Slave women do not dress the same as wives," he growled.

The statement hurt, but I knew it was the truth. I had tried to tell Valen that much, but he had refused to listen. And the gesture had been so thoughtful I hadn't been able to say no. "What *do* slave women wear?"

He shrugged. "In the house, usually nothing. I gave you one of my shirts because you seemed modest and I wanted to ease you into things."

"And in public?"

He walked over to the closet and pulled out a gauzy, short dress. "This."

I stared at the garment in shock. "You can see through it!"

"Of course."

"Why would you want your slave to go out in public like that?"

He gave me a chilly smile. "In case someone was interested in joining us for the night, of course. Some men even trade slaves for a day or two, for variety."

The thought of being with more than one man at the same time made my blood freeze in my veins. I hoped he wouldn't make me do something like that, but he seemed the sort who would enjoy it. What would I do if he brought another man to join us in bed?

He sighed. "Relax, Sorch. I have something else in mind for you."

"What?"

"You'll have to wait and see."

I didn't like his answer, but there wasn't a thing I could do about it, so like a good little slave, I waited to see what he was up to, hoping it wasn't something horrible.

"You can wear my shirt again, or you can wear the slave garment."

"Your shirt," I answered quickly. At least it covered me.

He grinned and went to retrieve it from the other room. Walking back to my side, he slipped it over my head, helping me into it. His hand brushed against my breast in the process and I saw his eyes heat. I didn't doubt that he wanted me, but for some reason he was holding back.

"Why... why haven't you..."

"Why haven't I taken what's rightfully mine?"

"Yes."

"I haven't had to force myself on a woman yet, and I don't plan on starting now."

"I'm your slave. You wouldn't be forcing yourself on me. I'm your property, and I have to do what you say."

Eyeing me thoughtfully, he removed the shirt again and pressed me down onto the bed, his body covering mine. "Is this what you want?" His hand cupped my breast. "Or this?" His hand slid further down, dipping between my legs, "Or perhaps this?"

My traitorous body responded to his touch, even though it was Valen I wanted. I knew I would have to adjust, to face the fact that I wouldn't be with Valen again. If

Thale was going to bed me, he might as well do it now and get it over with. At least I was wet and ready for him, I thought wryly.

Quickly stripping out of his clothes, he returned to me, nudging my thighs apart with his knee. "As you said, you're mine, so perhaps I'll take you after all."

I braced myself, but it wasn't necessary. Reaching between our bodies, he brushed his thumb over my clit, making me even wetter. It was as if he wanted to please me, and not just take me, as was his right.

"Why are you being so gentle?" I asked in surprise, having expected him to be rough in order to prove he was master.

He smiled. "I know it's my brother you really want. The least I can do is try to make it pleasurable for you."

His thoughtfulness touched me, but I'd never let him know. When he kissed me again, I kissed him back. His hands stroked my body, his caresses bringing me pleasure while he entered hard and fast. While it was enjoyable, he climaxed long before I was ready. Afterwards, he stroked me, trying to bring me to the same heights, but I couldn't let go.

I felt his cock harden inside of me and knew he wanted me again. I stroked his arm, encouraging him. A happy master would make life more bearable, at least in theory.

As he began thrusting into me again, I closed my eyes and pictured Valen, imagining that it was him inside of me, instead of his brother. When Thale found his release moments later, it sent me tumbling over the edge, pleasure zinging throughout my body.

When he was finished, he held me and I accepted my fate. I might not be happy with the situation, but at least he would be good to me. And if I had to think of Valen to find pleasure, then that's what I would do.

* * *

Thale made love to me several times throughout the day until we tumbled into bed that night, exhausted, and I fell asleep lying in his arms. The last thing I remembered was him whispering to me. "Everything will be fine."

If only I could believe it.

Chapter Seven

However, everything wasn't fine. The next morning I woke in Thale's arms and found a pair of turquoise eyes looking down at me in anguish. I blushed, wishing Valen hadn't found us together, but the look in his eyes gave me hope he hadn't meant his cold words to his brother. Maybe I really did mean something to him.

"Good morning, Valen," Thale said, noticing his brother.

"It's morning, but I'm not sure it's a good one," he muttered, turning his back on us.

Thale simply smiled and got out of bed. Throwing the covers back, he exposed my naked body and I shrieked. The sound drew Valen's attention, much to my horror. "Why are you doing this?" he asked Thale in a strangled voice.

"Doing what?" Thale gave him an innocent look, but it didn't fool me, not for a minute. He knew he was torturing his brother and humiliating me, and he seemed to be enjoying it.

Valen walked over and jerked the covers back over me. "You know what. You know I want her, and she's yours, so I can't have her. Why are you tormenting me?"

"Is that what I'm doing?"

Valen growled and left the room, refusing to look at me again.

Thale's smile grew and he pulled the covers away again. Leaning down to kiss me, he caressed my body. "Don't go anywhere."

I watched him walk out and I started to pull the covers back up, but he shot me a dark look that stopped me. "Leave those where they are."

Embarrassed, I nodded. I could hear the brothers talking in the other room, but couldn't make out a word of what they were saying. I heard Valen raise his voice several times, and watched as he stormed out of the apartment. I knew they didn't call

them apartments on Vaaden, but I had no idea what else to call the small living quarters. Valen had mentioned men kept their slaves in places like this, and their homes were for their wives and families.

Thale reappeared, looking rather cheerful.

"You seem happy, but it didn't sound like things were going well."

"You heard?"

I shook my head. "I just heard Valen get a little loud a few times, and he didn't seem happy when he left."

"He'll be fine."

I wasn't so sure, but I left it alone. It wasn't my business if he wanted to piss his brother off, so I would stay out of it. The last thing I wanted to do was make him angry with me again. "Are you going back to your wife today?"

He shook his head. "I'll stay with you another night before I go back home."

"Back home to your wife," I grumbled.

"Fidelity is an Earth custom. You'll just have to get used to the way things are done here."

I looked at the dresses Valen had bought me with longing. "Would you be terribly upset if I wore one of those on the days you aren't here? They're just so pretty..."

He sat on the bed and cupped my cheek. "If you want to wear them in the privacy of your quarters, that's fine. Just don't let anyone see you wearing them outside or there will be hell to pay."

I smiled before his words fully registered. "My quarters?"

He nodded. "They belong to me, but as my slave these are your living quarters."

It reminded me of my precarious position, and I was afraid of what would happen to me in the months or years to come. I knew if I asked Thale the same question, he would answer, unlike Valen. "I asked your brother a question the other day, but he never answered me."

"What question is that?"

"What happens to me when you grow tired of me, or decide you want a new slave?"

He studied me a moment, as if trying to figure out how much he wanted to tell me. I wasn't sure if he was trying to spare my feelings, or just trying to keep me compliant, but he was obviously choosing his words wisely. "I won't get rid of you for a long while."

"But what happens to me when you do?" I persisted, needing to know the answer.

He looked away. "If we have any children, I'll arrange for their care. If you're too old to service the other Vaaden males, then... you'll either be sold into servitude or..."

"Or?" I wasn't sure I wanted to hear. None of it sounded pleasant.

"Or you'll be left to die."

I gasped and knew my face had gone pale. Vaadens were beyond barbaric! Their cruelty toward Earth women astounded me. To think, I'd thought men on my planet were jerks! They could have taken lessons from these people.

"You asked," he reminded me.

"Yes, but I hadn't realized it would be so awful. My children would be separated from me?" I swallowed. "And I could be left to die? How could..."

"How could I do that to you?"

I nodded.

"It's simple. You're here to serve a purpose. Once you can't serve my needs, you no longer have a purpose and I no longer have need of you."

It seemed cold and calculating, and it made me wonder how Valen and Thale could possibly be brothers. They were as different as night and day. One was capable of love, while the other was empty and cold.

"If... if you tired of me, would you... would you consider giving me to your brother?"

"My brother doesn't keep slaves."

"But, would you ask him?"

He growled at me and pushed me back onto the bed. "You may think you're in love with my brother, but you would be little more than a slave to him, as well." He caressed my body, as if to take the sting out of his words. "He might enjoy you in his bed, much like I do, but he would never make you his wife."

It was a cold, hard truth, and I didn't want to hear it. Closing my eyes, I gave myself up to the sensation of his hands gliding along my skin, wanting to forget who or what I was. Concentrating on his skilled hands and mouth, I let desire take over, pushing my unpleasant thoughts aside.

He slipped his fingers inside of me, testing me. "I barely have to touch you and you're ready for me."

I wasn't sure if that was a compliment or not, so I decided to ignore it.

He removed his hands and flipped me onto my stomach. Spreading my legs, he thrust into me hard and fast, his cock filling me completely. He plunged into me, taking me with a ferocity I hadn't experienced before. It was as if he was trying to prove his ownership of me, reminding me who was in charge. As if I could forget!

With a groan, I felt him come deep inside of me, and then he kissed my shoulder and rolled off me. "We should probably eat something."

When I reached for the shirt, he stopped me. "Don't put anything on. I'll want you again in a few minutes."

I nodded and followed him out of the room, reminding myself that this was my fate.

* * *

After eating fruit and some sort of cracker, Thale pulled me into his lap, making me straddle him. As his cock brushed against my pussy, his hands caressed my breasts, kneading them and teasing my nipples.

"Thale, I'm starting to get sore."

He gently pinched my nipples for my defiance, making heat pool between my legs. "Then you shouldn't have slept with my brother."

"So this is punishment?"

"If you're too sore, you can always please me other ways."

I gave him a confused look, not understanding what he meant. If he didn't want sex, what did he want?

"I could make you suck my cock."

The reminder of what I'd witnessed in the prison had me shaking my head adamantly. I knew that wasn't something I wanted to do, especially not on command. Susan had seemed to enjoy it, but I wasn't sure I would.

"Then lean back against the table."

I leaned back, my legs spreading wider in the process, giving him complete access to me. He placed his hand in the middle of my chest, holding me down, as he slid his cock into me.

His frantic strokes told me this was my punishment, but it also brought me satisfaction as wave after wave of ecstasy washed over me. He placed his hands on my thighs and pushed them further apart, plunging deeper into me, my wet pussy gripping him tight. I tried to lift my hips to meet his strokes, wanting him to go even deeper, but he held me in place.

A sheen of sweat coated our bodies. He'd never lasted this long with me, and I wondered how he was able to now. While it was pleasurable, I also felt like he was rubbing me raw and knew I would be hurting later.

"You're mine, and only mine. Do you understand?"

I nodded, afraid that I understood only too well.

"When I leave you tomorrow, I want you to remember that, remember who is allowed between your legs."

That's when I knew. He was going to leave me with Valen again, and this time he expected us to behave. I was afraid to ask what would happen if we gave in to passion again.

At last, he allowed himself to come, thrusting hard and fast one last time.

Worn out, I lay trembling on the table, not daring to move until he said I could. If he took me again, I wouldn't be able to walk the next day. Then again, that was

probably his goal. He knew if I was too sore to do anything, it would be safe to leave me with Valen. No matter how much Valen wanted me, I knew he would never hurt me.

Thale picked me up and carried me to the bathroom, starting the shower. "We're not done yet, my pretty little slave."

"But, Thale, I can't..."

"You can, and will, take whatever I give you."

I whimpered. "But I'm sore."

"I bet I can make you want me anyway."

Sadly, I knew it was true. My body would respond to his touch like a moth to a flame. He had awakened something inside of me. It seemed I had an insatiable lust, lust I couldn't curb, regardless of who was touching me. It was a truth I wasn't ready to face yet, a side of me better left buried.

Thale made good on his promise and had me begging for more several times before dawn. As I drifted off to sleep, I heard him leave. Exhausted, I sunk into a deep and dreamless sleep, not even rousing when Valen came to check on me.

Chapter Eight

Hands gently caressing me drew me out of my sleep. I opened my eyes and smiled at Valen.

"I was starting to worry about you," he said quietly.

"Why?"

"It's late afternoon. You've slept all day."

I sat up and winced.

"What's wrong?"

A blush stole across my cheeks and I looked away. "Sore."

He grumbled under his breath and went to retrieve a warm, wet rag and a tube of ointment from the bathroom, returning a moment later. "Lie back."

I complied, his gentle tone easing any embarrassment I felt over the situation.

He tenderly wiped me with the cloth and applied ointment to his finger. Before I could ask what he was going to do, he slid his finger inside my pussy, the cream soothing my aches.

"He did it on purpose." I wished I could retract the words the moment they left my mouth.

"He what?"

"Nothing."

He shook his head. "It's not 'nothing' or you wouldn't have mentioned it. Why do you think he did it on purpose?"

I sighed. "So we wouldn't sleep together. He knew if I was sore, we wouldn't be able to do anything and he would be able to trust me into your care while he's with his wife. From what he said, it sounded like it was my punishment."

Valen cursed under his breath and threw the rag across the room.

I reached for his hand and gently pulled him down beside me. "Hold me?"

"Of course." His arms wrapped around me, pulling me close. I could tell my naked body had him aroused, but knew he wouldn't take me, not at the risk of hurting me more.

"Valen, he told me what would happen when he doesn't want me anymore."

His arms tensed. "I told you that wouldn't happen."

"He said he wouldn't let you have me; that you don't keep slaves."

"I don't, but I'll be damned if I'll let him sell you or let you die," he answered vehemently.

"He said you could never make me your wife so there was no point in you having me," I pushed, trying to make him understand.

Valen grew still. "He mentioned you as my wife?"

I looked up at him in confusion. "Only that it wasn't possible. I didn't ever imagine otherwise though. I just want to be with you, even if that means I'm your slave and have to share you with a wife later."

He stroked my hair and pressed my head back down to his shoulder, deep in thought. I wished I knew what he was thinking, but figured he would tell me if he wanted me to know.

The cream he'd applied had not only soothed my aches, but was now making me feel warm and tingly, and more than a little amorous. What the hell had he used on me?

"Um, Valen?"

"Hmmm?"

"I think the cream worked."

He smiled. "I knew it would."

I waited, but he didn't say or do anything else. Subtlety, it seemed, didn't work on him. Apparently, I had to use a direct approach with him. "Well, are you going to make love to me or not?" I demanded.

He choked back a laugh. "As delightful as that sounds, my brother will know I've taken you and it won't be pleasant for either of us."

I caressed his cock, straining against his pants. "I know you want me, Valen."

His hand grasped mine and brought it to rest on his chest. "I don't deny it, but it doesn't mean we should act on it. No matter how much I want you, I have to think of your safety first. If we defy Thale again, it could end badly for you."

I rubbed myself against him, hoping to change his mind, no matter the consequences. I gasped at the friction of his body against my breasts, my nipples feeling overly sensitive.

"Sorcha," he warned.

"Please, Valen. I need you. Make me forget who I am, what I am." I might only be a slave, but with Valen, I felt like so much more. I knew he at least cared about me, while I was merely a convenience to his brother.

He rolled to his side to face me. His hand skimmed down my torso and dipped between my legs, parting them. Exposed to his wandering fingers, I felt a thrill race through me.

I felt his fingers slide into me and groaned in pleasure. Thrusting against his hand, I wished he would enter me. I wanted more than he was willing to give, but knew he would argue if I asked again. While his fingers wreaked havoc on me, I wanted to feel his cock filling me up.

He reached out gently to trace the slope of my breast before brushing his fingers over my nipple. He caressed the sensitive tip, letting his hands make love to me, as I knew he longed to do with his body.

I called out his name as I climaxed, feeling my inner walls spasm around his fingers. You'd think that would have been enough, but as he withdrew his hand, I realized I still wanted more. Would I never get enough of him? Who'd have thought I would turn into an insatiable hussy, I thought with a grin.

He kissed my brow and smiled at me.

"That was wonderful, but I still want you," I mumbled.

He laughed and pulled me close again. "I'm afraid that will have to suffice. I won't take a chance on you being sore tomorrow when Thale comes back."

"He's coming back that soon?" I whispered, wishing it weren't true. I wanted my time with Valen to never end.

"That's what he said."

I sighed and burrowed into Valen. "Then I guess we'll have to enjoy what little time we have together."

He hugged me tight and kissed the top of my head. "Maybe I can change things one day."

With a smile, I closed my eyes, allowing myself to hope. I knew that life with Valen would be wonderful, even if I were only his slave.

Spending the rest of the afternoon lazing around my quarters, I felt at peace. The easy companionship I had with Valen lifted my spirits, even if I couldn't convince him to take me to bed.

Chapter Nine

We were both perplexed when Thale sent a message the next day saying he wouldn't be back for a few days. He didn't give an explanation, just a simple note saying he needed Valen to stay with me for another two or three days. Something didn't seem right to me, but I couldn't figure out what it was.

"It's a trap," Valen stated, as if reading my mind.

"What do you mean?"

"He's leaving me here longer, long enough for you to heal, to see if we do anything."

"Why would he do that? He said he wasn't turning you in because you're his brother."

Valen shrugged. "Thale's moods are hard to predict. He's a nice guy one minute, and plotting something devious the next, so it's hard to say."

I sighed, feeling trapped, both figuratively and literally. "Valen, am I ever allowed to go outside? I'm tired of being cooped up all the time."

He smiled. "If we were at my home, then I'd have a lovely garden you could enjoy." His smile faded. "If you want to go outside, you'll have to wear the standard slave garb."

I winced, remembering the nonexistent tunic. "Thale showed it to me. I don't want to go outside that badly."

My hands smoothed over the lovely aqua dress I wore and I smiled wistfully. "I wish I could wear this out somewhere. It's too pretty to wear in this place day after day."

He caressed my cheek. "If you were mine, I'd let you wear it."

I shook my head. "They wouldn't let you and you know it. These are the kinds of dresses your wives and daughters wear. Not for the likes of me."

"What's that supposed to mean?" he asked with hard, angry eyes.

"Valen, it doesn't do any good for us to pretend otherwise. Whether it was voluntary or not, I'm little more than a whore now."

He growled and stalked closer, anger flashing in his turquoise eyes, reminding me of the sea during a storm. "Never call yourself that again!"

"But it's what I am."

He cupped my cheek and stepped closer, our bodies barely touching. "Not to me."

His head lowered to mine and he kissed me gently, a soft caress of his lips on mine. It made me long for things I could never have. As if to preserve the moment forever, my arms crept around his neck, holding him to me.

When he lifted his head, he smiled down at me. What I saw in his eyes took my breath away. It was at that moment I realized Valen loved me.

My heart thundered in my chest and I stared up at him in wonder and amazement. I had no idea how he could love me, knowing what I was, yet he did. And if he loved me, no matter how horrible my future might be, it would be bearable. Even if we could only share stolen kisses here and there, it would be enough to sustain me.

* * *

An hour later, someone knocked on the door, startling me. I gave Valen an inquisitive look, but he merely smiled and went to answer the door. I watched in curiosity as a large man entered and handed something to Valen to sign.

"Is this everything?" Valen asked.

The man nodded, his gaze straying to me and widening in surprise. I'm sure it was rather shocking to see a slave dressed as I was, but I merely lifted my chin and stared at him coolly.

Valen opened the door wider and I stared in fascination as men brought in a piano and placed it on the far wall. Next, two crates were delivered, one stamped with "Earth" on the side.

Paying the men, Valen ushered them back out and locked the door once more. He turned to me and grinned, folding his arms over his chest.

"Valen, what is all of this?"

"Your surprise. You said you were bored, so I thought this might help."

"Where did you find a piano?"

"Sometimes, our soldiers confiscate items from Earth, other than captives. They keep them in a holding cell on the other side of Vaaden."

"But..."

"You mentioned how much you enjoyed music and that you had played the piano. I did some digging and discovered we had one in storage. It was simply a matter of agreeing on a price to have it purchased and delivered."

I slowly walked toward the instrument, my hands caressing the wood reverently. The man had bought me a piano. Tears gathered in my eyes at his thoughtful gesture and I gave him a tremulous smile.

He moved closer to me and wrapped his arms around my waist. "Do you like it?"

"It's perfect," I whispered.

"Why don't you sit and play while I open the crates," he suggested.

I nodded and sat down, my fingers caressing the ivory keys. It wasn't just any piano. It was an 1800's model Chickering with the original ivory keys, the mahogany wood polished to a high shine. Gently, I began playing a classical favorite of mine, "Moonlight Sonata." As the melody swept over me, I lost myself to the music.

As the last chords echoed throughout the room, Valen placed a hand on my shoulder, bringing me back to the present. I smiled up at him.

"Why don't you check out the crates," he said with a nod of his head toward the large wooden boxes.

Getting up, I walked over and peered inside the first one. An array of books greeted me, from the local history of Vaaden to romance novels. I wouldn't be bored for a very long time with these precious treasures. Moving to the next one, I found sheet music, pictures of various metropolitan cities on Earth, and an array of items that reminded me of home.

"Valen, I..." There were no words to express what his gift meant to me. Saying thank you just didn't seem like enough.

"I thought these things might make you happy, might make your stay here bearable."

I nodded and hugged him. "They do. *You* do. Just knowing you're here is enough, even if we can't be together."

He gathered me close and kissed me. Cupping my cheek in his hand, he slid his tongue between my lips and glided along mine, teasing me. As I hungrily responded to him, I wondered if we were going to devour each other with our passion.

A throat cleared across the room and we separated. Valen paled as he realized his brother had lied about the extra days and had returned on time. "Thale. We weren't expecting you for another few days."

"Obviously. Otherwise, I doubt you would have been kissing my slave."

"That's all we did," Valen assured him.

Thale's gaze took in the piano and crates, and a frown puckered his brow. "What's all this?"

Valen shrugged. "She was bored. I thought a few things from her home planet might make her happy."

Thale's gaze swung back to Valen, surprise etched on his features. It was as if he were seeing his brother for the first time, truly seeing him. I knew that *he* certainly would have never thought of something like that. It seemed he had misjudged his brother and the depth of his feelings for me.

Without looking at me, he ordered me from the room. His stern tone brooked no argument and I scurried to do his bidding. I hoped he wouldn't send the lovely items

back to storage, and hoped he wouldn't be too angry with Valen. As I sat in the bedroom, I tried to listen to their conversation. Both were speaking in hushed tones, but I was able to hear them a little and watch their facial expressions.

Thale stared at his brother and looked uncertain as to how he should react to what he'd witnessed. "You care for her," Thale stated.

Valen's response was so soft I couldn't hear it.

"You realize she's a slave?"

"I know," Valen bit out, his voice strained.

"You've always said you would never keep a slave. Why the interest now?"

"It doesn't have anything to do with her being a slave. I like SORCHA for who she is."

"You've gone and fallen in love with her," Thale muttered. My heart soared at the words, even though I knew nothing could come of it. Thale scowled as he continued. "Of all the women for you to finally take notice of, it has to be a slave."

"It's not like I can help who I fall in love with," Valen retorted.

"So you don't deny it?" Thale asked incredulously.

"No, I don't deny it."

"You know it's impossible for you to marry her," Thale pressed, obviously trying to make a point.

"I know."

"So you'll keep her on the side and visit your wife like I do mine?" Thale laughed bitterly. "You'll become the type of man you hate -- you'll become *me*."

"I don't hate you, Thale. I don't agree with your practices, but I could never hate you."

"So what would you do if she were yours?" Thale asked, his face alight with curiosity.

"I'd move her into my house, give her things that bring her pleasure, and live my life with her. I'd make sure she was happy and loved for the rest of her life."

"Your wife might have something to say about sharing her residence with a slave."

"I don't plan on marrying."

"What?" I couldn't see Thale's face, as he'd turned, but I could hear the shock in his voice.

"You heard me. I don't plan on marrying. A Vaaden woman is incapable of giving me what I need. Everything I need or want in a relationship I can get from Sorchia. Even if she's your slave, I can still get what I need from her just by being around her. I don't have to sleep with her to love her."

"I don't think I know you anymore," Thale said, his voice so soft I almost missed his words.

"You never knew me."

"What if I don't release her and have someone else stay with her while I'm with my wife?"

"Why? Why would you do that?"

"I'm not sure you can be trusted, especially not after the kiss I witnessed."

I heard him growl at Thale. "That's all we did! Do you know how much I wanted her? It was killing me not to take her, but I didn't because I knew she was yours. The thought of you hurting her because of my lack of control was all that kept me in check."

"So you love her, but since you can't have her you'll still visit the public harems?"

"I haven't been to one since the night I was with Sorchia," Valen said stiffly.

"You haven't... you haven't been with a woman since then?" Thale asked incredulously.

"No."

"You know you can't last much longer. I'm surprised you've made it this long, especially as I left her sleeping naked. That alone should have been enough to make you snap."

"Is that what you were trying to do? Make me break my word to you? Give you a reason to get rid of her or punish her?" Valen demanded.

"I kind of liked punishing her this last time. There are certainly worse ways to pass the time than burying myself in her warmth, all day long. Or did she not tell you that?" he asked in an icy tone.

"She told me. She was hurting when she woke up, thanks to your mistreatment of her," Valen snapped.

"It's not mistreatment if I own her. She's mine to do with as I please."

"You disgust me," Valen spat. "How could you abuse that sweet woman? Has she ever denied you?"

"She tried to stop me that day," Thale told him. "Of course, it didn't take long before I had her moaning and wanting more."

I blushed, knowing what he said was true, but not wanting Valen to hear it.

"Why do you insist on torturing her?" Valen asked.

"I'm not. If I were going to do that, I'd force her to accept more than just me into her bed." He sounded pleased by the idea. "Or have you forgotten that I like to share my women with at least one other male?"

My stomach flipped over and I felt sick. He'd said he wouldn't do that to me. Had he lied? Or was he just tormenting Valen?

"Thale, please don't do that to her. It would crush her completely, and I can't bear to see her like that," Valen pleaded.

"Well, since you asked so nicely, I guess I can put it off a while longer. As long as you keep your word and don't bed her."

"You have my word, as long as you don't ask her to do anything that repulses her. I know you have the right to bed her, but don't ask her to do anything she isn't comfortable with."

"Fine."

"Let me know when you need me to come by again. Until then, please treat her well."

“I’m sure she won’t have any complaints.”

I watched as Valen crossed the room and heard the door click shut, and tried to process everything I’d heard.

Chapter Ten

Thale entered the bedroom and eyed me in my Vaaden dress. There was an appreciative gleam in his eye that wasn't lost on me. "Your would-be lover is gone," he informed me.

"We didn't..."

He held up a hand. "I know, but that doesn't mean you didn't want to."

I blushed. "Even if I had begged he wouldn't have touched me. He gave you his word and he'll keep it."

"You should be thankful to your precious Valen. He's worked a pretty good deal for you."

"What kind of deal?"

"You get to keep the items he bought you, still get to see him when I'm with my wife, and in return I won't ask you to sleep with more than just me or do any other acts you find repulsive."

I stared at him in stunned fascination. He was going to keep the oath he'd given Valen? "What did Valen get?" I asked, pretending I hadn't heard their conversation.

"The two of you may spend time together when I'm with Staisha, though you still may not bed one another." He stared at me a moment. "You should know that he hasn't been with a woman since the night you were together."

"But I thought..."

"Yes, Vaaden males need to have sex on a regular basis, which is why we steal women from other planets. Earth is our favorite," he said with a grin. "Our bodies require that we have sex frequently, and we become ill if we do not. I only hope the fool knows what he's doing."

"Please, Thale. Let me talk to him. I don't want him to do anything that could harm him."

He moved closer and reached out to unfasten my dress. "And what would you give me in return, if I allowed you one more night with him?"

"What do you want?" I asked quietly, knowing I would give anything to feel Valen's arms around me again, feel our bodies moving as one.

"No matter how sore you may get, you will never deny me. As my slave, I have a right to take you when, where, and how I want. Is that clear?"

I nodded.

"Please me for the next two days, and I'll let you take Valen to your bed."

Two days with Thale. I would have to endure it regardless so I figured I might as well get something out of it in return. I knew he would bring me pleasure, even if I *did* wish it were Valen lying with me.

"All right."

"Stand up."

I rose to my feet and let him push my dress from my shoulders. As his hungry gaze raked my body, he began to undress and I saw that his cock was hard and throbbing with need.

"Why don't you tell me what's so different about my brother," Thale said as he moved closer.

"He... he touches me, takes me gently. He didn't force himself on me at any point, always asked if he could have me again."

"Like this?" Thale asked as he stroked my breasts.

I watched him intently and nodded, his caress soft and gentle.

His head bent and he kissed the side of my neck, trailing kisses down my collarbone and back up my jaw, and finally he claimed my lips. "Does he kiss you gently too?" he murmured against my lips.

"Yes."

Thale pushed me back against the bed, tumbling us onto it. His kiss was tender, yet commanding. His hands stroked and caressed me, slowly building my passion. When his hand dipped between my legs, he felt how ready I was.

Gently, he nudged my legs apart with his knee and placed his cock against my wet heat. Slowly, he eased into me until he filled me completely.

"Is this how he does it?" he whispered in my ear.

I nodded mutely, trying to make sense of what was happening. Why was Thale being so kind? Why was he trying to make me enjoy it? More importantly, why was he trying to be like Valen?

With slow, gentle strokes, he fanned the flames of my desire, pushing me closer and closer to the edge. Suddenly, he thrust into me long and hard, shoving me over the edge, sending me spiraling out of control. As the waves of passion subsided, he began using short, hard thrusts. So close on the heels of my orgasm, it sent another rush of pleasure through me as I felt him explode inside of me.

"Thale..."

He kissed me to still my words. Looking into my eyes, he shifted, the friction causing him to harden again. "Can you feel how much I want you?"

"I... yes..."

He caressed my breast as he thrust his hips forward, burying himself further into me. "Did I pleasure you that time?"

"Yes."

He thrust again, drawing a moan from me. "Do you want me to pleasure you again?"

"Yes, Thale," I answered as I wrapped my arms around him. I had no idea why he was acting this way, but I was going to enjoy it while it lasted.

Claiming my lips, he surged into me again and again, his fingers stroking my nipples until I shattered. Before my orgasm had ended, he was already pushing me over the edge again. Wave after wave of pleasure rocked me, until I lay under him sated and drained.

Thale rolled to his side and pulled me into his arms.

"Why?" I asked softly.

"I wanted you to see that I'm not always a monster."

"Why does it matter what I think of you?"

He sighed. "Because I refuse to let my brother come to harm. If you're what he wants, then you're what he'll have. I didn't want you thinking of me as a monster if you're going to be with my brother, permanently."

I lifted my head, not believing what I was hearing. "What?"

He grinned. "This was my way of saying goodbye, little slave. It's obvious you make my brother happy, and he seems to make you happy as well. Tomorrow, I'll call him over to collect you and your belongings."

My heart was beating a staccato rhythm in my chest. "You mean, I can go with him?"

He nodded. "He can't marry you," he warned.

"I know that. I had already decided if I ever had a chance to be with him, I wouldn't let it bother me that he had to take a wife."

His lips twisted into a wry grin. "I don't think that will be an issue."

I must have looked as confused as I felt because he laughed. Surely Valen hadn't meant what he said about marrying!

"He told me he would never marry a Vaaden woman. He said that if he had you, you were all he would need."

"But... don't you have to marry?"

"We are expected to, but it isn't an actual written law. More of an understanding."

Hope welled within me and I smiled. I was going to be with Valen and I wouldn't have to share him! Nothing could have made me happier at that moment.

He returned my smile and stroked my hair. "Before you get too excited, there's something you should know. If he ever takes you outside of his home, do *not* wear the

Vaaden clothes he gave you. I know he'll want you to, but it would end badly for both of you."

The smile slipped from my face. "I'd have to wear the slave garment?"

He nodded, watching me intently.

I took a breath and steadied my nerves. It was a small concession to make for true happiness. "I guess I shall have to remain in his house then."

Thale pulled me back into his arms. "Would you mind if I..."

Feeling the evidence of his arousal, I knew what he was going to ask. While I knew it was the right thing to give in to him, knowing that I was starting my new life tomorrow made me hesitate. "I want to say yes since you're being so generous with me, but knowing that I'll be with Valen tomorrow makes it feel like I'm cheating on him."

Thale nodded and sighed. "I figured as much. I'll leave you alone then."

I stared in amazement as he rolled out of bed and dressed. That was it? No fight, no coercion?

"I'll be in the public harem if you need me," he stated before leaving my quarters, the door closing firmly behind him.

I was stunned to say the least. Rising from the bed, I went to shower and dress. I wasn't sure if Thale would return before the day was over or not so I tried to prepare myself for the inevitable.

Chapter Eleven

The next morning, I stood dressed in one of the beautiful dresses Valen had brought to me. Thale was pacing the main room as we waited on his brother to arrive.

When the door opened, we both tensed in anticipation, watching as a tired looking Valen entered. Dark circles under his eyes suggested he hadn't slept, and his face was pale and drawn.

"You wanted to see me?" he asked as he collapsed onto a chair.

"I did a lot of thinking last night after our discussion," Thale began. "And after a rather interesting night in Sorcha's arms." I could see Valen flinch at his words. "I came to a decision."

Valen rubbed his eyes and glared at his brother. "What decision is that?" he asked.

"I've decided that if Sorcha makes you happy, then she should be yours."

Valen stared at his brother in disbelief. "What did you say?"

Thale grinned. "I said that I'm giving Sorcha to you."

Valen's gaze swung over to me and I gave him a hesitant smile. I couldn't tell what he thought of Thale's proposal and it was making me nervous. What if he didn't want me after all?

"What exactly did you do to my brother last night?" he asked quietly.

The smile slipped from my face. "Nothing."

"It can't be nothing for him to make such a huge turnaround in a short amount of time."

Thale rolled his eyes. "Do you want her or not, Valen?"

He paused and looked from me to Thale and back again.

I took a step toward him. "Valen?"

"Is that what you want, Sorchia?" he asked quietly. "Do you want to be with me?"

I smiled and threw myself into his arms. "Of course it's what I want!"

He smiled at me and hugged me tight, but his gaze narrowed on his brother. "No tricks? There's no hidden clause?"

Thale chuckled. "No, no tricks. Her stuff is already packed and someone will deliver her things shortly."

"To my house?" Valen asked.

Thale nodded. "You said that's where you would keep her. I don't agree with it, but I won't argue with you. You're a grown man and know what you're doing... I hope."

With a huge grin on his face, Valen lifted me into his arms and briskly walked toward the door. But Thale stopped him before we could leave. "Just a minute, brother. I think you're forgetting something."

"What?" Valen asked him, mistrust evident in his eyes.

"She can't go out in public like that," Thale said, gesturing toward my Vaaden dress.

Valen's jaw tightened. "I won't let her go out in that ridiculous slave's tunic. It's bad enough you've seen her and bedded her, I won't have every other Vaaden male we see knowing what she looks like without her clothes on."

"You know she'll be punished if you take her out like that."

"No, she won't," Valen growled.

Thale's brows rose. "Really? Care to enlighten me?"

Valen gave him a cold smile, much like the ones I'd seen on Thale's face many a time. "I spoke with the prime minister when I left here yesterday."

Now it was Thale's turn to be surprised. "About what?"

"About Sorchia. He was going to send you a notice declaring that she would belong to me when you decided to get rid of her. I knew it would only be a matter of time before you grew bored and wanted a new slave."

Thale threw back his head and laughed. "I see you outsmarted me at my own game. Well done!"

Valen looked at me tenderly. "There's more. I told him how I felt about you and that I refused to marry a Vaaden woman. While he can't legally let us marry, he has agreed to view our relationship in a different light than slave and master. You'll be allowed to go out in the dresses I bought for you, as long as you're escorted by either me or my brother."

"Valen, how..." I was beyond stunned at this point.

"It seems our prime minister once fell in love with a slave himself. He loved her until the day she died and he was heartbroken he couldn't make their relationship known as the special bond it was." He grinned at me. "So while I can't marry you in truth, you will be the wife of my heart for now and always."

"I love you," I said softly.

"And I love you," he replied before gently kissing me.

Thale shook his head at the two of us and ushered us out of the slave quarters. "Save that for your own home," he grumbled.

Valen smiled at his brother and carried me out, his long strides eating up the ground as we left my life of slavery and entered into our new life together.

While I would always be a captive in Vaaden, more importantly, I was Valen's. With him by my side, I knew I had a chance at true happiness, and that was all that mattered.

Jessica Coulter Smith

Jessica Coulter Smith currently lives in Tennessee with her family and a house full of pets, after having lived in several places from the East Coast to the West Coast. When she isn't writing, you can find her either curled up with a book or out shopping. She's particularly fond of bookstores and Starbucks!

Her writing career began in high school when she submitted *My World is Tumbling Down* to a poetry contest, not only receiving a publication offer, but also an award. Since then, she has published a half-dozen or more poems, six novels, and several short stories. At any given time, she has five or more works-in-progress at various stages of completion.

Prior to writing, she worked for a counseling center; in information systems for a debt collector; and has worked at more than one college. After handling everything from patient evaluations to department accreditation, she decided to sit down at the computer again and attempt writing novels (from young adult to erotica).

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