



Accidental Mates: Tav

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Amira Press
Baltimore, MD 21216
www.amirapress.com

ISBN: 978-1-935348-15-3

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Chapter One

I'm not sure what woke me. The echoes of a soft command bounced in my head, but while I glanced around the moonlit room I occupied, I saw that there was no one awake who could have spoken to me. Mack lay on his side, his snores rhythmic. A couple of his men had their own dingy mattresses in the corners of the room. They, too, seemed dead to the world.

Tossing the sheet back, I scooted to the edge of the bed I shared with Mack and slipped into my clothing. Given the choice between rotting in prison for my supposed crimes against humanity and being my old boss's lover, I chose the latter. At least I was back on Earth and wouldn't have to suffer through another high sun.

Still, Earth was no picnic. Many things had changed over the years since I had been gone. And now that we were back, Mack had become the leader of a rebel group set to overthrow the government, because it had allowed the filthy aliens to occupy our land. He hated all of them, the Drelconians, the Desert Ice, and our new allies, the Lycarn. I have to admit that I didn't like the Lycarn either. They terrified me with their half-human, half-wolf appearance. Someone had said that they could look just like us but chose not to because they wanted to intimidate everyone around them with their sharp teeth; black eyes; long, pointed ears; and too much fur coating their bodies. The seven-foot height and sinewy muscle didn't hurt the daunting image either.

I picked my way over the cracked tile floor to the door and inched it open. The creak in the still night made Mack mutter and flip to his other side. I waited, hoping he wouldn't wake. When he was settled again, I moved into the hallway and tiptoed down the passage. Two guards with guns tracked my progress past them but didn't try to stop me.

In the stairwell of the apartment building, I jetted down two floors. Something drove me forward, but I wasn't sure what it was. I tried to bring to mind the voice I'd heard in my dreams, but it was no use.

After I'd checked each empty apartment, I came to the one at the end of the fifth-floor hall. I had to put my shoulder into it, but I finally got the door open and strolled inside. The stench was overpowering, and the trash that littered the floor could conceal a rat beneath it. I hate rats! Yet, even in all this filth and decay, I hadn't seen any.

The window caught my attention. It was one of the few not boarded over, and I caught a glimpse of the moonlight in a clear sky. On the horizon, dawn raised its reluctant head. We had day and night like normal on Earth, but for some reason, I felt the nights were longer year round. Or it could have been the hopelessness I felt, living as a fugitive, as the lover of a man I didn't want, and as a part of a cause I didn't believe in.

I drifted to the windowsill to look out, my gaze locked on the sky. I had no idea what I was looking for, but I watched and waited. After about twenty minutes of scanning, I saw someone or *something* bobbing about like a bee or a drunk. This creature flew, it seemed, on unsteady wings as if he was just learning to fly. His body in silhouette to the moon, he moved across the sky and then nose-dived to another of the abandoned buildings on the other side of the square.

“Go to him.” The voice spoke in my mind again. For no reason I could come up with, I obeyed. I took the stairs two at a time and rushed down to ground level. Once outside, I ran, leaping over and sidestepping trash. I worried that Mack’s guards would mistake me for an intruder and pick me off with a bullet, but I kept moving.

Inside the building where the creature had disappeared, I paused to suck in a breath. The deep growls from somewhere above me almost made me turn back, but I pushed ahead. If this was a Drelconian, maybe he could tell me if Tiam was safe. I had no great love for any of the aliens, but she had been my friend and I missed her.

He faced the wall and leaned toward it with one hand to support himself. Even in the moonlight, the span of his shoulders and the taut skin stretched across firm muscle and buttocks made my mouth water. He was naked from head to toe, and from where I stood, I knew he was holding his cock in his hand and was pumping it with slow strokes.

I bit into my lip to keep from crying out. His grunts were enough for the two of us. I slumped against the wall, pressed a hand between my legs, and tried to force my eyes away from his sleek perfection. I couldn’t.

“I know you’re there,” he grumbled. Dragging in a deep breath, he sniffed the air. “A woman.”

He was about to turn around, with no intention of stopping what he was doing. I threw out my hands. “No, please. Don’t do that.”

His laugh sounded mean and angry. I had had little involvement with Drelconians other than Tiam, but the men always seemed ill tempered. I told myself to leave now, before it was too late, but I couldn’t move. Having no shame, he continued to pleasure himself. My eyes were riveted on the arc of his arm gliding up and down—a long ways in each direction.

I licked my lips. “Um . . . I could come back later.” If he demanded that I leave, that might get my feet going.

“No, since you’ve come—knowing that you’re watching has taken it to another level. Feels good. I’m almost there.” He looked back over his shoulder at me, his sheet of raven’s-wing hair rippling. He was Drelconian all right. The sexy features matched theirs. All Drelconians, male or female, were perfect specimens in their humanoid forms. This one was no exception to the rule. “Are you sure you don’t want to watch? I bet I would come faster.”

I should have been disgusted or pissed off, but I wasn’t. Mack pulled that garbage with the expectation of me being impressed with his size. Mack had good equipment, but he didn’t give a damn about my pleasure. I had wanted to leave him many times but had nowhere to go. The one and only time I had attempted to leave him, the police had caught me, and when Mack had to break me out a second time, he wasn’t happy.

“No, thank you.” The exchange between us freed me from my paralytic state. I spun away to step into the hall, but he grabbed my arm, having moved without sound and with great

speed across the room. I averted my eyes from his goods and heard the shimmer of his scales. I assumed they had covered his private parts.

“Don’t go,” he whispered.

I turned around to face him. “Who are you?”

His attention was on his crotch. “I’ve never done that before.”

I frowned. “Done what? Produce your scales at will? Of course you have. You’re Drelconian, aren’t you?”

His eyes widened, and he took me in a punishing grip to flatten me against his chest. I winced, and he loosened his hold. “You know me. Who am I? What is a Drelconian?”

“You can’t be serious?”

The torment in his expression told me he wasn’t joking. This man had no idea he was a dragon shape-shifter. How could it be? I had seen him flying, hadn’t I? “You’re a Drelconian,” I said again. “You shape-shift into a dragon. But you knew that. I saw you flying. Sort of.”

He nodded. “Yes, doing it poorly. I don’t know who I am, where I come from, or even how I got here.” He moved me closer to him. His hot breath warmed my face, which made my stomach knot. If he didn’t know what he was, then he didn’t know that at the blink of an eye, he could burn my head off with fire from his belly.

I wriggled to get loose, but he held on. The scales he had produced disappeared, and his cock, hard as stone, pushed against my stomach. Desire weakened my knees. The dragon shifter held me up.

“You seem to know more about me than I know about myself. Who am I?”

I fought to focus on his question and not the heady male scent he gave off like pheromones and made me want to wrap my legs around him. Instead, I answered with too much eagerness. “I don’t know who you are, but I intend to find out real quick.”

Chapter Two

I heard her and smelled her before she ever entered the doorway, although I didn't know why. In the months I had spent alone in this hell hole of a hideout, I was constantly plagued with doubts about my sanity. When I had first arrived, my nightmares had been filled with what I had done, the murders I had committed—all while at the mercy of a bitter cold, which I knew instinctively was my enemy.

She had said her name is Sandy, and I had told her the truth about not knowing what or who I was. The scattered memories had told me I could transform to a dragon, because I had vivid dreams of ripping into human flesh, destroying it and some other type of creature, too. I kept to the shadows, found food where I could, flew only when necessary. I hadn't gotten the hang of it.

Throughout it all, the only action to calm the rage in my head and ease the despair because of it, was jacking off. She came along, her feminine scent teasing me and her high-pitched voice making me want to drive my erection into her instead of palming it.

She was intoxicating, and soon I spilled my seed, as my nostrils filled with her essence. Now, I held her in my arms, and it was like I had never come at all. I wanted her, but if she could help me remember, I had to keep my priorities straight.

“How can you find out who I am?” I demanded.

“When you stop manhandling me, I'll tell you.”

“You're not like me.” It was a statement. Her body was softer, and although beautiful, she wasn't perfect. A tiny, quarter-moon scar lined the outside of her right eye. She had flaming red hair that was too frizzy and had bright green eyes. Her figure was small with nice, high breasts I wanted to explore. Her skin was paler than mine, much paler. I suspected she didn't tan in the sunlight. “Why do you seem unnaturally small?” I asked her as my sharp teeth snapped together.

She gave a soft shriek. I winced. “I'm not unnaturally small. Drelconian women are almost as tall as the men, many six feet and over. I'm five-seven. I'm human.”

I nodded at her explanation and released her when her eyebrow rose. “Please, tell me about myself specifically. What is my name?”

“I don't know, but Mack, my . . . friend, has a book where he keeps ID photos and all the information on the Lycarn and Drelconian leaders, along with a few others. He likes to collect details to assist him with his mission.”

“What mission would that be?”

She waved a hand. “What Mack does is not important right now, but if you are a leader, then you might be in the book, or you could be Draco or Ryuu.” For some reason, she seemed

disappointed at the prospect of me being either of these men. I rolled their names around in my head, but neither sounded familiar.

“Who are Draco and Ryuu?” I was getting tired of the questions, and just asking them was stirring my frustration. The rage could come up at any time. The feeling of being out of control was what kept me out here, alone. Last night, I had felt something new push at my mind, an invasion of some sort. I would not give in.

“They are the two oldest of the Drelconian lords, twins. The lords are the cream of the crop for your people, princes, I guess.” She strolled away from me. I studied the sway of her hips, the curve of her ass. That body, although human, could ease the rage for a longer period, I bet.

“Go and get the book, and bring it back to me,” I commanded. She laughed. “What’s so funny?”

“You.” She grinned. I reached out to bring her back to me, but she moved farther away. “You might not remember who you are, but you’re still arrogant like all of your people. It’s funny. In her way, Tiam was the same way. She tried to hide it, and because of her ignorance of our customs, you could miss the trait. Anyway, I cannot just take the book. I have to flip through it. Mack doesn’t take his eyes off me long, so I need to get back before he wakes from his drunken stupor. I’ll get him to show me the book. He likes to go over his plans . . .”

She stopped speaking. I had the feeling this Mack meant nothing good for my people and whoever the Lycarn were. And unless I missed my guess, he is Sandy’s lover. I hadn’t known her more than a few minutes, but the knowledge ticked me off. I wanted to rip him to shreds. Maybe I would when the time was right.

“Will you do it? Will you help me, Sandy?”

I saw her shiver at my speaking of her name. I hoped it was a good thing. Her eyes drifted to my crotch often enough, but she fought it. I, on the other hand, had no problem enjoying the vision of her breasts, her flat belly, and those shapely legs. I imagined her naked and wondered how long it had been since I had had a woman.

Or did I have a wife? Rage stirred at the thought. I backed away from Sandy. “Go now!” I snapped. She seemed to pick up on my waning control and fled from the room.

I sank down on the pile of blankets I had managed to procure during my nightly salvaging in the city and waited. My stomach growled with hunger, but I paid it no heed. I had become used to doing without.

Images floated over my mind of humans screaming while I burned them, the screeches of something called Desert Ice, and cold, lots of bitter cold. I closed my eyes and clawed at my temples. As fast as the skin tore, it healed. I felt the sides coming together, mending. I knew from experience this was another trait of the Drelconians. The reaction of my body had

been the same the day I tore a creature from my chest. The symbiont was dead, but not before it had done its damage to my mind.

* * * *

“Tav.”

I opened my eyes and realized I was in the same position I had been when Sandy left me. A glance at the watch I had picked up in my wanderings told me it was three days later. I forced my tight muscles to unfurl, and then I stood and, stretching, enjoyed how she took in my length.

“Do you like what you see?”

She blushed and looked away. “Your name is Tav,” she whispered, her voice shaky. “You are one of the lords. Draco and Ryuu are your older brothers. And from what I’ve heard, they are also here on Earth, prisoners of the Lycarn ambassador.”

“I should care because?”

Her eyes widened. “You don’t? They are your brothers. You must care.”

“I feel nothing.” I turned away from her and tugged on a pair of jeans. I might not know who I was, but I knew I despised wearing clothes. I did it only to walk among the humans when I was looking for food. Having braided my hair, I stuffed the ponytail beneath a hat and tugged it low over my brow. “Something happened to me. I don’t know what, but all I experience on a daily basis is anger, burning anger. If I let it out, I will kill . . . again.”

“A-Again?” Even with my back to her, I knew she trembled. I wanted to hold her, but not to comfort her.

“You should not come here again.” I gathered up an old leather bag and slung it over my head and shoulder. “It’s dangerous for a delicate thing like you. I believe I have killed many people, humans.”

When I faced her, her hands were on her hips. “So, you’re just going to let your brothers rot, is that it? You really don’t give a shit what happened to them?”

“Why do you care?”

She said nothing for several minutes. I didn’t know a lot, but I suspected humans didn’t get along with Drelconians and vice versa. So why was this human so determined to help the men she claimed were my family? I couldn’t remember them. For all I knew, she could be trying to trap me, to make me a trophy for her lover.

“Well?” I demanded.

“It’s because of Tiam. I want to know she’s safe. I want news of her. I’ve never had many friends in my life, although I did all I could to cultivate them on Orel-X Four. If you remember who you are, then you could contact your people somehow, and I can learn how she is.”

I laughed. “So, *you* don’t care about these lords any more than *I* do.”

“It’s not the same. They’re your family. You should value family.”

I pretended to consider her words, to search my mind. “Hmm, nope. Nothing. Don’t value it.” When she would have protested, I held up a hand. “But don’t worry, I will help you to rescue them.”

A joyful expression spread over her face, causing me to catch my breath at her beauty. And then the look turned to doubt. “Why?”

“Because I want you. I will use the time to seduce you,” I said in simple terms.

She laughed. “Not going to happen. But you’re free to try.”

Chapter Three

Our meals were of necessity something from a can and cold. Mack had promised to find jobs for us all where we could mingle among lawful citizens and gather intel on the Lycarn. Until now, he had arranged for everyone except me and the guards.

I sank down on a folding chair at the card table where he studied his book. “Mack, when am I going to get a job? You said last month you would arrange something, but still I’m stuck in this place night and day. You hardly ever let me go into the city, and when you do it’s with an escort. I feel like I’m a prisoner.”

He glanced up from the page he was studying. I recognized Ryu by now. “If you were out there, you *would* be a prisoner. Rotting in a jail cell. Is that what you want?”

He ran a hand down my face, to my neck, and lower, to cup my breast. I resisted pulling away. “No, you know I don’t.”

“Good, because I need you here.”

“For what! To warm your bed?” I jumped to my feet, but he snatched me back down, a hand on my nape to keep me in place.

“Look at this.” He jabbed a finger at the page in front of him. “This is Ryu. He and his twin are being held at the Lycarn ambassador’s house—”

“I know that already. I—”

“Shut up!” He tugged my hair, and I snapped my mouth closed before he became angry enough to cause me real pain. “I need to know where the house is. No one up until now has been able to tell me the location. You’d think with those beasts walking around disrupting our way of life, the information would leak out. It hasn’t.”

I had visions of stuffing one of his men’s guns into his cruel mouth and pulling the trigger, but I’d never gotten close to one, let alone shot off a round. I was a bartender by trade and had spent near a decade on Orel-X Four in a small community of eggheads whose purpose had been to find a way to kill off the Drelconians. The project had been scrapped for the time being. Mack had his own plans, and if I could get him to trust me, I might be able to use him to get what I wanted. Not that I was clear on what I wanted beyond knowing Tiam was safe. Life didn’t hold much hope on Earth.

“How can I help you, Mack?” I asked, infusing my tone with false sincerity.

He eyed me without a shred of trust. I thought he wouldn’t tell me more, but Mack couldn’t resist bragging. Under the impression that he was a brilliant strategist, he had shared many of his plans with me. However, up until now, I hadn’t been very attentive to what he said.

A slow grin spread over his face, full of self-satisfaction. “If I can locate the ambassador’s house where everyone else has failed, I will have two of the Drelconian lords and the

ambassador in one place. I can destroy them in one big hit. Before you know it, the beasts will leave Earth and the Drelconians won't come back. The Desert Ice are still stranded on Orel-X Four, but they'll learn about what happened here. If they ever get control of the dragons they tried to possess in order to travel, then they'll just keep moving along to the next place. We'll be free."

I blinked at him like he'd lost his mind. Nothing in life was that simple. "Are you kidding, Mack? The Lycarn and the Drelconians are aggressive species. They're not going to lie down and take it while you kill off their leaders."

My mistake of speaking against his plan and making him look like a fool became apparent the moment the others in the room laughed. His face reddened, and his eyes narrowed. He raised his hand to smack me, but he hesitated in front of the others. I was grateful for the reprieve. Instead, he glanced around and snapped his fingers at one of the girls. She sauntered over in a dress so short that her snatch was half visible beneath it and her breasts all but spilling over the top.

Mack patted his lap, and she sat down on him. He guided her hand along his shaft, squeezing her fingers around it while staring at me. "Get the fuck out, Sandy. Go find somewhere else to sleep tonight."

I gasped, hurt, although I didn't care about him at all. Because I had humiliated him, he had done the same to me. He knew I had nowhere to go and was afraid I would go to jail again without his help.

Humbling myself, I lowered my gaze to the floor. "I'm sorry, Mack. Please let me stay."

He pushed the woman up, yanked me from my chair, and dragged me over to the door. Kicking away the rags in front of it which blocked out the artificial light we used, he took hold of the knob and wrenched the door open. With a cruel shove, he sent me through to the hall and shut me out with a bang.

The crack of light under the door was snuffed out, and I was pitched into total darkness. After falling when he pushed me, I stood and brushed off my knees before picking my way along the hall. I considered sleeping in one of the other apartments, but I feared he would send his guards to further my embarrassment by kicking me out of the building. Better to leave on my own.

In the courtyard, I tugged my sweater tighter around me against the cool night air. Glass smashed nearby, and I heard the whine of a drunk for the loss of his dinner. Not until I was inside Tav's building did I realize I had been heading there. I hoped he wasn't in a sour mood and would let me stay. Tomorrow night, I would try to get work on my own and find a better place to live. At least I wouldn't have to stay amid of this filth. I had to believe there were other lawbreakers in the populated areas of the city.

When I reached Tav's apartment, I found it empty. I slipped inside and shut the door behind me. His window had either not been boarded, or he'd broken the board off in order to fly in.

I couldn't imagine how he got a dragon's rear through the narrow opening. The moon lit the room enough for me to make out various shapes.

I stumbled to a pile of blankets and settled in. Nearby he had left his bag, and I searched it. "Cake!" I was busy stuffing my face when he returned with the same stealth that he had used the night he grabbed me.

"Do you make it a habit of invading others' homes and eating their food?"

I jumped at his voice behind me and turned to face him with the evidence in my palm. "Uh . . ." I stuffed the last bit into my mouth and stood to shake out the crumbs from his covers. "I'm sorry, Tav. I was so hungry, and Mack threw me out. I had nowhere else to go. I promise I'll be out of your hair by tomorrow night." I offered him a big grin and waited for his verdict.

He said nothing but moved about the room—doing what, I wasn't sure. When he had stripped out of his clothing with no shame, he spoke. "You can stay. If I tell you to leave suddenly, do not argue. Just go. Your life depends on it. And . . ."

I nodded. "And what?"

He dropped to the covers and tucked his arms behind his head, then stared out at the sky. "Your lover is a fool for giving you up even for one night."

Chapter Four

“Trust me . . .”

The push in my head was there again. I blocked it out with difficulty, while willing myself to wake up. I heard my roar, but something bound my hands and feet. I had the thought to burn it away and filled my lungs in preparation for a blast of fire.

Someone screamed. “Tav, stop! *Please.*”

I came awake with a jerk. The room, although pitch black, was visible in my eyes. Early on, I had learned that I could see in the darkness like it was daylight. Something shifted beside me, and I turned to see Sandy, her green eyes wide in shock and fear.

The remnants of my dream and the push in my mind came back to me. I stared at her. She could be the one doing this to me. The push had begun the night before I met her. Without calling for the change, my teeth sharpened to points and my fingernails grew to claws.

Seeing the transformation, Sandy inched away from me. I followed. Grabbing for her blouse front to bring her closer, I didn’t realize just how sharp my claws were. They ripped straight through the material, even severing her bra so that her breasts were bared before me. I should have told her to leave, but I didn’t.

Her breasts rose and fell with her heavy breathing. The nipples teased me with their pink ripeness. I desired to return the favor and suck them between my lips, knead them between the roof of my mouth and my tongue. She wanted it, too. The ache was clear in her eyes, in the shortened breath. She was no longer afraid but excited.

I crawled above her as she lay flat on the floor. “You have two choices,” I murmured, not taking my eyes off her body. “Leave now or stay, and I will feast on your sweetness.” I lowered my head toward her pussy. Pungent and alluring, her aroma called to me, made my mouth water for a taste. “I have not . . . I’m not sure if I am a gentle lover. I will try, you being a human.”

Even amid the want to spread her legs and take my pleasure, I couldn’t pretend to respect her or her kind. I respected no one, nor did I trust any of them. I was not convinced she wasn’t the one attempting to invade my head, but I had to have her.

“Well?” I demanded.

“This is sudden.”

“You wanted romance?”

She frowned. “No, that’s not what I’m looking for, and I don’t know if you’ll be any different than Mack. He wasn’t gentle either, and he didn’t care if I had an orgasm or not. More often not.”

“Did he eat you?” It was a simple question, requiring a simple answer. She trembled. I thought the words inflamed her craving.

“No.”

“There you go then.” I pointed a claw ready to cut her out of her jeans. She pushed at my hand.

“Wait a minute. I won’t have anything to wear if you do that.”

I scooted back to watch while she undressed. She took her time folding the jeans and setting them aside while I watched how her bikini panties curved over her ass. Her scent was stronger. There was no doubt in my mind that she was already wet. The barrier of her panties mattered little to me. I slit them, and they fluttered to the floor in three pieces.

She scowled at me. I shrugged. “You moved too slowly. I was eager to get to my treat.” With no preamble whatsoever, I caught her by one ankle and tugged her closer. She protested, but I had already settled my head between her soft thighs and had my first taste of her cream. *Delicious!*

Reaching up to spread her pussy lips with the thumb and forefinger of one hand, I watched her reaction. A quiver rippled through her body, and she clamped down on a moan. She didn’t want me to know just how much she wanted my touch, ached for my tongue to trace her warm core. With the tip of my tongue, I toyed with her clit, flicked it, and sucked on the distended nub before releasing it. A small cry escaped between her lips in protest.

I pretended I didn’t know she wanted more but rather inched down to the tiny pool of her come gathering at the base of her opening. I sampled the thick white offering and then delved deeper for more. Sandy writhed.

I drew back. “He didn’t taste your sweetness like this, Sandy?” Diving in again, I sucked at her pussy while constraining her thighs from closing on my head. She bucked against my hold.

“Tav . . .”

“Mmm.” I licked hungrily at her clit and drew it into my mouth before letting it pop free. “He had no idea what he was missing. You taste so good.”

I sat up and rested my hands at her slender hips. She was so small, and it turned me on. My cock throbbed to get inside her, but I held back. Leaning to the side to get my bag, I didn’t miss the alarm in her eyes. She thought I wasn’t going to let her come. I had some satisfaction knowing I was in charge. And I was right about her driving away the rage. Since I’d begun pleasuring her, no pressure bound my head, and I could almost think clearly.

Holding up a small clear container, I waited for her to question me. She lay there trusting, but her eyes were riveted to my movements. Slow and easy, I coated my finger with petroleum jelly.

“You got that in preparation . . .”

“For you. Specifically, your tight little ass.”

She gasped. “Oh.”

Chapter Five

I'm not sure what I expected, but I hoped Tav would make me come. I had only come once or twice with Mack. He had taken me from behind, rough and painful. I had rubbed my clit and blocked out all thoughts of him. My orgasm hadn't been strong, and more often than not, I didn't even try to come.

But from the first touch of Tav's tongue, I was ready to explode. And when he stuck his finger up my ass, I almost screamed and rocked my hips to take him deeper. He moved to my side and dropped kisses along my stomach while still working my ass. On the fringes of my climax, I resisted crying out. I didn't want him to know he could manipulate my body at his whim.

"Let yourself go, Sandy," he encouraged me. "It's okay. Enjoy it." He pushed two fingers in my ass and followed them with his thumb in my pussy. I moaned. All thought of resistance left me.

He trailed kisses down my stomach to stop at my clit. Three powerful sensations, at my clit, the passage into my pussy, and my rear was too much. Screaming and writhing, I raised my hips up from the floor and dropped them when all strength left my body. "Tav, I can't take it. It's so good."

"Come, Sandy."

"I can't. I can't."

He stroked harder and faster. Catching my clit between his lips, he sucked and tugged until my orgasm smashed through all resistance. I rode it out, groaning and pumping my hips into his hand and mouth. When the sensations gentled, I relaxed enough to thread my fingers through my hair. Not once had my experiences with Mack been so blistering.

Tav climbed up to lie alongside me with a smug expression on his face. "It seems you do have the ability to come."

"You're awfully smug for a man who can't remember what and who he is. Seems you didn't forget *that*." I thought my words would ignite his anger, but he laughed, his dark eyes illuminated yellow and black in the dim light.

The longer we stretched out atop his threadbare blanket, the more his self-satisfaction faded, until I remembered that he hadn't come yet. His shaft extended between us, monolithic and ready for some attention of its own. I was not selfish. I let my fingertips rove along the plains of his broad chest down to the silken spirals above his navel until my hand bumped his cock's head.

He leaned in and kissed me. "Roll over. I'll transport you to another screaming orgasm."

I shook my head. "No, I'm taking you there." I shoved at his shoulders to get him on his back. He didn't resist. Climbing atop him, I noted how warm he was, warmer than any

human male—or female, for that matter. The more turned on he was, the hotter he became. I wondered if he would ever let himself go, would he keep himself from burning me.

I licked his head and took it into my mouth. It jerked in my hands. He groaned and arched his hips. “Damn, that’s incredible. I have a feeling I’ve not experienced this.”

Pausing, I stared at him. “You’re a virgin?”

He laughed and guided my mouth back to his throbbing cock. “Never! I mean a . . . what do you humans call it.” He appeared to search his memory but couldn’t bring forth the word. If he really hadn’t had one, then maybe he hadn’t known the word in the first place.

“Poor Tav.” I grinned. “You Drelconian lords are more deprived than I thought. Perhaps I might also need to school your brothers when we find them.”

His eyes darkened. He pulled me up from his groin to bring us nose to nose. “I don’t share my bedmates. If you’re going to give yourself to me, I will be your only lover. Understand?”

My breath caught in my throat. He had no right to command me, but I was too scared to speak up. I had been kidding. I knew his brothers were married, and my sexual appetite had never been so big I needed more than one man at a time. I gave a slow nod, and he released me.

For a few minutes, I did nothing, feeling deflated at his anger. The confidence I’d exhibited in trying to bring him to a head was gone. After some time, he reached for my hand and guided it to his shaft. I tried to extract my hand from his grip, but he held on.

“Don’t.” This time, his words weren’t a command. As he showed me how he liked to be pleased, his voice was soft and encouraging. “You want to stop?”

“Not really.”

His long fingers closed over mine, and we squeezed him together. He caught his breath. “But I hurt your feelings just now.”

“Yes.”

I waited for him to tell me he was sorry, but he stayed silent. I searched his face, and I didn’t find remorse exactly, but not cruelty either. Not like I saw in Mack. I had thought Mack was a decent man until he had lamented to me about not getting to sleep with Tiam, as if knowing she was a Drelconian meant he was free to force her. He had said as much while being intimate with me.

Tav removed my hand from his shaft and rolled me to my back. Positioning himself over me, he stared into my eyes. I glanced away. He trailed kisses along my neck, tantalized a nipple until it puckered, and then he met my gaze again. “I can’t promise I will be nice.” He lifted a finger to tap the side of his head. “I like to blame the amnesia, but there’s more going

on there. I don't know how to fly, and I also get vertigo. I get angry sometimes, and I lose myself. I lose time."

"You're making excuses."

"So, what you're saying is you don't want me to do this?" The sides of my pussy stretched as he entered me. I whimpered. Propping himself on his palms at either side of my body, he rocked his cock deeper then pulled it free. "That piss you off?"

I bumped him hard and knocked him off balance. Scrambling to my feet, I gathered my clothes and stomped to the door. He didn't stay down long. When I wrenched the door open, he slammed it shut and yanked my clothes out of my hands.

Behind me, he bent his knees and curved his body around mine. "I didn't mean it."

"Didn't you?" I stared at the door, not seeing more than a sheet of solid black before me, but feeling the cracked paint beneath my fingertips. "I assumed—"

"You assumed?"

With a sigh, I tried again. "In your file, it says you were the gentlest of the Drelconian lords, sort of shy and somewhat gullible."

I imagined he frowned at the information. "Gullible?"

"I shouldn't have said anything. I'm sorry." Something he couldn't say to me. He had been married. His wife had betrayed him, had only married him for his money and the status she would have. Tav had thought it was a love match. Silly him when the humans and Drelconians had only been trading in the first place.

He curled fingers over mine on the door panel, and somehow his cock found my opening with no guidance. With his sharp thrust, I went up on my toes and pushed my ass back to him. My walls stretching around him hurt, but I didn't protest.

"I'm not nice." He shoved deep and pulled back. "I'm not gullible." A repeat of his stroke had me panting. "I'm not what you thought, nor do I want to be. I will make you come, and that's all!"

When I began to moan and buck against him, he ran a hand down to my nipple and pinched it. I cried out, my orgasm eminent. He switched to my other breast, plucked and twisted the small bud. My legs gave out, but in a lightning move, he caught me. I rested my cheek on my crossed hands while a flood of pleasure bathed my insides. Tav didn't slow his pounding for a second. My climax calmed, and then climbed again with each grind of his hips.

He was brutal and insensitive all right, but in a way, that made me want to let him use my pussy until it was raw. Maybe I had fallen out of one bad relationship into another, but I couldn't be bothered to analyze it now.

“Tav.” I gasped. “I can’t possibly come again!” I told him after the fourth consecutive explosion.

He nuzzled my hair. “That’s what you think.”

Retracting his cock, coated with my cream, he shifted me higher and placed the thick head at my ass.

“No!” I screamed. “Too big!”

“Relax.”

I tried, but my muscles were stiff. I wanted him to take me in every way possible. I knew anal sex could be extremely hot. Just using his fingers there had set me on fire, but this might be too much.

He pressed inside my ass, and tears sprang to my eyes. His hold on my waist tightened. Grinding deeper, he grunted his pleasure. “I can’t help it.” He gasped. His voice was deeper, and I imagined his teeth had changed to razor points in his excitement. When he was buried to the hilt, he drew back and drove in again.

His roar echoed around the room. A burst of heat filled me, and I knew he had come. He shook behind me, and his forehead dropped to rest on my shoulder while he dragged in ragged breaths.

After he had composed himself again, he lay a hand over my mound. “Now you.”

“No. Please.” I covered his hand. “Not now. Just take it out.”

He looked down at me but complied and then carried me across the room to lay me down on the blankets. He found water from somewhere and washed my body then wrapped me snugly in the covers. When he had cleaned himself, he lay down next to me and took me in his arms with my head cradled on his chest. Minutes later, we were both asleep.

Chapter Six

From the corner of the room, I watched Sandy. She had insisted on attempting to get a job at a bar. Never mind that, from what she told me, she was wanted, and the first place the police would look for her was in one of those establishments.

While she dyed her brilliant hair to a hideous shade of brown, I frowned. "It's ugly."

"It's necessary," she countered. "If you don't like it, you can leave."

"I believe this is my apartment, and I'm being generous in letting you stay."

She rolled her eyes. "This place is abandoned, and I can't figure out how you got the water running. Mack had no success over in the other building." I shrugged and was rewarded again with the strange eye movement. She thought I was insulted by it, I guessed.

"Tell me about this . . . bar," I demanded.

She dipped her head beneath the water, muffling her voice. "It's where they sell drinks. The one I'm looking at also serves the Lycarn. I'm hoping to chat one up, or maybe find a human who doesn't like them, and maybe he'll give me information." She glanced back at me. "You're too ignorant to do it. I can't believe you didn't learn all this simple stuff while you went foraging in the city for food and such."

"None of them interested me, so I had no need to stay in one place long. I steal my food and move on. Besides, I don't trust anyone."

"You didn't see any attractive women to take to your bed . . . of sorts?"

"I didn't say that."

She smirked. "But you've barely let me off my back the last week."

I considered saying something spiteful, but I didn't like her reactions to meanness. She would either get a glassy-eyed look like she was about to cry, or she'd stomp out of the apartment and I wouldn't know where she went. I began to think I could sniff her out, but I didn't want her going off in the first place. Unless I demanded that she leave when I was in a mood, of course.

"How long is this going to take?" I grumbled. "I have food to gather, and you're not good at stealing. I don't know how you got yourself in trouble in the first place. What did you say you did to break the human law?"

"I didn't." She pressed her lips together. I knew she was keeping something from me, and I often thought it had to do with my forgotten past. But now that she was my lover, the nightmares had lessened. I had no desire to dredge them up unless necessary.

"When will you be done, damn it?"

She spun around, her head buried beneath a towel. I watched her thin blouse rise, revealing her flat belly. Her nipples were hard behind the material, which reminded me of the last time I had sucked them. At my insistence, I had worked her tight little ass until she could take me without pain, and I'd even driven her to the orgasms that I had promised while doing so.

Although I couldn't say why, I didn't trust her. I thought she might betray me or leave and go back to her old lover at any second. Especially when I couldn't stop the cold remarks from tumbling from my lips. Yet, despite this, I regretted hurting her.

"Done," she announced, twining the end of her braid in a ponytail holder. "We can go, but you don't have to walk me there. I've been out alone plenty of times. And I know you're worried about Mack, but I've caught sight of him in the city, and he's shown no interest. He's got a new woman to torment."

I kept my facial expression indifferent. "I can kill him if you'd wish."

She glared at me like she was trying to determine if I was serious. I took ahold of her small waist and tugged her against my erection. When she glanced up with a question in those unforgettable eyes, I wanted to kiss her soft mouth and not let her out of the apartment. But she was right. I hadn't allowed her far from me for most of the week. A woman like Sandy enjoyed her independence. If I didn't let up, she would bolt. Then I really would have to kill the bastard who dared replace me.

"I'll walk you there, but I won't hang around. Okay?" I felt no guilt about lying to her. When her lips curled in disbelief, I nipped at the fuller, pinker one until she moaned. Too soon, she stepped out of my hold and sauntered through the door, leaving me to follow like a trained puppy. I didn't appreciate it.

* * * *

Sandy strode toward the door of the Hunting Wolf Bar and Grill. I began to think that the red glowing eyes of the neon beast over the sign was why the Lycarn favored it above others. But Sandy had assured me that the average person, having no say in the government's decisions, was not happy that so many Lycarn had taken up residence on Earth.

I had to agree. Despite wearing clothes, they looked wild, and from the looks I got when I dared get too close, I had the feeling they knew I was different even in disguise. The aggression was almost palpable. One followed too close to Sandy, and I shoved between them to force him back although we hadn't touched. My expression told him, I was sure, that I was looking for an excuse to test out which was the stronger of the two species. He growled but backed off.

Sandy glared. "I can't take you anywhere! You said you'd let me do this alone, Tav. Go do something else. I can find my own way home."

I glanced at the Lycarn, who chuckled. He held open the door for Sandy. "Miss?" His voice was gravelly like mine when I was in dragon form. I suspected he did it on purpose, just as

he allowed his ears to elongate and point at the tips. The bulk, the height—it pissed me off to have to look up at him.

“Fine. Good night!” I did an about-face and, striding down the street, tugged my hat lower over my face. With my hair hidden and makeup on to give my face a more flawed appearance, I figured I looked human. Sandy had taught me how to act the part without standing out from what she called “sheer freakishness.” She had been a huge help to me. I could stand to help her in her quest.

Someone stepped into my path, causing me to make an abrupt halt. “What’s your problem?”

He dragged on a cigar, blew the smoke in my face, and put it out on my hand. The wound closed and healed in seconds. “No problem at all, friend.” He grinned, evil in his eyes. “But I’m thinking I could get a nice reward if I tip off the law enforcers that there is a dragon among us. Or hadn’t you heard your kind are outlawed here?”

I folded my arms across my chest. “And I could rip your head off your shoulders.” I leaned toward him. “Literally.”

The man nodded. “You could, but it would be such a shame, because there’s a half-dozen guys who would like nothing more than to share a certain sexy human between them. Anything happens to me, and that’s exactly what happens to Sandy. Got it?”

I planted my fist in his face and sent him sprawling out on the pavement. As if they had been waiting for the opportunity, a homeless man and woman with two children scurried up and robbed the guy of everything except his socks and his boxers. I stepped over his body and continued down the street.

Chapter Seven

The Hunting Wolf was jam-packed. Every seat was taken, and people stood around the walls and crowded the bar for drinks. The harried bartenders clearly needed more help, but then they looked so busy that I had to wonder how much time I could make to chat up the patrons for information.

I squeezed my way between the bodies and tried my best not to notice how a number of human women entertained their Lycarn dates. I say dates, but I was pretty sure money had changed hands. Who would ever give it up freely to those monsters? I was almost through when an enormous clawed hand slipped between my legs and wrapped around one thigh.

I strove to free myself, but his grip held me close to his side. As I spun around toward him, I braced myself. If he made trouble for me, I would not get the job and possibly go to jail, which would prove to Tav that I couldn't take care of myself.

He surveyed me with his all-black eyes. "Come here and sit on this." He indicated the mammoth erection straining against his slacks.

I swallowed and shook my head. "No, I don't think I will."

His eyes became slits of coal. "It's what you do." He slid his hand higher until his knuckles bumped my pussy. The pleasure transforming his expression made me reach for the knife Mack had given me back when he first became my lover. While palming the weapon, I attempted to wrench myself free, without success.

"You have two seconds to get your paws off me."

He grinned. Each of his teeth alone had to be sharper than my knife. "Or what?"

I lifted my arm and, at the same time, saw Tav had entered the bar. His gaze locked on me and slid lower, to where the Lycarn's hand was planted. I thought I saw a shimmer of golden scales as he barreled through the crowd. All I needed was for him to morph to dragon form and blow his cover. He had said he would leave me to handle this. What a liar!

I brought my arm down and aimed for the Lycarn's shoulder, figuring it would cause enough pain for him not to try me again. In mid-arc, he caught my wrist and flipped me so that I landed on his lap. Tav's angry roar seemed to shatter every glass in the building, including the floor-to-ceiling mirrors behind the bar.

The music stopped, women screamed, and Lycarn howled and scratched at their ears. The beast holding me on his lap let go, and I elbowed him in the gut, which hurt my arm in the process. I shuffled to my feet and searched in the direction I'd last seen Tav. His cover must surely be blown.

But with all the chaos, screams, shattering glass, and howls, no one was sure what had set it off. Tav was now on the other side of the room from where I'd spotted him. His eyes

glowed for an instant beneath his hat, but otherwise, he appeared like all the other men in the bar. No one was the wiser.

A man about five-feet tall shoved through the crowd to stand before me with an accusing expression on his face. “What the fuck is going on here?”

Tav started over to us, but I gave a tiny shake of my head and he stopped, his nostrils flared. I hoped he wasn’t about to blow smoke or, worse, fire from his nose. He appeared to debate whether to interfere and then settled back at the bar, his eyes never wavering from me.

“Sir, I can explain,” I began to the man who must be the manager.

Before I could continue, the Lycarn rose to his full height, dwarfing us both. We craned our necks to look up at him. All of the manager’s presence as the man in charge drained away. I trembled despite myself.

“What’s going on is none of your fucking business.” The Lycarn poked a finger into the man’s chest, almost making him tumble backward. “I have found my bedmate for the night.”

I found my wrist encircled in an inescapable grip for the second time as I was hauled toward the door behind the Lycarn. My potential job had disappeared before I had the chance to apply for it.

Out on the street, the tall, dark, and scary—or I should say hairy—Lycarn was no less commanding. He strolled out into the busy street and stopped an oncoming taxi with his hand. Granted, the driver had slammed on his brakes, but I gaped at the hand imprint in the metal when the beast strolled from the front to the side of the car.

He tore open the door with too much force. “Get in!”

I considered running but had heard they were fast on their feet. I felt my pocket, which brought the fearful realization that in the scuffle, I had lost my knife. I was defenseless. When the bar door banged open, we both turned to look. Tav filled the opening. His eyes were like a cat’s, with slits of black amid yellow.

I moved back to examine the hand imprint again, and then to the giant of a wolf-man, then to Tav. A vision of him being crushed in this thing’s paws floated into my mind. I thought fast and blew Tav a kiss. “It’s been fun, Tav, but I think I’m going to spend some time with Sasquatch here.” My words were brave, but my voice wavered a touch.

Not waiting for Tav to respond, I hopped into the taxi with the Lycarn behind me. He ran a hand down my thigh as the vehicle tore out into traffic. I flinched, then paused to consider whether I would break a bone if I jumped out while we were moving.

“Phelan,” he muttered.

“What?” My mind had been miles away figuring out my escape plan. I couldn’t call the police, and I’d just dumped Tav. I was on my own.

“My name,” he said louder. “Phelan is my name.” He pointed to himself, which reinforced my thought that he was little more than an animal. I should feel ashamed after misjudging the Drelconians, but the Lycarn were savage.

“I don’t care what your name is. I’m not going to be your bedmate.” I crossed my arms over my chest. “You ruined my chances to get a job back there. The way I see it, you owe me a night’s pay.”

He leaned up to my face, growled, and snapped his teeth together. I screamed, and he laughed. “I will pay you by fucking you.”

“That’s pay for you!” I scooted to the other side of the car. The tent in his pants made me shiver. “Something like you shouldn’t be having sex with a human woman. You’re too big.” Just days ago, I thought Tav was too big. And he was, but not like this. Tav made me hot. This creature had me gripping the door in preparation of throwing myself out on the street. Anything was better than having him touch me.

He thought my fear was funny. “My people are warriors. We love fighting. I should have fought your dragon for you, as is proper. But maybe he was too afraid. Afterward, you would become my slave.”

“For your information, Tav is not afraid!” I shouldn’t let him provoke me. His kind enjoyed it. “And I’d rather kill myself than be enslaved to you. I thought you were our allies. What a joke. What a *mistake* someone made.”

He shrugged. “Matter of time. Still, I will have you. I will enjoy hearing you scream while I take you for the first time. After that, you will lick my balls at the snap of my fingers.”

“Go to hell!”

Before he could respond, something smashed onto the roof of the car. Jagged claws tore away the metal, and a roar rattled the windows. Crying out, the driver wove over the road.

Tav had waited to attack until we were on a back street with little traffic. Phelan didn’t have the chance to grab me again. Tav reached in and curled me in his hold to lift me out. Unfortunately, he had not mastered flying. I was close to throwing up when we dipped and swayed, low then high.

I managed to look back and caught sight of Phelan. He howled in rage, transformed to the biggest wolf I’d ever seen, and chased after us. Tav took a shortcut through the park, but Phelan followed. Whoever had gossiped about the Lycarn’s speed had not exaggerated in the least. They left out the part about the alien being able to leap ten or fifteen feet off the ground.

Phelan sprang and tore through Tav's underbelly. Tav roared. His hold loosened, and I plummeted to the ground. Grateful for the grass but not the hard-packed dirt beneath, I slammed my head upon impact. Spots danced before my eyes.

As darkness descended on my consciousness, I watched Tav crash head-first, much like I had, and Phelan climb atop his body then bare his teeth for the kill.

Chapter Eight

The rage had been under control for a while now. I thought it didn't exist any longer, that somehow I had healed. Not my memory, of course, but losing control of my anger. When I saw Sandy fall, even though it wasn't a long drop, I froze for a second. The distraction allowed the Lycarn beast to get the upper hand. His powerful teeth smashed through my scales—which was nearly impossible—as he bit into my tail.

With strength I could only marvel at, he forced me out of the air. But seeing Sandy lose consciousness set me off. I flipped over on top of the wolf and tried to crush him. He yelped but kept squirming. When I rose to pin him under a foot and drove my claw into his lanky throat, I thought that would be it.

To my surprise, he changed and grew. His humanoid form was bigger and enabled him to maneuver better during the fight. His strength seemed to know no bounds. Naked and uncaring, he shoved me, a two-ton dragon, off him. I slid backward, tearing up grass and shrubs along the way.

A tree halted my progress, and pain exploded throughout my skull when I hit it. A memory of creatures screeching and an odd mechanical voice telling someone to put the symbiont inside me. I remembered turning my head to shout because of the pain and seeing Sandy in the hall when someone left the room. A man standing beside her took her arm to lead her away.

She had been a part of what happened to me! I fought to bring more details to the foreground of my mind, but the Lycarn wasn't finished with his attack. He morphed again into some half-beast, half-humanoid thing, bulky with knotted muscle and inch-long razor nails. He sliced into my body, which had changed back to its humanoid form as well.

I cried out at the knifelike cut into my stomach and drove a fist into his face. He stumbled but came back at me. We rolled about the ground pummeling each other until my muscles ached. I wanted nothing more than to lie down and rest, but I had to keep going. The Lycarn would not leave me alive, and from the pleasure mixed with pain on his face, he was enjoying the fight. His kind thrived on it.

Each time I tried to fly up, he jumped to head me off and smack me down. I was being flayed simply because I couldn't remember how to be . . . *me*, a dragon. With a final burst of energy, I attacked the Lycarn with blow after blow and then threw him with all the force I could into the lake.

I spun away, then ran for Sandy, scooped her up, changed, and flew in a straight line for the sky. By the time the Lycarn could swim to the shore, we would be out of his sight, let alone his reach.

* * * *

Hours of flying in the most haphazard way left me drained. Sandy and I crash-landed in a forested area. I hadn't spotted houses or human activity for miles. The air here was cleaner, fresher. I dragged it in and savored the absence of car exhaust and noise pollution.

Sandy stirred beside me and opened her eyes. Desire stirred within me at her beauty, but I mentally trampled it after recalling what I had.

"You were there," I said, accusing her.

Her eyes widened. I didn't have to elaborate. She knew what I was talking about.

"You were involved in whatever happened to me. I remember seeing you in the hall, outside my room." I reached out and took her arm in a punishing grip. She cried out, but I ignored it. "I foolishly believed you when you said you didn't know me, had never seen me before."

Her soft lips parted, and her tongue darted across them, wetting them so that they glistened in the moonlight. She was lucky that I hadn't yet recovered my strength or I'd make her pay right now—my gaze slid down over her full breasts, her small waist, and curvy hips—with her body.

She squirmed and sat up in degrees to massage her temple. "I didn't have anything to do with it. I've only ever been a bartender."

"Lies!"

Her glare did nothing to alleviate my anger. My healing was complete. My muscles no longer protested movement, and I sat up also but made no attempt to attack her. This angered me even more. She was nothing to me.

"Believe what you want, Tav, but I didn't know you. Maybe I was in the hall outside your room. It was the wing where they kept your people after they were captured. I don't remember seeing you specifically. All of you . . ." She stopped.

"All of us what?"

She grumbled. "All of you look alike, with your hair and build, not even the tiniest scar or bulbous, pockmarked nose to set you apart."

I swallowed a chuckle. "Unlike you." I reached out to trace the tiny scar at the side of her eye. "You're imperfect in many ways—"

"Thanks a lot."

"But so beautiful, so desirable." I steeled myself against her appeal. "Tell me everything, and if you lie, so help me, I will take you back to the Lycarn and watch while he fucks you until you're unconscious again."

"You wouldn't."

I stood and strolled over to a tree to lean against it. She didn't need to know the thought of watching another man fuck her turned me on a little. I had thought I would never, could never allow it. Of course, I didn't want anyone hurting her. Yet, I still craved every inch of her body. "Try me."

"The humans made contact a few years ago with an alien race called the Desert Ice." She smiled. "I think my friend, Tiam, actually called them by the name first. Their real name is something that didn't translate into English very well. Anyway, they were to help us get out from under the thumb of the Drelconians. We didn't know at the time, or rather I didn't know at the time, the Desert Ice wanted to take over the bodies of the dragons in order to escape their planet. I don't know how they expected to do it since the Desert Ice far outnumber the Drelconians from what I can gather."

At my confused look, she held up her hands to indicate her own lack of understanding for the plight of the creatures.

"They were forced to live below ground until the night time because they are naturally cold-blooded or something. The heat of the sun on Orel-X Four would kill them. They fused with the Drelconian bodies in a sort of protective coat. I don't know what happened to the others or you, because when they discovered that I helped Ladon and Tiam escape, I was shipped back to Earth to stand trial."

I stooped to pick a few blades of grass to rip them apart between my fingers. "And the Lycarn? Where do they come in?"

"New allies to give us fuel without strings."

I laughed, and she flinched at the coldness of it. "I don't have to have my memory to know a hostile race when I see one. They are born warriors with little compassion, from what I've seen. Therefore, they allied with you for a reason they haven't shared as yet."

The terror in her eyes got to me. I turned my back on her, but she moved up behind me and wrapped her arms around my waist. "That's what Phelan said, the Lycarn who wanted me. He said if he fought you for me and killed you, then I would become his slave. Do you think they'll make us slaves?"

I tossed away the bits of grass and ran my hands down the legs of my pants. My dick stood out behind the material, stiff and hard. "More than likely they will. You humans are foolish. From what I've learned, the only race you know which would not screw you over is the one you screwed first."

Chapter Nine

What Tav said was true. We had made the wrong decisions. More and more Lycarn descended on us each day, filling our cities, living among us. They were arrogant and mean, and they flouted our laws at every opportunity. So far, the lawmakers had done nothing to curb it. What would happen if today or tomorrow they wanted a complete overhaul in how our country was run or every country around the world? Although I was not considered an upstanding citizen with rights to be violated, something told me even if I were, Phelan would not have been arrested or asked to leave the planet for what he did.

As I stroked Tav's back, pressing close, he held himself stiff. He hadn't forgiven me for being human or for being on Orel-X Four in the first place, where his nightmare had taken place. I hadn't been there when he had escaped, but I had heard rumors about a Drelconian who had gone crazy, killed his captors, and then stolen a ship and disappeared. I figured now from what Tav had told me of the little he remembered that he had to be the one the stories spoke of.

It terrified me, but even with his occasional barbs and his possessive attitude, he hadn't abused me. I liked to think underneath the gruff exterior was still the gentle dragon Mack's book outlined.

I slid my hands up over his hips, around to his stomach. His sexy, tight muscles made me weak. I could spend the day rubbing him down, tasting him, and staring at his naked body. I inched my hand beneath his shirt and stroked his skin, and a low rumble began in his throat. He might be angry, but he wanted me, and I was going to have him.

Exploring farther south, I came across his cock and curled my fingers over it through his clothes. I didn't want to waste a moment, so I unbuttoned his pants and reached inside his boxers. His head went back when I closed my palm around his shaft's head. Precome coated my hand.

"I didn't get to suck you long last time," I murmured.

"No time like the present." He twisted around to face me. Gentle pressure on my shoulders made me drop to my knees.

I frowned up at him. "Not even a 'please, won't you . . .?'"

He cocked an eyebrow at me. "You initiated this."

I should have bitten him, but I lapped up his juice and traced with my tongue around the head. I drew him into my mouth and alternated between sucking and stroking him deep into my throat.

"Mmm, Sandy, that's good." He rested his hands on the back of my head and gave me a push to get him deeper. My mouth was stretched as it was. I pulled back to look up at him. "Why did you stop?"

“You’re thick, Tav. I don’t need you pushing my head. My throat can’t take you too far.”

He caressed my cheek, then slid his hand beneath my chin to guide my face toward his cock. He rubbed his erection over my lip and waited for me to open to him. I resisted, stubbornly.

“Come on, baby. Open.” He leaned down to tweak my nipple and to squeeze the sensitive mound. I gave in, and he filled my mouth, running his hard-on in and out at a rapid clip, but not deep enough to hurt me. “Shit, yes!” he growled.

I hung onto his bare buttocks, allowing my fingernails to sink into his skin. Soon his seed gushed into my mouth. I drank it down and dragged on him for more.

He pulled out of my mouth, caught his dick in his palm, and forced more out. He took my chin a second time and smeared the cream on my lips. “Let me watch you lick it off,” he commanded.

I tried to yank away, but he held on. We stared into each other’s eyes for long minutes, and then I gave in. My eyes half closed, I stuck out my tongue and trailed the tip in a lazy orbit around my lips. Tav’s nostrils flared as he watched. His cock twitched and grew at my teasing.

“Do you like tasting me?” he asked.

“You know I do.”

He released me and stepped back. “Stand up. Take off your clothes, and face the tree.” He indicated which one, fully confident I would obey him. I thought about it, but we both knew his commands were turning me on. I had thought that I wanted a gentle lover, one who was cognizant of my needs and who desired to please me. Tav may not have been gentle, but he seemed to know how to get me off. It didn’t mean I wasn’t somewhat resentful.

I stood and placed my hands on my hips. “And if I say no?”

Massaging my clit with two fingers through my slacks, he laughed. “Do you want to say no?”

“I . . .” My eyes drifted closed, and I pushed my hips forward to ride his fingers. With my forehead on his broad chest, I tried again to speak. “Y-Yes. I mean no. I don’t want to say no.”

He gave me a final pat and moved his hand. “Then do as I say. Get undressed and spread ’em at that tree.”

Compliant, I unbuttoned my blouse while he watched. After I had dropped my blouse to the ground, I undid the snap on my pants, unzipped them, and slid them over my hips. Tav sidestepped and leaned around to take in the sight of my ass being slowly revealed.

I kept my panties and bra on while tossing aside my pants. Tav shook his head and wagged a finger. “Everything.”

Rolling my eyes, I reached behind me and unsnapped my bra. My breasts sprang free of the silk and lace, and my nipples puckered and ready for him. He grunted his approval. Curling my fingers in the sides of my lilac panties, I took my time sliding them down. The patch of hair at my apex seemed to drive him wild. I had scarcely kicked away the last scrap of material before he lunged for me and lifted me high in the air.

He rained kisses along the inside swell of my breasts and in the valley between them. My belly was almost level with his head when he stuck his tongue in my navel. I whimpered, come wetting the tops of my thighs.

“I want to eat you from top to bottom,” Tav declared. His voice was deep and gravelly. I glanced down to find his eyes had changed—and his teeth, too. I squeaked.

“I hope not literally. Well . . . not completely.” My laugh was shaky.

He slid me down his body until his cock penetrated my pussy and went deep, stretching my protesting muscles. My appetite might have been moderate, but Tav’s lust never dulled. He gripped my ass cheeks and pumped me up and down his staff. The pain gave way to pleasure when his small head rubbed my sweet spot. I locked my heels behind him and rode him hard. Our pelvises slapped together. My juices flowed, easing the friction between us.

“Damn it, Tav. I’m going to come,” I screamed.

He chuckled and plunged harder. I bit his neck. He scooped some of my juices up to coat my ass, and before I knew what was happening, he had lifted me off his dick to push into my ass. I shouted my orgasm and lost strength at the same time.

When I would have fallen, he caught me and lowered us both to the ground, me on his lap. He didn’t break his stride but pounded deep and retracted over and over. A second orgasm took control. My clit, tingling, bumped along his groin with each lift and drop. After a third, then a fourth, orgasm, I fell on his chest, spent. Seconds after, Tav’s orgasm exploded, his roar echoing in the still night.

Chapter Ten

I woke up with a start and sniffed the air. He was coming. I knew it wouldn't be long before he tracked us down, but I had hoped that he would lose interest or find another woman. The Lycarn who had chosen Sandy was on our trail, and if my nose was working as it should, he was less than an hour away.

Sandy shivered. I had had her snuggled to my side. But we needed to get moving now. I reached out to shake her awake but paused when she called out.

"Who are you? Why are you in my head?"

I studied Sandy's face. She looked terrified. I picked her up and sat her on my lap. "Sandy, wake up now. Time to go." I tapped her cheek, but she didn't respond. I pressed my lips to her ear and called to her. "Wake up, baby."

"Who are you?" she whimpered. "I can't help you."

"Sandy!"

She jerked awake and stared up at me. I gathered her close and kissed her sweet lips. I pressed my mouth together to keep myself from saying something sappy.

She frowned. "What is it? Can't I sleep for a second? Damn it, Tav, my body doesn't heal like yours. I'm sore!"

I dropped her the few inches to the ground, and she bumped her ass. "Trust me, when I am ready, I know how to make you beg me to take you, sore or not!" I stood and yanked her to her feet. "You were talking in your sleep about someone in your head."

Her eyes widened. She pressed a hand to the side of her head, confusion clouding her expression. "We have to find Ryuu, Tav. We have to find your twin brothers."

I shuffled her along, looking over my shoulder into the woods. "You can tell me all about it on the way. We need to get out of here. Hold on."

I shifted to my dragon form and lowered my neck, but she backed away. "You dropped me before."

"I'll be more careful."

She pivoted on the ball of her foot and strode in the opposite direction. "I'll take my chances on the ground, thank you very much."

Frustrated, I followed behind still in dragon form. We were coming up on a thick grove of trees which would be damaged if I didn't change or take to the air. "This is too slow! I could fly with you gripped between my teeth."

Not bothering to glance back over her shoulder, she said, “And I can break my knife off in your gums. Think it would hurt?”

I scoured my memory for whether she still had the knife she’d pulled on the Lycarn in the bar. I thought she didn’t, but wasn’t about to take the chance. She might do it only to prove how brave she was and knowing I would heal.

“I suppose you want to be that Lycarn’s lover then?”

She stopped. Her eyes grew wide, and she whipped back and forth scanning the area around us. “Where is he?”

“He’s coming. I’m picking up his scent, and it’s getting closer.” Again, I lowered my neck for her to climb on. “Don’t forget, he’s much faster on foot than we are. In his wolf form, he could run for days without stopping.” At least that had been the rumor. I had no reason to disbelieve it, nor did I want to test the truth of it.

“Fine.” Sandy wrapped her legs around my neck, giving me an instant hard-on. “But if you drop me, Tav, so help me, I’ll . . .”

I rumbled a chuckle and took to the air. I was getting the hang of it, if I did say so myself. Well, until I dipped dangerously and my head began to spin. Images of blood and screaming filled my mind. I at first thought of shaking them away, but recalled in time that I would shake Sandy away in the process.

“Focus, Tav!” she screamed in fear and clutched me with all her small strength.

The trees whizzed by beneath us. I thought of flying low, hoping it would help the vertigo. It didn’t. When we had been zigzagging for a few hours, Sandy slumped forward, and I felt her slip. She was getting tired. With haste, I searched out a clearing for safe landing and headed toward it. Just as my feet broke the soft earth beneath my heavy body, Sandy fell off me. I whipped around and caught the waist of her pants between my teeth. The material tore, but not before I lowered her safely.

She lay there trying to pull herself together while I got a glimpse of her bare bottom. I morphed to my humanoid form and rolled her to her back. “Um, I . . .”

“You ripped my pants,” she said in accusation and then laughed. “This is so crazy. If it wasn’t just us, I’d die of embarrassment.”

I chuckled, allowing myself to be a leaning post while she removed the ruined garment. “While I don’t mind the view,” I told her while eyeing the patch of red curls between her legs, “we won’t get far with you like that. Then again . . .”

She placed her hands on her hips. “Then again what?”

I reached out to rip her blouse off. She swatted away my hand with a frown.

“Then again, I don’t mind you walking around naked or who sees you. You belong to me. I just don’t want to spend my time fighting over you.”

She stared at me with a dumbfounded look on her face. “I can’t believe you said that. I don’t belong to you. We decided we would enjoy being lovers. I don’t appreciate you talking about me like I’m a piece of property. Second of all, I can fight my own battles.”

“I haven’t seen any evidence of it.” I should have bitten my tongue rather than insult her like I did. I wasn’t completely remorseful for what I had said, but I didn’t know why. I wanted to ask her more about Drelconians to see if what I felt toward her was natural of my people or whether it was just me. However, she didn’t seem very chatty at the moment. I let her be.

Through gritted teeth and with glassy eyes, she said, “If you don’t mind, please go find me something to wear. I’m sure you can sniff it out. You’re an animal, right?”

“Touché.” I sniffed the air and picked up nothing of the Lycarn. “We may have lost him for now, but I don’t want to take chances. Stay put, and I’ll be back soon.” I leaned over to kiss her, but she turned her head. I wasn’t worried. I would charm her when I returned and have her moaning my name in no time.

Chapter Eleven

At first I was nervous standing out in the middle of nowhere at night, but then I heard the gurgle of water nearby and drifted toward it. Along a slight path was a small creek. Just glimpsing the water, I felt hot and sweaty and dreamed of the refreshment.

I glanced around and then kicked off my shoes and socks. My blouse soon followed before I plunged down in the frigid waters. Dipping beneath the surface, I ran my hands down my neck, over my shoulders, and around my breasts. With my eyes closed and with thoughts of Tav in my mind, I ran my hand farther down to my pussy.

So lost was I in stoking my lust and threading my fingers into my moist center that I didn't hear the snap of twigs behind me until a rough voice joined them. "As sexy as I imagined."

I dipped low beneath the waves and spun around. "You! But we lost you, and Tav didn't smell you coming this time."

Phelan spat on the ground. "That dragon doesn't know all there is to know about himself, let alone the Lycarn."

I wondered how he knew so much about it. Tav hadn't exactly been running around telling everyone he didn't know who he was. I thought better of asking how Phelan knew, but he was only too glad to give me a meaningless hint.

He tapped one temple. "A little birdie told me about his problem."

"What are you talking about?" Something about him was different. I thought he would beat me over the head and drag me out of the water to take advantage of me, but instead he just stood there. I wasn't complaining.

"Come out, and I'll tell you."

Sinking even lower, I crossed my arms over my breasts. "You're still a pervert. But something's different." I glanced around. "Tav will be here in a minute. You better back off before he kicks your ass again."

He snarled. "A few lucky blows. I had mercy on him. You seem to think he's worth saving."

I rolled my eyes.

"Or his brothers?"

I gasped. "What do you know about it?"

"Come out, and I'll tell you."

"Go to hell."

“Then I’ll join you.” Before my eyes, his bones snapped and popped. Where the hair had been thick and long on his head, it grew tamed as if he’d combed it, and the extra at other parts receded. Only then did I notice the man was naked. He stepped down into the water.

I stumbled backward and fell beneath the surface. When I came up sputtering and brushing my hair from my face, he howled.

“Nice view!”

His hands slid to my waist, and he hauled me against his chest. I tried kneeing him, but his grin widened. The beast had balls of steel—even unprotected. Without my knife, I dug my fingernails into his chest, but they were of no use, having been softened by the water. When his mouth was inches from mine, I turned my head and bit into his cheek. The coppery tang of blood filled my mouth.

In the instant I threw him off guard with my attack, he loosened his grip, so I was able to wade to shore. But he was on me. His hands slid around my waist, which forced me back into his hold. “I only wanted a kiss,” he whispered in my ear. “She won’t let me go any further.”

I stopped struggling and stared up at him. “Who won’t?”

“The woman in my head. Shannon.”

“Silly me for rushing back with clothes for you. Turns out you don’t need them after all.”

Phelan and I both looked up into Tav’s angry face. I had thought that if he caught Phelan with his hands on me, he would try ripping his head off. Instead, my lover just stood there holding a simple white dress with pink flowers all over it. I hated the color pink. And why did he have to bring a dress?

“Tav.” I shrugged off Phelan’s arms and rushed up to Tav. He shoved the dress in my arms and turned around to stroll back the way he had come. Heedless of my wet skin, I slipped into the garment and ran after him. I grabbed his arm. “What’s wrong with you? You can’t think I would welcome his touch?”

“Wouldn’t you?” he sneered. “You said yourself before I left I’m an animal. So is he. Bigger and apparently better endowed.” Phelan had caught up with us in a small clearing, and Tav’s gaze raked over Phelan’s huge dick, still erect, and by the gleam in his eyes, Phelan was proud of it.

I planted my hands on my hips and stood in front of Tav so he couldn’t get to the sticks he had begun to gather. “I thought I belonged to you. I’m surprised you’re not ripping Phelan’s head off like you tried earlier.”

The disgust on his face was plain. “Is that the type of woman you are? Wanting men to fight over you all the time?”

“You know I didn’t mean it like that.”

“I don’t know anything, Sandy.” He brushed me aside. “Nothing except women are manipulative, and they will use you until they get what they want.” He glanced at Phelan. “What are you using him for? Does he know where my brothers are? Where the ambassador’s house is?”

Phelan glanced up. His eyes narrowed to slits, and he growled low in his throat. He seemed in the throes of some internal battle, and then after some minutes he calmed. “I do know where your brothers are. Just like you’ve heard, they are prisoners of the ambassador. Particularly the black-haired one. What was his name?”

“Draco?” I offered.

He nodded. “Yes, he is the special pet.”

The quip seemed to piss Tav off, but he still didn’t appear to be upset enough for his own family. “What do you mean ‘pet?’”

Phelan didn’t explain. He glanced at me. “If he’s finished with you, I’ll take a taste. I’ve never had a human, too small and delicate. Our women are rough and strong, skin like rawhide.”

“Attractive,” Tav muttered and blew out fire to light the sticks he’d piled. Without another word, he lay down on the ground and tucked his hands behind his head. With his eyes closed, he looked like he couldn’t care less if I took Phelan for my new lover.

I wanted to spite him and jump on Phelan, ride his cock half the night, and make plenty of noise to stoke Tav’s jealousy. But I didn’t want to drive Tav away. I didn’t want to lose him, even if our relationship was just physical.

Not paying him any mind, I turned back to Phelan. “Will you help me find them and save them?”

Phelan shrugged. “I might.”

“Who is Shannon?”

Tav’s eyes popped open, and he leaned up on an elbow. “I know that name.” He looked at Phelan. Phelan pretended to be too busy rifling through a satchel he held in his hands to hear. I had slipped into my shoes and was strolling by him when he darted a hand out and yanked me down onto his lap.

He slid a hand up my thigh and squeezed. “I can smell you,” he whispered in my ear. “I can smell your pussy juice. What does it taste like? Hmm? Stick your finger in it and let me lick it off.”

I squirmed. “Get your hands off me, Phelan.”

“You want it.”

“Not from you!”

I didn't think Tav could hear us, but apparently he could. He stood, walked across, and plucked me from Phelan's hold. The Lycarn didn't fight but released me. Tav strolled back to his side of the fire with me hanging from his arms. He lay down and deposited my length atop him.

“Hmm,” I said, smirking. “Trust me now? That I wasn't about to jump him?”

“No.” Tav covered his eyes and was soon snoring.

Chapter Twelve

The most annoying quality of a Lycarn is his excessively huge ego. The second bad quality is his stubbornness. They presumably held these characteristics in varying degrees, yet we had without question become involved with the Lycarn with the most. We had had to trek twenty miles on foot because “Lycarn do not fly” according to Phelan. And he would not give us details of this Shannon person he mentioned until we had completed the first phase of the journey, which we also had no details on.

My patience had waned by that point, and I was two seconds from attack. To make the situation more strenuous, he found every opportunity and reason to caress Sandy or to rub against her, and she made no move to stop him.

“How long is this going to go on, Sandy?” I demanded.

She cast an innocent look my way. “I don’t know what you mean.” With a few skips, she hurried up to walk alongside Phelan, then snaked her arm around his, which allowed her breast to rub his arm. I had the sour pleasure of watching her hips sway and knowing the material of that damn dress was too thin and it was too short. I had only chosen it for my own pleasure. Now it was being used for his benefit and not mine.

Frustration ate at me. Twice I’d gone into the trees to jack off alone. I could try to seduce Sandy, but I felt foolish to attempt it in front of Phelan when Sandy gave me wide-eyed, innocent looks like she didn’t know what I wanted.

This could not last.

We stopped at midafternoon, and I noticed the look of pain on Sandy’s face. She’d hidden the fact that her feet were hurting, and I guessed her legs were, too. With no rain for weeks, the ground was hard, and the grass wasn’t something she wanted poking beneath her dress. Without a word, I scooped her up and planted her on my lap as I slid to the ground. She didn’t protest, because of weariness.

“Now,” I demanded of the Lycarn who was busy trying to look like an Adonis, which involved flicking his waist-length hair back over his shoulder. He was still naked, and when he crouched, Sandy and I got more of a view than we wanted. The beast must stay hard twenty-four seven. “Tell us about Shannon, and do something to cover yourself, damn it.”

Phelan laughed. Just as I had done without knowing how, in growing scales. The Lycarn grew fur to cover his private area. He winked. “Better? Didn’t know I was getting you all hot and bothered.”

“Don’t flatter yourself,” I snapped. I ran a hand over Sandy’s stomach and slid it lower to cup her mound. I expected her to push me away, but she trembled and flattened her back against me. I watched for Phelan’s reaction as I kissed behind her ear, then snaked my tongue along her neck and nipped her shoulder.

With my other hand inside her dress, I pinched her nipple. She groaned, and Phelan surged to his feet to pace back and forth. “Shannon is the woman’s voice I hear in my head. I came out of the lake you tossed me in a little disoriented. For a while, I was unconscious on the edge of it. That was enough time for this witch to invade my head and make me do things I would never do. Like betray my people!”

His words struck a chord in me. I released Sandy and considered what he had said. “Did she say who she was? I, too, had someone trying to break into my head. But I don’t sleep much, so I think she had little opportunity to brainwash me.”

My words irritated him.

“Or you could have a weaker mind.” I snapped my fingers. “Come to think of it, Sandy also had dreams of someone in her mind. She’s not being controlled. Maybe this witch can only control dogs.”

Phelan gave truth to the dog claim when he growled like one. “Or maybe she can only reason with high intelligence.”

“Reason?” I smirked. “I wouldn’t equate mind control with reasoning.”

“Any time you want to go again, Tav, you let me know.”

I stood up, then deposited Sandy on her feet. “I’m ready when you are. Just remember who kicked whose ass last time.”

“Boys!” Sandy interrupted. We both focused on her. “Don’t look at me like that. You’re acting like children. We have a mission, an important one. I suggest we stick to it and leave the rest alone for now.” I knew she meant sex when she moved out of my reach and cast an apologetic look in my direction. If she thought she would be with him and leave me, she could forget it.

I folded my arms across my chest. “I’m waiting for him to share.”

Sandy flicked an eyebrow up. “Well, Phelan?”

He grumbled, angry that he was being denied a fight, I guessed. “She says she is Ryuu’s wife.” He nodded toward me. “His sister-in-law. She needed someone who knew where to find him, and I do. The Lycarn would not help, except she did something to me. I can’t resist her command to go. But you can be damned sure, I will fight it until I am free.”

Sandy clasped her hands together, excited. “So, you do know where the ambassador’s house is, don’t you? Is Ryuu really being held there?”

Phelan took his time about answering. I had the feeling that he was savoring his next revelation, anticipating our reaction. I gritted my teeth. So far, I remembered nothing of my brothers, felt no affection, no connection to them. It seemed to me the only things I could

produce from the past were negative feelings, like those I felt when I returned from getting Sandy's dress. I could have sworn another woman had betrayed me, one I had loved.

When I saw his body wrapped around hers and her looking up at him as if she was waiting for his kiss, another memory surfaced, but only for an instant. A woman, beautiful and, I assume, mine. But she hadn't been what she appeared to me.

Glancing over at Sandy, I wondered if she was the same. Could she be searching for some way to find out about her Drelconian friend, and that's all? And if this Shannon had contacted her, why hadn't Sandy asked her about Tiam?

"Listening?" Phelan asked me.

I smirked. "If you have something to say, out with it. Otherwise, don't waste my time."

Deflated at my lack of anticipation, Phelan blurted out his news. "I had a debriefing at the ambassador's house about three months ago. While I was there, the place was in an uproar."

Sandy gasped. "Why?"

"Because she had had two Drelconian males brought here from Orel-X Four. The one they expected to heal in time. Something wrong with his head. He was more like a wild animal than we Lycarn are." He chuckled, but neither Sandy nor I found it amusing. Phelan continued. "The other one wasn't affected with the experiments on the hot planet. He was healthy enough, and I heard for myself the ambassador say she had retired her current lover. She planned to take this Drelconian to her bed."

Chapter Thirteen

I stared at Phelan. “You can’t be serious. He’s a dragon, and if what you said is true, he remembers who he is, knows how to fight. He’s not going to let your leader force herself on him.” I glanced at Tav, hoping this news was shocking enough to jar his memory. His face showed no emotion, but his eyes had shifted. I wondered if he had at last found some compassion for his brothers.

“He’s married,” Tav announced. “Her name is . . .” He seemed to be fighting to remember. “Harmony. Draco won’t give in without a fight. He’s stupid enough to believe in love.”

Despite his words, I rushed over to him and took his arm. “You’ve got your memory back!”

He shook his head. “No, I remember snatches of information. I remember Draco is married, and I remember his wife. She was a hot and fiery human. *Is*, I guess. If she’s still alive.”

I glared at him because of the comment about Harmony. He was just trying to get me back for flirting with Phelan. It needed to end here. We weren’t teenagers, but Tav didn’t appear to have changed his mind about not trusting me, and I wouldn’t give in and be his play thing, his property. Funny how I knew Tav wouldn’t force me if I truly didn’t want him, whereas Mack would have beat me into submission.

“What else do you remember?” I grumbled.

He tweaked my cheek. “I remember Shannon is Ryuu’s wife. She’s hot, too. She was . . . *is* a psychic. Must be pretty powerful to be able to reach us here and control him.” He jerked a thumb in Phelan’s direction.

“Where is she?”

He shrugged. “Don’t know.”

“I know.” Phelan began walking again, leaving us to follow.

My feet felt like they had blisters all over them, and my legs were on fire. I’d have given anything at that moment to be like Tav, to heal in an instant.

“I know the golden dragons are gone. No one knows where. A few live on a planet called Shale, but most of the Drelconian inhabitants there are silver dragons, Ryuu’s people.”

Tav stormed up to Phelan and yanked him backward to face him, a feat considering Phelan towered over him. “How the fuck do you know so much about my people?”

Phelan laughed. “Oh, now they’re ‘your people’? You didn’t give a shit a second ago.”

“Never mind that.”

The Lycarn was not intimidated by my lover, or former lover. “*My* people make it our business to know about others. We scoped out the humans for years before we decided to visit. We’ve observed your meddling in their lives, your mating with some.” He licked his lips, his black eyes reflecting lust when he focused them on me. “We take what we want, when we want it, and we don’t let anyone get in our way. The ambassador will ride your brother hard. She’s a perfect warrior and a sexy woman. I’ve enjoyed time with her myself. But it’s a good thing he will heal, because she’s rough. Oh, the pain she put my poor dick through.”

The horror on my face made him throw his head back with laughter. His people were savage, the women and the men. If Shannon hadn’t gotten control of him, I wondered what he would have done to me. Maybe I would be lying dead back there in the creek. And what would happen if she lost control?

I imagined her stuck on Shale with all the Drelconians who were strong enough to fight, lost to the Desert Ice on Orel-X Four. She must have been desperate, must have worked night and day to push herself to reach someone who could help. Shame filled me when I realized how much I had fought her when she had tried to talk to me. I believed now it was she who had led me to Tav.

After stepping on a stone, I cried out and dropped to the ground. Tav rushed to my side and lifted me onto his lap. He tried to work my shoe off, but I pushed his hand away to do it myself. I was horrified to find my sock bloody and bruises covering my skin. I chafed at the fact that these two men were unaffected during our long hike, but here I was all bloody and swollen. I had never thought of myself as a weak person, but then I hadn’t been challenged much. I was an only child, and my parents had still been together until the most severe of the shortages a few years ago, which killed them. I’d always had all I needed in life. Nothing fancy, just the basics.

Having no other choice, I tugged my ruined sock back on. “I’m fine. I just stepped on a stone. You don’t have to treat me like an invalid.”

Phelan grunted. “You are soft and weak.”

I would have found a scathing remark, but he and Tav suddenly turned and sniffed the air in the same direction. Tav hoisted me onto his back. “Keep still and stay quiet,” he commanded.

“You don’t tell me—”

“Shut up, Sandy, if you want to live!”

He said no more, and neither did I. For what felt like forever, we ran in silence through the trees. The moon had gone behind the clouds. The woods were almost pitch black. Phelan changed to his wolf form, and all I could see of him was his glittering eyes.

Tav and I were hard-pressed to keep up with him as he ran. Where Tav panted, Phelan seemed not to be winded at all. I wanted to know what they were running from, but I was

scared to ask. Phelan stopped running. Tav and I followed suit. In the distance, a wolf howled. Phelan's answering call scared me mindless.

"He's telling them where to find us, Tav," I whispered into his hair in a panic. "We haven't done anything wrong."

"Except I'm not allowed on the planet, and you're a wanted criminal."

Oh yeah, there was that.

Tav slipped me to the ground, and I heard his low growl. In a sliver of light, I saw him hunched over like he was about to attack Phelan. The Lycarn rolled away from Tav's sudden lunge.

"Stop! I'm not betraying you. It's my brother. He has told me the pack is out on your trail. Seems someone has informed them you were seen with me, and I am helping you."

"All that in a howl?" I wondered aloud.

"My brother has been sent to scout ahead. He is to bring me to the ambassador for questioning."

I stared at him, and he winced, pain filling his eyes. They shifted, darkened, and then went back to the wolf's eyes.

Tav pushed me behind him. "She's losing the control she had over him."

Not so close to our target! Not now!

The second wolf sprang from the trees just as the moon returned to illuminate his menacing size and the hunger to kill plain in his eyes. The two brothers went at it, ripping at each other. Tav transformed, partly uprooting several of the weaker trees in the process.

"Get on my back now!" he commanded. I wasted no time. Ignoring my painful feet, I leaped up to his knee, and he tossed me up to his neck. But before we could take off, something else tore through the forest. Something worse.

Chapter Fourteen

The warmer climates of Earth were expected, all year around. We rarely saw snow anymore and most places were happy to get an hour's rain. But when the frost blew into the forest, followed by ice that crackled on the branches and leaves, I knew this wasn't natural.

I hadn't smelled them or sensed them at all. They dropped from the sky looking like Drelconian dragons but breathing ice one second and fire the next. I had barely enough time to put Sandy down before they attacked.

One of the dragons smashed down on my chest. I shoved at him, but he was strong, much stronger than I was.

"Wait, I am one of you. You must recognize me. I am Tav, your lord!" I chanced it, hoping he would respect the mention of me being a lord. I had no idea how the hierarchy of my people worked or if the others were resentful of my family. I had heard there were seven lords, and I was one of them.

The dragon spat ice at me. "I have no lord." His eyes were a freakish blue, and his touch was cold enough to chill me through my scales. He lifted me above his head and tossed me as if I weighed nothing. As I smashed into a tree, I heard a snap, and pain raged over my back. When I landed, I was on my hands and knees, having changed back to humanoid form. I willed my body to heal. It did, but the dragon that had attacked me changed also and was stalking over to me.

I forced myself to my feet while searching for Sandy. To her credit, she had picked up a thick branch and had smashed it over one of the attackers' heads. Now I wished I had replaced her knife with something to cause more damage. Yet, even a sword wouldn't put these men down long.

With my back healed, I faced the man head-on. An image flashed through my mind of this man standing at my side, his hands folded, his head bowing and him saying, "Yes, my lord." In an instant, I remembered him. He had been my guard, and he knew it. I saw the recognition in his eyes.

We locked hands, trying to force each other back. Scales rippled over our bodies to protect against potential blows. I sent one into his rib cage, but the scales were there a moment before I connected. He countered, catching me beneath the jaw. I tumbled backward. *Damn!* If I could remember everything, then I could combat this man on equal terms. As it was, I looked like a weak fool.

I scanned for Phelan to see if he was fighting on our side, but he was still occupied with his brother. They had transformed to werewolves, and I couldn't figure out which was which. One of them bit a chunk out of the other's ear. The injured wolf howled and took off through the trees with his brother in pursuit. Sandy and I were on our own with four Drelconian hybrids on us.

Sandy's cry of pain distracted me, and another blow to my head sent me down in the dirt. My mouth buried in the earth, I struggled to turn my head while two men pinned me down and bent my arms behind my back. Sandy was in a similar position.

"Get your fucking hands off her," I growled. "She's mine."

"Yours?" The first man who had attacked me laughed. "What happened to *my lord*, shy and accepting?"

I bumped his hold loose and rolled to my back, taking the two of them with me. Pinning them down did no good. I couldn't get up to help Sandy. Another of the men hauled her to her feet and curved a jagged claw at her neck. "You can stop resisting or I can slice her throat."

The fight went out of me. When I too was yanked to my feet, one of the men holding me put a hand to my temple. Bolts of freezing cold shot through my head, and I never formed another thought before I was out.

* * * *

I lay in a lavish room with beautiful rich furnishings and silk sheets which teased my nipples as I shifted my position every so often. I moaned. All I wanted to do was luxuriate in them and forget all my problems.

"*Sandy, wake up.*"

I sprang to a sitting position, opening my eyes. This wasn't a dream. The room was real, as were the sheets. I peeked beneath the covers to find myself naked. Where was I, and who took my dress? I scanned the room and couldn't find my missing dress.

I gathered sheets around me, then scooted to the door and tried the knob. It was locked. I listened at the panels and heard muffled footsteps coming closer. Before the person could reach the room, I rushed back to the bed and lay like I was still asleep. A lock sprung, and the door opened.

"Well, well."

I couldn't help gasping. It was Phelan. Rolling to my back, I sat up and glanced over at him. "Where's Tav?"

He grinned, much like he'd done in the bar, when he was uninhibited. I knew without him telling me that Shannon's hold was broken. "What do you want with that poor excuse for a dragon when you've got me?"

"Do I have you?" I offered him what I hoped was a seductive smile, all the while thinking hard about how I would overpower him and find Tav.

"Don't bother," he said, strolling over to me.

“Don’t bother what?”

He lifted my chin and planted a kiss on my lips. “You smile, but I see the wheels turning in your head. You’re plotting. It won’t do you any good. I am your master now. You’ll do what I say.”

“Go to hell!”

He brought his hand out from behind his back, and before I knew what he intended, he snapped something closed around my neck. I jerked away, but was forced back. My eyes widened at the leash in his hand. A thick leather band with spikes jutting from it was attached to my neck, and a leash hooked onto it. Phelan held it up for me to see, excitement gleaming in his eyes.

“Isn’t it ironic?” he demanded. “You humans put your dogs on leashes, and here you are like a dog.”

“Being held captive *by* a dog,” I spat.

He jerked me forward. I fell to my hands and knees over the side of the bed. He led me to the door, but I pulled in the opposite direction.

“Wait, please. I don’t have any clothes on. Can’t you give me something? Where’s my dress?”

“You don’t need clothing. The ambassador wants proof that I haven’t been in league with you and your pet. I will give it to her in the form of fucking you for her pleasure.”

“What? No!” I fought against him, but it was pointless. As he paraded me down the hall before all his fellow Lycarn who were roaming the house, I considered my options. I could give in and have sex with him. If I did, I could maybe lull him into trusting me, that I was fully submitted to him. Or I could fight. Since I had no weapon and no training, resisting was a joke.

But if Tav hadn’t been captured, then it was possible he would track us here and break me out. With his own issues of trust, it would not do to have him catch me willingly acting as this beast’s sex slave. My options were limited. If I didn’t give in to Phelan, he could cause me serious bodily harm.

I liked Tav. I wanted *only* Tav. But circumstances meant a choice neither of us would like. Phelan wasn’t ugly by any means either. He was sexy in his own right. Thick, long hair, strong features. My biggest fear was his massive size.

“Phelan, wait.” I pulled on the chain. He glanced at me with a warning in his eyes. Desperate, I explained. “If you waltz in there and take me in front of her, it will be obvious you’ve never been with me. Um . . . you’re really big.”

He stopped. "Damn it. You are right." He sighed. "Fine. I will take you back to the room and ready your body. Then I will take you to the ambassador."

Chapter Fifteen

The walk back along the hall passed too fast. I cast a sidelong glance at Phelan. He strode proudly, a look of satisfaction curving the ends of his lips upward and a gleam in his eye. He hadn't eased on the leash for one second, and from the bulge in his pants, he must be looking forward to having me. I swallowed.

"Get on the bed," he commanded when we entered the room. He unhooked the leash and tossed it on a chair but left the collar around my neck. I reached up to remove it, but he jerked my hand away. "Let's get something straight right now. You do as I say, exactly as I say, or else."

A flood of thoughts washed over my mind. Reflexes almost had me smacking his face and telling him where he could go. I caught myself in time. The halfway helpful creature who had led us most of the way through the woods was gone. Phelan was of a race of creatures who would not blink twice about ripping me to shreds if that's what pleased them.

I humbled myself with effort. "I will cooperate with you. I won't fight. Just, please, tell me where Tav is."

He sneered in disgust. "I don't have to tell you anything." Stepping closer, he ran a hand down over my breast and pinched my nipple. His tongue lashed across his lips. "But I will tell you because it pleases me to have you here, to know I'll lie between your legs while your pet is locked below in the ambassador's dungeon."

Attempting bravado, I chuckled. "Dungeon? Come on. This is the twenty-second century. There are no dungeons."

He made no attempt to deny my claim, but instead dipped down, and while one hand stroked my breast, he covered my other nipple with his mouth, sucking the tiny bud between his teeth. I closed my eyes, resisting the excitement that had just ignited within my body.

I shouldn't feel anything with this man-beast. I should try harder to escape. I forced my eyes open and my mind on a workable getaway. A glance around the room revealed no weapon of any kind. In a last-ditch effort, I tried to talk my way out of the situation.

"Phelan, you don't want to do this. You want a woman who is completely willing to be your lover. I'm committed to Tav."

He looked up and grinned, his teeth and the expression in his eyes making me tremble from head to toe. "Committed, huh?" An eyebrow drifted up toward his long hair. "Then why when I do this does a shudder pass through your body?" To demonstrate, he ran his hand down over my belly, headed toward my pussy. The shudder he had claimed I'd experience manifested before he could make connection with my center. I was already dripping wet. He parted my folds with two fingers and shoved in a third between. At his slow stroke in and out, I toppled onto his chest and clutched his arms.

"S-Stop," I rasped.

“Why?” He eased in another finger and another. I cried out at both the pain and the enjoyment. “You like it. But I don’t need you to enjoy it to get myself off.”

I balled my fist up and hit him in the jaw. His head didn’t even snap back. “You bastard.” I shoved his hands away from me and marched toward the door. He caught my hair, slung me onto the bed, and followed me down so that I was pinned beneath the bulk of his hard, muscled body.

“You forgot who you belong to.” Again, he invaded my body, his fingers working a magic I couldn’t resist. He kneaded my clit, shoved fingers deep into my passage. My cream seemed to flow extra thick and heavy. I bucked into the palm of his hand when he rested it on my erect bud. I was so close to coming.

“No, I shouldn’t.” I gasped.

“You should.” Before I could come, he jerked his hand out and flipped me over. Straddling me with a knee on either side of my head, he offered his dick. “Suck it!”

“No!” I turned my head, but he forced it back.

“You want a taste, and you damn well know it. Suck it, Sandy!”

He was right. I did. I don’t know where my sexual drive had come from. Maybe being lovers with Tav had revved it to life. I had always thought that I didn’t like sex too much, didn’t need it or crave it. My intimacy with Mack had sustained the illusion. But the first time Tav had spread my legs, I was hooked. Shame washed over me, because I craved so much more!

I opened my mouth and stuck my tongue out. Phelan pushed his lengthy rod closer. The broad head bumped my mouth. I circled it with my tongue and sucked the tip. He groaned. His head went back, and he closed his eyes. For a second, I considered biting him, but rejected the thought. Stretching my mouth wide, I took him deeper, but not far. I took hold of it and ran my mouth over him. Salty-sweet liquid layered my tongue. I sucked harder.

Trailing down to his balls, I watched for his reaction. His lips parted, his eyes flickered open and darkened. His ears grew up pointed, and his teeth sharpened. “Bite,” he demanded. “Bite the sides. Slide down to my balls and suck me there, Sandy.” To reinforce his command, he laid a hand on the back of my head and applied gentle pressure. I nipped the sides of his dick. He growled. “Yes!”

He’s an animal! I could claim that he was wild and untamed, a beast, but the truth of the matter was that I liked what we were doing. I wanted to see it to the end, to the point of my climax.

I nipped and licked his skin all the way down to his balls, and with his encouragement, I wrapped my lips around the two small orbs and sucked hard. He got off on the pain, or he wasn’t like a human man. That much was obvious looking at him. In a move that made my scalp tingle and me wince, he tugged my hair to lead me back to his head. I took him as deep

as I could and pumped the rest of him with my hand. I slid my mouth over his smooth, leathery skin and enjoyed his flavor and the reaction I got when I sucked him. He jerked and moaned, squeezed my nipples to the edge of painful, and cried out in a howl.

“Make me come!” he demanded, like I had control over his orgasm.

I sucked harder, worked him faster. His fists crashed into the mattress just above my head, and he exploded into my mouth. The rush of thick warm liquid choked me at first, and then dragging on him until he was empty, I swallowed its rich, salty goodness.

He drew himself out of my mouth and leaned back to give himself enough space to flip me around to lay on my stomach. I resisted. “No, you’re not going to do what I think you are.”

“Be quiet!” he grumbled. “You do as I say. If I want you like this, I will have you like this.”

Every muscle in my body clenched in my fear. I squeezed my eyes shut and tightened my jaw. He rubbed my ass.

“Relax.”

With one massive hand, he separated my thighs, lifting first one leg and then the other. I sobbed into the bed. I felt the heat of his body close, his warm breath on my cheek.

“You want this.”

“No.”

“Liar.”

I swallowed hard and coughed to clear my throat. I smashed a fist into my mouth to keep from saying anything, but he pulled it out and waited. “I want it,” I whispered, angry with him. “You know I want it.”

“But you think your boyfriend won’t want you anymore? You think he will reject you if you get off on me fucking you?”

He laughed, a cruel sound that tormented me for my desires. I hated him.

“What if I told you he’s watching us, bound so he can’t get away? What if you find out he gets off on seeing me take you, watching you come for me?”

“I’d say you’re the liar!” I screamed. “Tav wants me for himself and nobody else.”

“What do you want?”

I glared at him over my shoulder. “Not you.”

He plunged into my moist pussy with such force I nearly fainted. Before I could acknowledge the pain, the tight squeeze, I came hard and fast. Orgasms rippled through my belly, clenched my muscles all the more, and my pussy worked his dick like it had been starving for him. He pumped deep, but he didn't fit all the way in. Still, I tried to take him. I pushed back on him, but he stopped me with a hand on my ass. He pinned me to the mattress so I couldn't move while he plunged in and out. I screamed when another orgasm rolled over my body. He growled his own ecstasy in unison with mine.

I thought he would come inside me, but when his climax came, he drew out of me and aimed his cock at my ass, spilling his seed on my ass until he collapsed at my side.

He moaned, watching me. "I've made up my mind."

"About?"

He ran a hand along my cheek and lower to my breast. I was spent, but the lust in his eyes looked fresh and raring to go. "I'm going to keep you. It will mean killing him. Killing Tav."

Chapter Sixteen

I woke strapped to a bed in a barren room. The temperature was set so low, my limbs were weak, and I couldn't transform to a dragon to save my life. The one difference was whatever that freak shot into my head jogged something loose. I knew who I was. I knew what had happened to me on Orel-X Four, and I knew I had to save my brothers and Sandy.

Straining at the bonds did no good. Every time I panted, my breath blew out in white smoke. I scanned the room, but there was nothing to see beyond dingy white walls and a door.

A lock clanged, and the knob turned. A woman stood in the opening dressed in a sheer gown, so thin I could see through it to her shapely form beneath. She was at least six and a half feet tall, a giant, but insanely beautiful with bright blue eyes and blond hair. She ruined the look when she smiled, which revealed pointed teeth. At my flinch, she burst out laughing.

"Aw, you don't like my teeth, honey?" Her voice was thick and heavy, almost like a man's. It turned me off. She strolled over to the bed and ran a hand up my leg, stopping to squeeze one of my thighs. "My lovers like my teeth," she teased. "They enjoy it when I bite."

She snapped her teeth together near my cock, and I flinched again to her delight. "Where's Sandy?" I demanded.

"The human girl?" She wrinkled her nose in distaste. "Don't worry about her. I've allowed Phelan to have her. But he will bring her before me soon to prove to me he's tamed her."

Dread closed my throat for a moment, not allowing me to speak. "What do you mean by 'tamed her'?"

She seemed to consider whether she wanted to tell me, and then was distracted as she blew on my exposed member. I willed scales to cover it, and she clawed at them in anger. My satisfaction lasted only long enough for me to remember how Phelan's teeth had bitten straight through my scales. These people were strong, maybe stronger than Drelconians.

"Tell me!"

She cooed and giggled in a girlish way that was unbecoming in a woman her age, or what I guessed was her age. Not a girl by any means. "I like how you think you can command me, dragon. I am the ambassador to these hateful humans, a Lycarn if you don't know by now. And this is my house." She gestured with her arms in the air. "You are my slave, along with the other two. I'm going to enjoy fucking you."

I struggled to get free while she stood before me with her arms crossed under a massive chest. If I were not so angry, I would have stopped to enjoy the view. Big, perky breasts with erect nipples. This woman was built to pleasure a man, but something told me she was more interested in pleasuring herself at her lover's expense.

She grinned at me and bent down toward my groin. She opened her mouth wide, then bit down hard. The pressure was great, although she didn't break through my scales. I let out a roar that should have pierced her ears with pain. She only laughed.

"Draco fought it, too." She simpered. "But eventually he came to love me sucking his big, long dick. Yum!"

"Bitch," I yelled.

She smacked my face. The sting lasted longer than it should have. The cold was unbearable. How she could withstand it, I didn't know. I closed my eyes and stoked my internal fire. Yet, all I felt was the slightest of flickers.

"Don't do this," I pleaded.

Her bite pressure increased. Pain seemed to inflame my balls. I jerked my hips away from her, and my scales failed. She released her hold, her eyes bright. Reaching out to take my exposed cock in her hands, a howl from somewhere far off made her pause. "What the f—"

Someone knocked twice and barged in. With limited strength, I covered myself again. The half-wolf, half-man saluted her. "Ma'am, we're under attack."

She rounded on the intruder and moved with a speed and grace that shocked me. In seconds, she had the man around the neck, and the fear in his eyes seemed excessive given he was a head taller than she was. She made no move to cover herself, and his gaze didn't drop to take in her half-naked state. In a daze, I wondered if it was disinterest or that he had seen and experienced her goods many times before.

"I told you not to disturb me," she spat.

The man trembled. "But, ma'am, they've broken into the south gate. There are hundreds of them."

"And they pose a threat how? Are they stronger than the Lycarn? No? Then get the hell out!" She shoved him into the hallway. The rise in temperature from the door being open was just enough for me to get a clear head. I broke my bonds, but it was too cold to take on my dragon form.

I charged her. She had me by maybe two inches, but I had her in brawn. I thrust her against the wall, my hand around her neck, much like she had done to her employee. This did nothing but turn her on. She rubbed her breasts into my chest and grabbed for my crotch. I yanked out of reach.

"Oh no you don't. You're done using me and my brothers." I flipped her around and dragged her back against me. Even that got her off. "Damn, you don't get enough, do you? Is that why you have so many lovers?"

She laughed. “You don’t know the half of it.”

“And none of them willing, I bet.”

A howl started in her throat, but I cut it off by tightening my hold and shuffling her out the door. She was my ticket to finding Draco, Ryuu, and Sandy. I just hoped I could pull it off in time.

Chapter Seventeen

Kill Tav? Hell no! Before I could respond to Phelan's threat, the door burst open, and Phelan and I both stared unmoving at the man filling the doorway. He eyed us without saying a word, and then a slow grin spread over his face.

"Well, well, well. My how you've come down in the world, Sandy." He smirked.

"Mack, what are you doing here?" I scrambled for something to cover myself, which was ridiculous since he'd seen me naked plenty of times over the last couple of years.

He shrugged and leaned against the doorjamb as if he wasn't pointing a gun at Phelan. "Just out for a little fun. Didn't expect to stumble on my ex, though. I wondered where you'd gone. My new girl isn't working out, and I was going to let you come back to me, but since you've had that dog inside you, never mind."

Phelan sprang up off the bed, but with no emotion and little remorse from the look of him, Mack fired several shots into his chest. I screamed. Phelan slumped to the floor unmoving. Blood seeped out from beneath him and stained the lush rose carpet.

I must have been staring down at him a while, because Mack snapped his fingers in front of me. "Let's go, Sandy."

I leaned away to rearrange my sheet under my arms. "I'm not going anywhere with you. You're crazy. He didn't do anything to you."

"Have you gotten braver since I last saw you or what?" He dragged me off the bed and shoved me toward the door. "I may not want you, but you're human. You belong with us. Get your ass moving."

I stumbled out into the hallway, glancing up and down it. Humans were scurrying about, too free with their guns. The explosions from the weapons set my teeth on edge. While they squeezed off many shots, they didn't hit much. The Lycarn were fast. Mack had been lucky. Had he not been distracted, Phelan would have killed Mack. *And then lived to kill Tav.*

I swallowed. Better this way, but I felt bad. At least I think I did. Shock was more like it with all that was happening. Mack motioned me down the steps, and I fell over the ends of the sheet as I gripped the rail with tense fingers. I paused at the bottom of the stairs. We were just feet from the front door.

"Wait, Mack, please let me find Tav. He's . . . my friend. They took him captive too." I don't know what I was thinking, given that Mack would know what kind of being Tav was the moment he set eyes on him. I remembered how he'd looked at Tiam, commented on how she was not perfect enough to look like the Drelconians, with her long, black hair and the white streak setting it off. So unlike my wild mane. Mack had never once looked at me then, not with Tiam around. And I hadn't wanted him to either. In my way, I guess I, too, had been enamored with Tiam, but as my best friend.

“Tav?” Mack said. “Why does that name sound familiar?”

A roar shook the house followed by the distinct sound of splitting wood. Mack and I both looked back, but he didn’t pause long. With a look of fear on his face, his bloodshot eyes narrowed, he rushed to the front door. He wrenched it open only to find a small army of werewolves converging on the house.

Mack stood there and stared in disbelief. I shoved past him and grabbed the door to slam it shut, but not before one of the werewolves made it through. It leaped on Mack’s chest, which shoved him to the floor. His gun went flying and landed beneath a couch.

I fought to get the door shut. The pressure on the other side made it impossible, would have been if the Lycarn out there hadn’t begun to fight with a few of Mack’s men whose backs were against the door. “Somebody help me!” I screamed. More of Mack’s men came running when they saw him under attack. Three of them helped me shut the door and lock it, while two others landed on top of the Lycarn and beat him with their fists. The beast seemed not to feel anything.

Dropping to my knees, I then crawled to the couch and reached under it for the gun. The space was too narrow. I tried shoving, but the couch was too heavy. “Doesn’t anyone have a gun?” I don’t know why I bothered with trying to get the werewolf off Mack. It occurred to me I should try to find the Drelconians.

I jumped to my feet and scanned the room for anything I could use as a weapon. Another dragon roar rent the air. A chandelier that had been over the lobby area crashed to the floor and shattered, followed by pieces of the ceiling. I glanced up to find Tav flying around up there in dragon form. I don’t know how I knew it was him, but I was sure. A female werewolf leaped from the railing on the second floor and landed on Tav. She sank her claws and teeth into his scales. He let out another roar, and this time, everyone ducked and covered their ears.

While the wolves howled because of their sensitive ears, the humans got the better of them, some with heavy objects found around the room, and others with knives. The beasts were hard to overcome even after they had been shot. That made me wonder about Phelan, but I didn’t stop to consider it. I scuttled past Mack and the others and charged up the stairs with a lamp base clutched in my hands.

“Get back, Sandy,” Tav ordered when he saw me.

I couldn’t actually jump out there and fight in the air like the Lycarn did. Besides, Tav’s bulky body was tearing up the house. I could imagine the ambassador had overseen the decor and raged even more when Tav destroyed it.

“I’ll find your brothers,” I called to him, although I had no idea where to start. I ran along the hall calling out and checking the doors. When I came to the one where I’d had sex with Phelan, I paused. He wasn’t there at the side of the bed, but the blood remained. Rushing inside, I scanned the room but didn’t see him. I checked the closet and the bathroom. There was no sign of him.

The entire second floor was a bust. I spent more time trying to hide from the werewolves and the humans than searching. Moving to the first floor and then the basement on the off chance Phelan hadn't been lying did no good either. If Draco and Ryu were in the house, it must be some secret place, somewhere impervious to a dragon's strength.

Stopping on the steps up from the basement, I closed my eyes and tried to relax. The fact that it sounded like the front door had just been smashed in made it difficult. A rush of frigid air made me shiver and I realized that I still had not found any clothes to wear.

I dragged in a deep breath. *"Shannon, I know you've been speaking to me. Tell me where to find your husband. Where is he?"*

No answer came. I supposed I needed her ability to reverse the call, as it were. Just about to sneak through the basement door to the kitchen, I took one step and was shoved back to land on my ass with someone on top of me. I clawed out to find a man, human, dead. I realized that he was about my size and that I could probably fit his clothes.

Dressed in camouflage, I left the basement ready to go back to Tav and help him fight. If nothing else, he could smell his way to his brothers. Unless I missed my guess, he remembered who he was given how he had handled himself while flying.

I turned a corner, and a hand came around from behind to cover my mouth. A male voice spoke into my ear. "Where do you think you're going?"

Chapter Eighteen

The ambassador lay dead at my feet at last. I shrank into humanoid form and stretched my aching muscles. Around me, humans and Lycarn lay exhausted, wounded, or dead. Somewhere nearby, maybe outside, someone was still battling. I heard the grunts and dull thuds of fists impacting. Shots in the distance went off, and howls followed each.

I spun around to face a fist against my jaw. Not losing my footing, I countered and sent Phelan tumbling over the back of a couch. I leaped up to the back of it and glared down at him while he lay stunned. “You helped us before. You have a choice now—help me get my brothers and Sandy out of here or you can die alongside your leader. What will it be?”

He chuckled, then flexed his jaw. “Do you really think you can beat me?” He nodded toward the ambassador’s body. “You just spent the better part of two hours battling one of our toughest warriors. You must be worn out.”

“You don’t know me and my people at all.” I tapped my head. “I’m back. All my memories are intact. I might not be the shy dragon I was before all this shit, but I am stronger for it. Besides, you’re forgetting . . . I heal.”

“Oh yes, I forgot.” He propped an arm on his knee while he sat in a deceptively calm position on the floor. I remained on alert, not buying his casual attitude for a minute. He went on. “We Lycarn don’t have your resilience, but we have our gifts. My own”—he paused to be sure I was paying attention no doubt—“include activity in the bedroom.”

When I stiffened, his eyes narrowed. His nostrils flared, and he scratched at a wound on his chest. We Drelconians weren’t the only ones hard to kill from the look of him.

“Sandy was very giving to me up there . . . in the bedroom.” He nodded his head toward the stairs, then changed position to rest on his feet, although he was still crouched. “Damn, she knows how to take a man deep.”

I sprang on him and slammed him on his back. As I drove my claws into his arms, I shouted close to his sensitive ears so he wouldn’t miss my meaning. “No one touches her without my permission and gets away with it. Got that? No one!” I slammed him hard enough to crack the floor tiles. When he would have slipped his feet between our bodies and flipped me off, I morphed to my snakelike form and wrapped around him. The end of my body extended into the dragon’s tail, complete with sharp spikes. I wielded it in front of Phelan like a mace.

His eyes widened, and he fought with amazing strength to free himself. In this form, I could hold him forever with no trouble.

“You really have remembered,” he muttered.

“That’s right, and you will pay.” I lifted my tail to take aim at him, not caring that I would cut myself in the process.

“Hold on,” he shouted.

I paused.

“I wasn’t lying when I said Sandy enjoyed her time with me. Do you really want to kill the man she might prefer?”

I growled and tightened my hold. “She prefers me.”

“Are you sure?”

I hesitated. Could he be lying? The alternative would be that he had forced himself on her. If he did, he needed to have his head smashed in. She could have given in just to buy time. The doubts and questions made my head spin.

Footsteps sounded in the hall, and two of Mack’s people entered the room. “He’s gone,” the first man told the other. “Mack’s taken her and left. If he would get his head out of his pants for five minutes, we could end this.”

“I agree,” the second man answered. “What the fuck? Two more right here.”

I released Phelan just as the two humans turned to us. He sprang on one, while I took out the other. I had no hatred toward humans, and I didn’t really care much for whatever their mission was. They had ruined my plan to get Sandy, and if what the man said was true, she was already gone with Mack.

Phelan stepped over the bodies strewn about the floor. “Well?”

“Well what?”

“Are you going after her?”

I scanned the half-destroyed house around us. “Unfortunately, I must first find my brothers. Mack won’t kill her at least.”

Phelan shrugged like he didn’t care. Although he was heartless, I knew he wanted Sandy still. He would fight me for her again. He would lose.

He seemed to be considering something for a while and then spoke up. “How about we call a truce just until we find her. I will help you locate your brothers. I suspect I know where they are being held.”

I was suspicious. “Why should you help me? A minute ago, you wanted me dead. What’s changed?”

He strolled confidently out the gaping hole that was where the front door used to be. I paused in the opening and heard more wolves somewhere nearby. If I didn’t move or take Phelan up on his offer, I would soon be outnumbered. I could fly to get out of their reach, but if I didn’t pick up on my brothers’ scent, I would need help.

“What’s the catch?” I demanded again when Phelan still hadn’t answered. He strolled across the lawn to a Jeep and hopped in, an eyebrow raised in invitation. I frowned. “You don’t expect me to ride in that?”

“I prefer my own feet also, or rather just as you prefer your wings. However, we will have to go into town. Better to do so in this contraption. There is a building there the ambassador had control over.”

“You knew this long before the bloodbath inside, before you led us here to be captured.” I glanced up, searched the sky, and sniffed the air. The ice dragons were nowhere. They’d swooped down on us and disappeared without a trace. I almost wondered if I had imagined them. “You can’t be stupid enough to believe holding dragons in the middle of a city would go unnoticed.”

“There’s plenty one can get away with among the humans, if you know which of their buttons to push. Let’s go. I will not explain anything else to you.”

I growled and headed around to the other side. It seemed I didn’t have much choice in the matter. One way or another, I would find my brothers and then set out on Sandy’s trail. If Mack had harmed her, he would die. Maybe he would die anyway just for making me search for them.

Chapter Nineteen

I wasn't going to do a replay of what had passed between me and Phelan. Not with Mack. That boat had sailed. He'd had his chance and had tossed me away when another woman came along. I had had no time to call for Tav as Mack had dragged me out of the kitchen door and forced me into a waiting vehicle. I had searched for a weapon, but none was available beyond a spoon on the table. It would have done nothing except make Mack laugh. So, I bided my time.

He shoved me into the nearest vehicle and hopped in beside me. While driving like a madman, he searched the glove compartment and under the seat, his hands shaking.

"What's wrong with you?" I demanded. "Scared someone's coming after us to tear you apart."

He slapped me. "Shut your mouth! All my plans have been ruined by that freak of a dragon. I wanted to take the ambassador as a hostage. No, he up and kills her. Now what am I going to leverage with? On top of that, the Lycarn outnumber us five to one. Shit, one to one and we're outnumbered with their strength and speed." He slammed a fist into the steering wheel. "Fuck!"

I jumped and glanced out the window. We were traveling too fast for me to jump out, but we still hadn't hit civilization yet. The ambassador's house was out in the middle of nowhere, and only a narrow, winding road led up to it.

"What about those ice dragons?" I questioned him. "They in on your plans, too?"

He frowned. "What ice dragons?"

I couldn't tell if he was pretending not to know what I was talking about. "There were four Drelconians who I assume have the Desert Ice symbionts in them. They blew fire and ice out of their mouths. If I weren't so freaked out being attacked, I would have been impressed. So, you know nothing of them or where they went?"

"No." His hands tightened on the steering wheel. "That's just more interference. Damn it! I'm tired of this. I want it over. Now!"

I crossed my arms then sat back, calm. "You demanding it won't make it happen, that's for sure."

I felt his eyes on me a long time before he spoke. "What's made you so bold? Fucking a shape-shifting alien? Probably gave you something. Maybe one of those symbionts is growing in you right now."

Chuckling despite myself, I ducked away when he tried to grab me. I pressed myself against the door. "You won't get far, Mack. Either I will kill you in your sleep, or one of my lovers will kill you for me."

His eyes bugged. I felt sorry for him, although he didn't deserve it. In his mind, his mission was a noble one, for the good of mankind, but his hatred of all aliens, no matter what species, was flat wrong. And it would get him in more trouble than he counted on, from all sides.

"Lovers?"

"Yes, lovers. One Lycarn. One Drelconian. They both want me and won't like it that you've taken me." I shrugged. "You're right, though. I do feel different. I used to be afraid of you and afraid of my life out there alone if I didn't have your help. Maybe it is because I know they aren't far behind. Whatever the reason, you have only your strength over me now. Not fear. First chance I get, I'm gone."

He yanked the Jeep over to the side of the road, stirring up a cloud of dust. "Glad you said that. Get out."

"What?"

"Get out, Sandy." He opened his door, slid to the ground, and dragged me across behind him. "I'm going to tie you up so you can't do anything. If they're coming, then I'm going to have a bargaining chip."

I grumbled with the realization that I wasn't so different after all. I hadn't been smart enough to keep my mouth shut. I could have let him believe he still had a hold over me and then struck when the time was right. No, I had to boast.

He slammed me against the side of the vehicle and yanked some cord he'd found under his seat to wind around my wrists. When he was done, he glanced down at my feet. "Why do you have only one boot on?"

I followed his line of sight to see my toes, dusty in the dirt, peeking out from the camouflage pants bottom. "The boots are too big. I came out of one of them when you dragged me from the ambassador's house.

"Well, I'll—"

A dragon's roar pierced the still night. The blood drained from Mack's face. He shoved me in the car and climbed in after me. The Jeep fishtailed as we peeled away from the side of the road and sped along doing eighty miles per hour. A wolf's howl seemed to set both our teeth on edge, and Mack floored it.

His terror had us swerving all over the road, and when a gigantic shadow darkened the area just ahead of the car, I thought Mack would wet his pants. I sat there with my hands clasped in my lap like we were out for an evening drive in the country, that is, when I wasn't attempting to hold on to the door handle to keep from tumbling over.

When Tav landed in front of the car and smashed his two front paws on the hood, the Jeep reared up at the back, and the spinning tires from Mack revving made my heart pound.

Finally, we slammed down to the ground, and Mack sat frozen. He stared into the yellow and black eyes and saw the steam rise from Tav's flared nostrils. Tav opened his elongated mouth to show off the ball of fire at the back of his throat.

"Shit, shit, shit!" Mack chanted. Quickly, he unbelted himself and reached to yank me onto his lap. Tav roared. The windows shattered.

I screamed. "Damn it, Tav. Are you trying to burst our eardrums?"

He didn't look at me. His attention was riveted to Mack. "Get out of the car." The rumble of his voice was just short of a roar. We scrambled out the door, Mack holding me like a protective shield. Some man. I stomped on his foot and elbowed him. Still he held on; he knew that if I got away from him, it was likely Tav would let loose the fire he'd flashed and charcoal him from head to toe. I hoped Tav wasn't angry enough to do it anyway while I was not out of the way.

"Look what you've done to the Jeep!" Mack's voice bordered on hysteria. "I want safe transportation back to the city, and I want you to keep your flames to yourself." He pointed his chin to Tav while dragging me closer. Tav didn't seem to like how Mack spooned me, him being closer to my height.

"And what makes you think you will live longer than the next sixty seconds to make such a demand?"

Chapter Twenty

Mack and I both spun around behind us to find Phelan standing there. He was in humanoid form, naked. I sensed rather than saw Mack's reaction to how well-endowed my wolf lover was. Seeing Phelan this way reminded me of our time together, and guilt hit me. I glanced back over my shoulder to find Tav had also transformed. His eyes met mine, and I knew that he knew what Phelan and I had done and that I had enjoyed it. My stomach knotted.

"I . . ." I couldn't find words.

With the speed we'd all seen many times that night, Phelan had grown out a claw, sliced away the cord binding me, and had Mack's head in his steely hold beneath the palm of his hand. Mack attempted to run, but unless he wanted to leave his head behind, he was stuck.

I drifted in Tav's general direction. He folded me in his arms and squeezed. Without a word, he bent down and slipped my foot out of the oversized boot and tossed it away. Then he shifted into a dragon. "Find us," he muttered to Phelan and nuzzled me to climb onto his neck. I didn't argue.

Soon we were soaring in the air, headed I don't know where. "Will he kill him?"

"Does it matter?" Tav's voice was cold, or I imagined it was. In this form, it wasn't easy to tell for sure.

"You're mad at me."

"We'll talk when we land, Sandy."

I fell silent and waited. My stomach was in knots. What would I say? What excuse could I give him? If he asked me straight out if I had enjoyed having sex with Phelan, I didn't think I could lie or be convincing if I did. We had no ties, nothing binding us together. We had made no promises or confessed love. But I still felt wrong.

I felt I needed to say something in my defense. "I didn't really have much of a choice in the matter."

He didn't respond. After an hour and a half of flying, which I think he flew so long only to be sure it would take time for Phelan to track us, he landed in a grassy field, nothing but rolling hills for miles, and the vast star-filled sky above. I slipped from his neck and paced away a few steps. The grass cushion beneath my feet was a nice change to the hard-packed dirt road we had been on.

"We made no promises to one another." I continued to defend myself, and he, the stubborn mule, refused to rise to my baiting him. "Aren't you going to say anything?"

Without warning, he grabbed me and spun me around to crush me against his chest. His mouth came down on mine in a rough and painful kiss. I let him lash out at me, as he pushed his tongue into my mouth and sucked my lips too hard. After a long while, he raised

his head, and I thought I saw fire in his eyes, which I had never seen before. I blinked, and the vision was gone.

He lowered one hand between us and squeezed my pussy. I gasped. He jerked me closer. “Am I not enough for you? I don’t please you?”

“You do.” I tried not to moan. “It’s just tha—”

“That what?”

“I never meant to hurt you, Tav.”

“You didn’t.” He spat the words and released me. Almost falling, I caught myself. He turned his back, and I chased after him as he walked away. I wanted to rail at him, yell that I would do whatever the hell I wanted. At the same time, I wanted to say I would never be with Phelan again. I would never think of what we did in the ambassador’s house. I couldn’t say either. I just stood there.

After some time of staring at his stiff back, I moved closer and wrapped my arms around his waist. I never would have thought he cared. In fact, if this was just about a male staking his claim, Tav would have been more angry than sullen. He would have tried to kill Phelan.

“Did you and Phelan fight?” I hated how I sounded, like one of those women who enjoyed having men fight over her. I wasn’t the type. Up until now, I wasn’t the type to want more than one man either. And they weren’t even human! I must have a screw loose.

He lifted his chin to watch a shooting star. “That might be Draco and Ryuu. We found them, if you care.”

“Of course.”

“Draco is . . .” He ran a hand over his face and turned to face me.

Without saying a word, he lifted me and strode over to a small boulder sticking up through the natural green bed. I wondered why someone hadn’t dug it up to keep it from marring the perfection all around. When Tav settled with his back against it and me on his lap, I was glad they hadn’t.

“Draco’s state of mind worries me, and Ryuu will need to be looked at by our medical staff. Either way, their wives will be happy they are home.”

I frowned. “Why would Draco’s mind worry you? I thought it was Ryuu who had been injured by the symbiont.”

“The seven lords, me and my brothers and anything in our direct line before us, have always been stronger, for whatever reason, than all the other Drelconians. It’s why the elders decided we should be the ones to procreate and build a new, stronger race after our women became barren. Apparently, this strength allowed us to resist the symbionts to a certain

extent where the others could not.” He slid a hand down between my breasts to my stomach. I thought he would do more, but he stopped. “However, Ryuu’s mind was more damaged than mine was. I believe he will heal. Draco’s problem is different. The ambassador held him hostage.”

He didn’t say, but I knew what he was alluding to. “She forced herself on him?”

He nodded. “He didn’t want to face Harmony. I convinced him to at least escort Ryuu back to Shale while I found you.”

“I’m sorry, Tav.” I leaned forward and kissed him. “You need to get back there and support your family. I’m safe now. You shouldn’t have to worry about me.”

“And leave you to Phelan? No, I claimed you. You *are* mine.” He tugged my shirt, and the buttons flew every which way. “I’ll prove it to you right now.”

I wasn’t about to push him away. If these were our last few moments together, I was going to enjoy them.

Chapter Twenty-One

I knew. The moment I set eyes on her, I knew she had given herself to another man. I didn't have any sensing ability beyond what any person had, but it was like whatever connection she and I had had was now diluted or shared. I wanted to punish her for what she'd done and kill Phelan.

I could have killed him earlier, but a weird feeling stopped me. I had at first thought it was Shannon interfering again, but she would be busy waiting on Ryuu to arrive—not screwing around with us.

Although I wouldn't admit it to Sandy, I wanted to make her happy. I almost felt I could back off if she chose Phelan over me. *Almost*. So I chose one last night with her. I needed to make it count.

I parted the two sides of her blouse and stared until I'd had my fill of her breasts. She was so beautiful, her skin creamy and smooth. I leaned down to kiss along her collarbone, which was torment to me because what I really wanted was to tease and suck her rigid peaks. I ached to hear her moan and murmur my name. It hadn't been so long since we were together—one night only—yet it felt like forever.

I grasped her slender hips, then watched for her reaction when I lifted her to my mouth. Her little pink lips rounded in an *O*, which made my cock tighten. Never had I been more grateful that I had no clothes restricting me.

First, I laved one nipple and then the other. I rolled it in my mouth, pinched it between my tongue and the roof of my mouth. I sucked hard enough to make her whine and arch her back. She was mine for the taking. *All mine*.

I lowered her to the ground and removed the rest of her clothing. She had looked so sexy in the military garb when I first saw her. When I had her pants off, I grinned down at her. "Too bad the cords were cut from your wrists. I might have enjoyed making you my prisoner."

She tilted her head to the side. "What would you make me do?"

"Well . . ." I flipped her over, pulled her hands above her head, and made her clasp them together. I tugged her hips toward me so that her ass stuck up in the most alluring way, then I climbed above her. "I would force you to take me deep, fast, and hard."

She gasped and then moaned. "Oh."

I reached down, pulled her soaked pussy lips apart, and pushed my cock inside her. She cried out my name, music to my ears. "You want me to stop?" I demanded.

"No, please, no. More!"

I was on the brink of shooting my load in her, but I fought to hold off. I wanted this to last a while. I wanted to torture myself until it hurt not to come in her. Unbidden, an image of Phelan rocking his dick in her tight pussy came to mind. I thought I hated even imagining it. Yet, I found myself getting harder, growing. As I heard her moan, it brought to mind the slapping of their bodies together, which turned me on. I shoved deeper into her until she had taken every inch.

“I should punish you for liking his touch.” To emphasize my words, I ground in and out. She gasped but pushed her ass higher. I leaned back on my haunches and rested my hands on my thighs. I could feast on the sight of my body connected with hers. “You want him instead of me?”

“No.” She sobbed, and I continued to stroke.

“What do you want, Sandy?”

“I . . .” Her muscles clenched around my cock. I gritted my teeth, certain she was about to come. She wriggled and pushed down. “Ah . . . Wait, Tav. Please.”

I dropped to my hands on either side of her body and worked her fast. The friction between us took me to the edge of my climax, and when she screamed with her orgasm, I emptied myself inside her, my come spewing hot and feeling so good I wanted to collapse on top of her. But I held off, giving in to a few grunts alone.

I pulled out of her and flipped her over. She lay unmoving, her hands at her sides and her eyes watching me. I knew she was afraid to tell me the truth of what she felt, but I wasn't going to let her off so easily. She would not jerk me around.

After I had lifted her thighs, I squeezed them, waiting for her reaction. She tensed and bit her bottom lip. I grew hard again. “What do you want, Sandy?”

She opened and closed her mouth several times. Without another word, I dropped between her legs and lapped at our combined juices leaking from her sweet core. A shudder tore through her.

“Hmm?” I dug in farther, sucked, and swallowed the tangy, salty mixture. She squirmed and moaned. Licking my way up to her clit, I ran a hand over her belly and pressed down. Her clit was in a firm hold between my lips, then I pulled back.

“Tav!” She screamed and fought hard. I held her with my hand on her stomach. “I'm going to come again! What are you doing to me?” True to her word, her thigh muscles trembled. She squeezed against my head, and a fresh flow of come slid down her channel. I released her clit and, scooping it up, hungrily took in all that she offered me.

“Well?” I demanded.

“I don't want to lose you, but—”

A growl alerted us that Phelan had arrived. I glanced up to find him strolling toward us in wolf form. His head was low, and his nostrils flared, sniffing the air. He stopped a few feet away and sat, still in his animal form. He seemed unready to interfere. I resented him being there, but I wanted to prove to him I could get Sandy off.

After I had dipped a thumb into her pussy, I judged her wet enough. I positioned my cock at her opening and pushed in with my hands around her small waist to steady her. Her eyes fluttered closed and then opened again, wide with embarrassment that I intended to take her in front of Phelan. I noticed she didn't seem too worried about his reaction, and it warmed me. My anger cooled somewhat.

I pulled her up and made her ride me. She wrapped her arms around my neck, then kissed my forehead, my eyes, and down until our lips met. For a moment, I forgot my enemy while I delved my tongue into her mouth, enjoying the warm sweetness of her. But then I drew back and pressed her head on my shoulder as I pumped in and out of her.

Phelan's mouth hung open. He licked his lips, his eyes never leaving our joined bodies and the way my cock burrowed into Sandy. I had the impression he enjoyed torturing himself by watching, just like I had when I delayed in taking her.

What did I feel about Sandy? Lust, definitely. Love? I wasn't sure. I had loved my wife even though I had picked her out in a lineup of beautiful human women. I had trusted she had a good heart, that she cared for me as well. I had been wrong. By rights, I should drop Sandy for betraying me, but Sandy had never smiled at me and pretended she loved me for me. Ours had been a physical relationship. I couldn't . . . I wouldn't give her up without a fight. I had been wrong before. I wouldn't back off, even if it would make her happier. My decision was selfish, but so be it. We were bonded according to my people's traditions. Bonded mates develop love. Period.

Soon my balls rose. The needling in my groin intensified, and the muscles down there clenched. I slid my hands down over Sandy's back to grip her ass cheeks. I held her in place while I drove in and out at a lightning clip. The pleasure was nearing pain, and the ache in my chest was a surprise. When my come exploded inside her, I shouted her name and hated my weakness in front of Phelan. My eyes wet, I turned my head to bury it in her neck, and she clutched at me with the same intensity.

After a while of us shuddering in each other's arms, I drew back. "I'm not giving you up at all!"

She nodded. "I know."

I glanced up to find Phelan about to turn away. "Wait!"

He stopped and looked back at me.

"Change," I demanded.

I imagined an eyebrow went up at my command, but he complied and soon stood before us naked. I sighed and stood with Sandy still in my arms. I walked over to Phelan and deposited her gently into his arms. His eyes widened, but he took her, his hands sliding around her flat abs and lower toward her pussy.

“Your turn,” I told him with a grin. “I’ll watch.”

Chapter Twenty-Two

I don't know who they thought they were, passing me around like I was their private party toy. I pretended to be angry for a little while, but then I got into it. By the time we found a ship going to Shale, I was so sore that I walked on the tips of my toes. But I had never been more satisfied in my life.

"How long until we get there?" I asked Tav while I dropped into a chair. He and Phelan had fought over who would pilot the vessel, but I happily reminded them Pierre was picking us up. I had old contacts after all, and the card someone had once given me for a pilot who would take me anywhere for a price. At the time, my desire had been to stay on Earth. I had been shocked to find Pierre had access to some intergalactic phone-type device that could pick up signals from whatever calling device was used, whichever planet the caller was on. When I had more time, I might ask him how it worked.

Tav had just strolled in the room from visiting Pierre on the bridge. "Fifteen more minutes." He collapsed in a chair across from me and frowned that Phelan's hand was on my thigh, up close to my center. I rolled my eyes, but when he patted the seat beside him, I went. Phelan let out a low growl.

"Have you thought about what you're going to tell your people?" I had no idea how he would explain this situation away. We had argued forever about leaving Earth. Our situation was special, and I didn't think any of the Drelconians would understand. A woman would not have two lovers among Tav's people. I didn't want to embarrass him either.

"No, I haven't. It will be fine." He narrowed his eyes on me. "You sound like you're unsure. I thought we had settled this."

"It's not settled."

"Of course it's not settled!" Phelan banged his fist on his armrest. "She wants me, not you. You and I might enjoy sparring with one another, fighting over her, but her mind's not at rest. Either way, I've betrayed my people, killed some for her. I can't go back."

If that was supposed to put my mind at ease, it did not. I covered my face with my hands, but Tav pulled them down and kissed me. He lifted me onto his lap, his arms making me feel secure.

"She may lust after you, my friend," Tav admitted, "but she loves me. Even you have to agree. Then again, you aren't in love either, are you?"

Before Phelan could respond, something slammed into the ship, which sent us all to the floor. Blow after blow to the hull made it impossible to stand. Tav tucked me against him, and Phelan scooted on hands and knees to lie in front of me. I was protected by two strong men.

Another hit, and the ship dipped to one side. We slid down the floor. Phelan flipped around so I'd land on him when we smashed into the wall.

“What the fuck is going on?” Phelan shouted.

As if he'd heard him, Pierre came over the intercom. “We're under attack. It's the Drelconians.”

“Never!” Tav answered, although Pierre didn't seem to hear him. He continued to speak.

“*Mes amours*, hold onto something. It is the . . . how are they saying it? Ice dragons.” He paused and let out a string of curses. “So close to the destination, too. *Mon dieu!*”

A volley of shots peppered the ship. We all saw it at the same time, a beam of light ripping through the ship. We'd freeze to death! But just outside a portal, I glimpsed a planet. Pierre was trying to make it into the atmosphere of Shale at least. We weren't going to make it.

Phelan's feet grew claws and lengthened. His thigh muscles bulged and split his pants. He pressed me away from him with his knees in my stomach until he could press his feet at the front of my hips. Just before he pushed, he stared into my eyes. “He's wrong. I love you.” His gaze shifted to Tav. “Save her!”

Tav held me tighter. Phelan shoved with all his might, and we slid backward against gravity to the top of the room, now on its side. Tav caught the doorjamb and hauled us out. All I could do was watch dumbstruck while the beam cut through my wolf lover's body. “No . . . Phelan!”

I struggled against Tav's hold.

“Stop it, Sandy. He's gone. He did what he had to do to save you. Now get it in gear. Let's go!”

I thought he was heartless, not caring that the man he had just called friend was dead. He yanked us outside the room and smacked a hand over the button to close the door. An alarm went off and a message said the ship's system was sealing the room to stabilize oxygen. Phelan was gone.

We stumbled along the hall as the ship rocked to and fro. A door opened at the end, and Pierre appeared. His face was pale, and sadness filled his eyes. I thought for a moment that they looked all black with no whites, but when I blinked, they were normal. “This way to the escape pod. My ship is lost. The silver dragons are here now and shooing the ice ones. Too late.” He sounded like he choked off a sob, but he moved ahead of us, so I couldn't see his face.

In silence, we piled into the cramped quarters, and Pierre pressed a series of buttons. The panel leading to the ship slid closed, and I jumped at the bangs and whirring of something mechanical outside the pod. In another instant, we were free, or at least I assumed so. The

pod had no window, and the drop-down red screen in front of Pierre, with its blips of light, gave me no clue.

“Everything okay, Pierre?” Tav asked him while holding me close. I pulled away, which left only an inch between our thighs. I didn’t blame Tav, but my selfishness had caused Phelan his life. I felt like I wasn’t good enough for Tav either. He deserved better. Only now did I think about his past, what I had read in Mack’s file on him. His wife had been a selfish bitch as well. Boy, did he know how to pick them.

And Mack. Phelan had admitted he had killed him, with no remorse. This was my life on Earth. What would it be like on Shale?

Chapter Twenty-Three

“What do you think?” Ryuu asked me.

I sighed. “What do I think about what?”

“About your damn brother! What have we been talking about all this time, Tav?” Ryuu thumped the back of his hand against my head. “Get your mind off Sandy for a moment and think of your family. She’ll come around. Give her time. She’s just grieving.”

“I should never have told you about Phelan.” My gaze strayed back to where Sandy sat on the other side of Ryuu’s living room. She was chatting with Tiam, who was back on Shale with her new husband, Ladon. She was mine. I should go across and demand she come back to my bed, but how could I do that to her? What if she loved him more than me? I had claimed that she didn’t love him, and I thought that it was true at the time. But now I wasn’t so sure. She seemed miserable, and her beautiful pale skin had gone paler. Her eyes had dulled. Most of the time they looked red like she had been crying.

I thought love would come after some time, but love was here now. I loved her so much, I could barely concentrate on the fact that Draco had offered Pierre a ship in exchange for taking him with him to who knows where.

With effort, I focused and turned back to Ryuu. “I think we have enough to deal with here. We don’t know the ice dragons’ plans, whether they are in allegiance with the humans or have their own agenda. To attack so close to Shale was bold. We can’t just hurry off chasing Draco across the galaxy and leave our people vulnerable. You and Darke took a huge risk coming out there to help us.”

“You’re welcome,” Ryuu grumbled. “What you’re saying makes sense, but he is my twin. I risked it all to go to him before, and I would do it again in a heartbeat.”

I scanned the room for his wife. Shannon was talking with one of the older Drelconians, Stone, but her eyes were on Ryuu. I had the feeling she was talking in his head. “You’d risk her?” I nodded toward her.

Ryuu frowned. “Don’t be stupid. Of course not. If I went looking for Draco, I’d take her with me. We’re not going to be separated again.”

Harmony appeared in front of us with her hands on her hips, fire flashing in her eyes. “Ryuu, I want to talk to you in private.”

He stood and shrugged. “Tav, come along. He’s ruling with me now that he’s back, Harmony, and Draco’s gone.”

She pressed her lips together and nodded, then marched, like the warrior she was, behind my brother. This woman would take nothing lying down, for sure. I wondered what she wanted, probably to demand Ryuu go after her husband and bring him back.

When we were in Ryuu's study alone, she faced him, determination in the set of her jaw. "I want a ship."

"Come again?" Ryuu's eyes widened.

"You heard me. I want a ship. I'm going looking for Draco. I'm not sitting here this time on Shale. Darke did a great job running things here. I barely needed to lift a finger. Your people respected him despite his age, but I'll be damned if I sit by while Draco's off feeling like he betrayed me, that he's somehow not worthy to be my husband." Her voice broke. She was silent for a few minutes while she pulled herself together. I didn't have to wonder what it cost her to have to wipe away tears in front of us. She wanted to be tougher when we viewed human women as soft. "I have to go after him . . . to tell him I love him no matter what."

If only Sandy felt the same way, that she loved me no matter what. Would she go across the street, let alone the galaxy, for me?

Ryuu drew Harmony into his arms and stroked her back. She resisted for a moment then gave in. "I understand how you feel, and if I didn't have everyone to think about, I would already be gone to look for him. Still, you can't go out there alone. You don't know how to pilot a ship, and I can't spare a man right now. The ice dragons are likely to try attacking again. We're few in number until the young ones mature."

"Darke can pilot. He's been trained. What's more, it's his duty to go after his father. Please, Ryuu, *please*. I can't sit here. I just can't."

My older brother ran a hand over his long, white hair and closed his eyes. He had always been the lighthearted one, always looking only to have fun and impress the girls. Now, he had the weight of the world on his shoulders. Shannon, working with those skilled in medical arts, had brought him out of his coma quickly, and he hadn't stopped since.

I spoke up on Harmony's behalf. "Ryuu, let her go. I'm sure you know being mentally connected with Shannon, the torment she went through being separated from her mate. Their bond is strong also."

"So is yours," he reminded me. He nodded to Harmony. "Go, and take Darke, Stone, and his mate. As for you, Tav, get your mate. Shannon tells me she's gone to my lake, the perfect place to renew a relationship."

He didn't have to tell me twice. Following Harmony when she shouted a cry of happiness at being given permission to go, I jetted out the door to find Sandy. I had no idea what I would say to her, but somehow I would make her see how we belonged together. We were bonded,

and nothing could change that. Somewhere beneath the hurt she felt at losing Phelan was the love she still felt for me. If it weren't true, I wouldn't feel the pull toward her as I did.

Ryuu's living room was now empty except for Shannon holding a small child on her lap. She glanced up and winked. "The lake."

I nodded. "On my way. Uh, Tiam?"

"I found something for her to do. Sandy will be all alone. Go get your mate, Tav. This one is true, and I know she loves you. I felt it the times I was inside her mind. She's consumed with thoughts of you."

What she said was hard to believe given how Sandy had stayed away from me for the last three weeks, but I would take my chances.

Chapter Twenty-Four

I felt him behind me. Something told me when Ness dragged Tiam away and Shannon suggested I spend time down at the lake, I was being set up. It didn't take them long to send Tav after me. What was I going to say to him? I knew by the longing I'd seen in his beautiful eyes that he loved me, and I loved him, too. My longing matched his, probably exceeded it. The last three weeks had been sheer torture.

"Can I join you?" Although I knew he was there, the cadence of his voice still startled me. A tremor set me on edge, made me want to run before I threw myself on him.

"Sure."

He dropped down to the grass and removed his shoes. I had done the same when I arrived. The lushness of the greenery here reminded me of the field on Earth where we had last made love. But it also reminded me of how selfish I had been.

"I don't deserve you," I blurted out.

"Don't say that, Sandy." He stroked my hair and brought his hand around to my chin to force me to look at him. "We can't help what we feel, what we desire."

"We can curb it when it does no one good but ourselves. I had a choice to let Phelan go. I didn't. I was selfish. I wanted my cake, and I wanted to eat it, too."

The confusion on his face told me that despite his interactions with humans, he hadn't yet heard the expression. "Sandy, we need to discuss this. You can't just shut me off and pull away like what we had was nothing. I know you're grieving over Phelan. I thought I just wanted you happy when I agreed to be only one of your lovers. I had no idea my feelings had deepened to the point of love. I guess only love could have come to such a decision."

I blew out a noisy breath and stood. "That's just it, Tav. You shouldn't have had to. I read in Mack's file what Lisa, your wife, did. She actually tried to make a deal with your enemy. She used you, pretended she was someone she wasn't. I read how you were the shy, quiet type of your brothers, but I see what your bad experiences with humans have done to you."

He burst out laughing. I frowned, finding nothing funny about what I had just said. His eyes twinkled with mirth, which made me want to stroke his face and kiss his lips.

"You make it sound like I'm now a horrible Drelconian, that I'm not fit to go out in public with my rotten personality."

"You know what I mean!" I stomped off toward the water and dipped a toe down to break the calm surface. Gentle ripples floated away, and a fish darted over to investigate the invasion. I pulled back, grossed out at the thought of it touching my skin.

Tav came up behind me. He rested his hands on my shoulders and kissed the top of my head. For a few minutes we said nothing, just stood there staring out over the water, luxuriating in the rising ten moons. I had thought I could not love another planet other than Earth, especially after living on Orel-X Four, but Shale felt like home. I wanted to stay, but if Tav and I weren't together, it was impossible. I couldn't bear it.

"If you think I'm going to let you go because you feel guilty, you're mistaken."

I gasped at the harsh words, although his voice hadn't been. He had stated a simple fact. "I have a choice about who I see."

"Do you?" He ran his hands along my sides to reach around in front of me and stroke my stomach. I held out for all of a moment, and then sunk back into his hold. "You are drawn to me like I am to you," he whispered. "To be apart is . . . absurd. I won't walk away and let you go."

My mouth hung open. "But—"

"No buts." He placed his hands on my shoulders and spun me around to face him. "Sandy, you are a good person. If you felt nothing about this whole mess, then you wouldn't be. I love you. Are you going to stand here and tell me you don't love me?"

"No, I'm not saying that."

"Good." He grinned. "You know how we Drelconians are. We claim our mate and expect no argument."

I laughed. "You *have* been rather arrogant this whole time."

His eyebrows went up. "I thought I was the perfect gentleman."

"In your head alone. *You're mine. She's mine,*" I mimicked.

"Stating facts."

I punched his arm and then hugged him. Resting my head on his chest, I sighed. "I didn't love him. I cared. I lusted, sure. But right from the start, it was you. I may be dealing with the guilt of causing his death for a while, but the last few weeks have been a nightmare without you. I missed you. Tav, I don't want to be a disappointment." I drew back and looked into his eyes. "I don't want your money. Ryuu says you all have buttloads, although I don't know why he told me that. Probably to test me. His wife looked like she was going to choke him. She said she vouched for my feelings for you."

Tav squeezed me. "I didn't think you were after my money. Not after you were living in an abandoned building. Lisa wouldn't have survived it."

"Do you still love her?"

“No. I love you.”

“Are you sure?”

“Sandy, you have my heart, only you. I want you as my wife, my mate. And if you want another lover today or tomorrow—”

“Never again!”

The End

About the Author

Brenda Steele loves all things out of the ordinary. She writes to gratify the cravings of her own sexual drive, and then for her dear readers. Hopefully, the two won't be far apart and all who read her work will come away satisfied. Look for her hot "My Lover" series and the continuation of her "Accidental Mates" series.