

EVANGELINE ANDERSON

HIDDEN RAGE

KINDRED TALES

HIDDEN RAGE

A KINDRED TALES NOVEL

EVANGELINE ANDERSON



Evangeline Anderson



BRIDES of the
KINDRED



KINDRED
TALES



KINDRED
Birthright



ALIEN *Mate*
INDEX



CyBRG
Files



COUGAR-
VILLE



BORN TO
DARKNESS

www.evangelineanderson.com



Hidden Rage, 1st Edition,

A Kindred Tales Novel

Copyright © 2021 by Evangeline Anderson

All rights reserved.

Cover Art Design © 2021 by Reese Dante

This book is a work of fiction. The names, characters, places and incidents are products of the writers' imagination or have been used factiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, actual events, locale or organizations is entirely coincidental.

All rights are reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then you should return to a retailer of your choice or evangelineanderson.com and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the author's work.

Cover content is for illustrative purposes only.

Any person depicted on the cover is a model.

CONTENTS

[Hidden Rage](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Chapter 41](#)

[Chapter 42](#)

[Chapter 43](#)

[Chapter 44](#)

[Chapter 45](#)

[Chapter 46](#)

[Chapter 47](#)

[Chapter 48](#)

[Chapter 49](#)

[Chapter 50](#)

[Chapter 51](#)

[Chapter 52](#)

[Chapter 53](#)

[Chapter 54](#)

[Chapter 55](#)

[Chapter 56](#)

[Chapter 57](#)

[Chapter 58](#)

[Chapter 59](#)

[Chapter 60](#)

[Chapter 61](#)

[Chapter 62](#)

[Chapter 63](#)

[Chapter 64](#)

[Chapter 65](#)

[Chapter 66](#)

[Chapter 67](#)

[The End?](#)

[Give a Hot Kindred Warrior to a Friend!](#)

[Sign up for my Newsletter!](#)

[Do you love Audiobooks?](#)

[Also by Evangeline Anderson](#)

[About the Author](#)

HIDDEN RAGE

A KINDRED TALES NOVEL



KINDRED TALES

A woman who's been kidnapped and taken to a harsh new world

Begins to fall in love with the warrior who took her.

But Dragon has a secret inside him—a deadly force that fills him.

Will it save Bobbi's life...or kill them both when his *Hidden Rage* comes out?

Is it wrong to fall in love with your kidnapper?

Dr. Roberta McClelland—Bobbi to her friends—is a Xeno-Cultural Anthropologist living her lifelong dream of studying an alien species. On the peaceful planet of Avria Pentaura, she spends her days tending crops and learning her new people's customs. But her peace doesn't last long—she doesn't count on raiders from the neighboring planet, Saurous, coming to visit and she especially doesn't expect to be kidnapped and held captive by a rogue Kindred named Dragon.

Dragon isn't native to Saurous—a planet inhabited by lizard people called Saurians. His parents were killed when he was little and he has been adopted into the Crimson Blades crime family. As a Hybrid—a mix of two different types of Kindred—he isn't sure of his heritage. He only knows that his mother was a Vision Kindred, but his father's origins and the other half of his

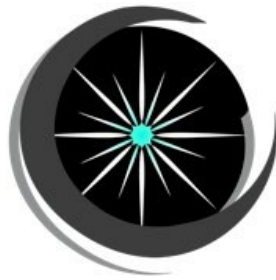
own nature are a mystery to him.

The big Hybrid has never met a female like Bobbi before and the minute he sees her, he knows he has to have her. The problem is, his sadistic Saurian brother, Zerlix, wants her too. Dragon can think of only one way to protect the curvy little female—he must marry her and keep her with him always.

But Bobbi is a modern woman and she's not interested in marrying her kidnapper, thank you very much. She's determined to run away no matter how hot her Kindred captor is and she's going to give the evil Zerlix the slip too. But when she gets into trouble in the notorious Blue Light District, can Dragon find her in time to rescue her? And will happen when the hidden half of his heritage comes out?

Read *Hidden Rage* to find out!

PROLOGUE



The small boy sat in the center of a room beside the dead bodies. He did not cry. He did not howl or beg or paw at the fallen forms of his parents. He simply sat there, staring quietly ahead, as though seeing something no one else could. He said not a word.

The lack of mewling and tears impressed Rep. Vizlar. Most mammalians were so emotional—prone to uncomfortable displays of grief or sorrow or whatever other “feelings” they were having at the moment. It was their warm blood that did it. It made them overly emotive and extremely tiresome to deal with.

Take the boy’s people for instance—Kindred, they were called. They had settled on Saurous without so much as by-your-leave, opening a shop right on the edge of the Crimson Blades’ district, not even begging permission first. Then, when Rep. Vizlar had sent an enforcer to gather the fees for the necessary permits and protections, they had refused to pay!

Such disrespect could not be allowed, of course. As the new head or “Komendant” of the Crimson Blades, Rep. Vizlar had to attend to it himself. If he hadn’t, word would surely have gotten out that he had allowed a group of mammalians to disrespect him. The minute it did, every Clan on the planet would have been on his doorstep, knives out and blasters drawn, ready to

carve up the Crimson Blades' territory and take it over.

Rep. Vizlar ran a hand over the sleek, dark green scales that covered his head. He felt no guilt, only a cold kind of satisfaction. The slaughter had been justified—necessary. And now it had to be finished. He raised his blaster and pointed it at the boy. It was a shame to kill children, but he couldn't allow the youngling to grow up and come seeking revenge against him. Plus, it was better to finish the job.

“Wait, Komendant Vizlar.” A hand with sleek, green scales edged with scarlet tapped lightly on his arm. It had six short fingers and a long, triple-jointed thumb, all tipped with sharp black claws.

“What is it, Yariz?” Rep. Vizlar turned to his Advisor, his lipless mouth curving into a slight frown—a sign of grave displeasure. But Rep. Yariz didn't give up.

“Do not shoot the boy,” Rep. Yariz said urgently. “I believe if you do, you will be leaving a great opportunity on the table.”

“Oh?” Rep. Vizlar frowned. He didn't lower the gun, but he *did* give the other male his full attention.

Yariz was from the Blood Scale Clan, as his red-edged scales attested. They were known for their cunning and their ability to plan years into the future. It was one reason his Sire, the old Komendant of the Crimson Blade Clan, had adopted Yariz into their family, back when the two of them were little more than boys themselves.

“Explain,” Rep. Vizlar said. Leaving loose ends wasn't his style. But if his Advisor had a good reason for his request, he would consider it.

“The boy may be of great use to you in the future,” Rep. Yariz said. “His people, the Kindred, form extremely strong family bonds—their loyalty is

unquestioned and unquestioning. If you took him in, that loyalty would be transferred to *you*.”

Rep. Vizlar frowned.

“The boy will have no loyalty to me. He just watched me shoot his entire family down—such memories do not fade.”

“They can be wiped though—or a memory block put into place,” Rep. Yariz said. “Listen, I researched his family before we came here. The boy comes from two branches of the Kindred tree. His mother was a Vision Kindred—they are able to see weaknesses that others cannot in the fraction of a blink. Such an ability would come in handy in the future, don’t you think?”

“Well...yes.” Grudgingly, Rep. Vizlar nodded. “What breed of Kindred was his father then?”

“That, I do not know,” Rep. Yariz admitted. “But I *do* know that when two different branches of the Kindred mix as his parents did, their offspring is usually unable to form a bond with a female. They call that kind a ‘hybrid.’”

“What does that have to do with anything?” Rep. Vizlar demanded. His blaster was still pointed at the silent boy’s shaggy head. The mammalians had hair all over their bodies, but especially on the tops of their heads—nothing like the smooth, sleek scales of his own kind. All that hair...it was most off-putting.

“It means that since he cannot bond with a female, all his loyalty will be to his family—*your* family—if you take him in,” Rep. Yariz said patiently. “And you never have to worry about him leaving or trying to start his own Clan.”

“Hmm...that *would* be an asset,” Rep. Vizlar admitted reluctantly. It was

a problem sometimes—a second or third son leaving the family of his birth and attempting to strike out on his own. “But what would I take him as?” he asked his Advisor. “Where would he fit into my family? Our Clan?”

Rep. Yariz shrugged his narrow shoulders.

“Why not take him as a Little Brother to Zerlix, your firstborn? The way your own Sire took me as *your* Little Brother? That way his loyalty would carry on to the next generation of your family and his place in the Clan would be assured.”

“Adopt him as a Little Brother?” The idea took Rep. Vizlar somewhat aback. “But he’s mammalian—a warm-blood,” he protested. “How could he fit into a Saurian family?”

“The Kindred are well able to bear the cold, as you see,” Rep. Yariz pointed out. “They do not quake and shiver as other breeds of mammals do when they visit Saurus.” He nodded at the boy as proof.

It was true that he wasn’t shivering, though the temperature on Saurus, which was the fourth planet from the sun, was well below what most mammals could stand, Rep. Vizlar thought. And he supposed the unsightly mop of black hair on the boy’s head could either be shaved or slicked back to make his skull appear properly smooth. Of course, there was the fact that he had tan skin instead of proper, sleek scales, but that could not be helped.

His mate, Res. Tizlah, might be a bit shocked to have a mammalian son added to her brood, but she had been expecting Vizlar to choose a Little Brother for their firstborn for some time. And she was a nurturing type of person—he often teased her that she was almost as emotional as a warm-blood. She would love the boy as her own, even if he was an ugly little mammalian.

“Well...” he said slowly, considering. “You say they’re loyal, these Kindred?”

“To the death,” Rep. Yariz promised. “Also, most males grow to be quite large and strong—even by our standards. He may not look it, but I believe the boy will make a formidable addition to your family and to our Clan when he grows up.”

Rep. Vizlar allowed his blaster to drop to his side. He trusted Rep. Yariz’s word. His Advisor had never given him bad advice, not even when they were boys together.

”All right,” he said at last. “Take the boy to the Memory Doctor at once. Tell him to put in a block that can never be broken—he can never remember this day. If he does...”

“He won’t,” Rep. Yariz said quickly. “I’ll be certain of it.”

“Very well.” Rep. Vizlar nodded. “Bring him to my residence as soon as the block is completed. I’ll tell Res. Tizlah to make up a cot for him and tomorrow we’ll introduce him to Zerlix as his new Little Brother. He’ll be pleased—he’s been begging for a playmate and of course his sisters can’t keep up with his rough ways.”

He shook his head, smiling fondly as he thought of his firstborn. Zerlix was stubborn and headstrong, but having a Little Brother to play with would surely settle him down. It would also help to mold him into a future leader for the Crimson Blades Clan. Yes, taking the mammalian child was a good decision.

He was sure of it.



“I don’t like sending you on your own, with no Protector.” Commander Sylvan frowned in apparent concern as he leaned across his desk. “It will be almost impossible to contact you—Avria Pentaura is beyond an especially thick section of the Blind, which is—”

“Excuse me, Commander, but I do know what the Blind is,” Bobbi interrupted. “A vast cloud of cosmic dust that separates the known universe from the unknown universe. And yes, I know that it scrambles signals and makes interstellar communication almost impossible sometimes.”

Dr. Roberta McClelland—Bobbi to her friends—was a Xeno-Cultural Anthropologist who had won an academic contract to work with the Kindred of the Mother Ship. It was a grant to study extraterrestrial life and cultures on different planets and she was itching to get on with her research. But first she had to convince the overprotective Head of the Kindred High Council to actually let her go and *do* the research.

Not that she disliked Commander Sylvan—he was gentlemanly and kind and intelligent and not at all condescending, like a lot of human men were when faced with a female scientist. But he *was* extremely protective of women, as all Kindred were, and he was proving to be difficult to convince.

“Look, the Orniths are a matrilineal society—they don’t trust males,” she

explained to him now. “They only mate once a solar year—the rest of the time, the males are all banished from the tribe—forced to live in the wilderness away from the females. If I brought a male guard with me—especially a huge Kindred warrior—they would *never* warm up to me. All my research would be tainted because they wouldn’t be able to be themselves around me.”

“So you don’t just want to observe them...you want to live among them?” Commander Sylvan raised an eyebrow at her.

Bobbi nodded eagerly and pushed a strand of curly, flame-colored hair out of her eyes. She really needed to get a haircut before she went on this mission—her mane was getting out of control. But first she had to convince the Kindred Commander to let her go on the mission—by herself—in the first place.

“No simple observation for me,” she told him. “Complete integration and immersion—I believe that’s the best way to study the Orniths. I want to *become* one of them. Well—as much as I can, anyway. I mean, I know I don’t look anything like them, but I think they’ll accept me, because I’m a female and so not a threat.”

“Well...” Commander Sylvan frowned. “I’m still hesitant because of the lack of communication, but I *do* believe that you’d be safe there. Our observations have concluded that they are a completely peaceful—if somewhat primitive—people who never seem to have any wars. They don’t even have any weapons, as far as we’ve been able to tell.”

“Which makes them a *perfect* society for a woman to study alone,” Bobbi pointed out eagerly.

Sylvan sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Sometimes I wish we

hadn't published our findings about the peoples we found beyond the Blind on Earth. Humans are always so eager to explore, but you seldom consider the consequences."

Bobbi cocked an eyebrow in return.

"Forgive me for saying so, Commander Sylvan, but aren't *you* married or 'Joined' to a human yourself?"

A reluctant smile twitched the corner of the big Kindred's mouth.

"Yes, that's true enough. And I suppose my Sophia had her share of exploring other planets before we finally settled down on the Mother Ship. The difference was, she was going to known Kindred home worlds—not someplace millions of light years away in the unknown universe."

"Well, it won't be unknown for long, if I get a say in it," Bobbi declared. She leaned forward eagerly. "Just think of it, Commander—a whole race of people who are avian instead of mammalian. I mean, not that the Orniths can fly—they're much too heavy for that. But they're covered in feathers and their beaks—"

"All right, all right..." Commander Sylvan held up his hands, the smile twitching the corner of his lips again. "I can tell how eager you are to begin your research, Dr. McClelland." He shook his head. "I can see now why my mate's friend, Kat, described you as 'a real firecracker.' She claims that human women with flame-colored hair have a fiery temper to match."

Since Kat herself had red hair, Bobbi didn't take this as an insult. As for the "firecracker" remark, well, she wasn't surprised by that either. She brought a lot of enthusiasm and excitement to whatever project she was involved in—she always gave a hundred percent. It was a "whole lot of personality wrapped up in an itty-bitty package" as her dad used to say.

Sometimes it took people aback that so much energy could be packed into a five-foot-one, curvy-petite woman like herself.

“Redheads are supposed to have hot tempers—I’ve heard that all my life,” she told Commander Sylvan. “I don’t know if it’s true—I just know I’m impatient to get started with my research. Please, don’t stand in my way!”

He sighed deeply and ran a hand over his short, blond hair.

“I won’t. I just want to be sure you’re safe before I have someone drop you off where there’s no communication and no way for you to call for help. There *is* another inhabited planet in that particular solar system, you know,” he added. “It’s called Saurous.”

“Is that right?” Bobbi tried not to look too surprised. She had focused almost all her attention on Avria Pentaura and its fascinating inhabitants. The rest of the Orthura System hadn’t interested her much but only because she’d assumed the rest of the planets were barren and devoid of life. “Is Saurous inhabited by Orniths as well? But it can’t be, can it,” she went on, answering her own question. “The Orniths are too primitive to have any kind of spaceflight.”

“It’s inhabited by a reptilian people who call themselves Saurians,” Commander Sylvan told her. “They’re a cold-blooded race—which is just as well, since Saurous is located at the far edge of the Orthura System’s temperate zone, which means it’s extremely cold there. They do have spaceflight, but Avria Pentaura seems to be too warm for them to bother with.” He shrugged. “So the inhabitants of the two planets pretty much leave each other alone—at least, as far as our observations go.”

Bobbi’s head whirled with possibilities.

“Another race that isn’t mammalian! I’d love to be able to study them,

too!”

Commander Sylvan frowned.

“I’m afraid that’s completely out of the question, Dr. McClelland. Unlike the mild-mannered Orniths, the Saurians are *extremely* dangerous. The entire planet of Saurous is divided up into territories that are run by ‘Clans’—which operate very much, I believe, like Mafia families on Earth. Any outsider is seen as a threat and treated accordingly. No, I’m sorry...” He shook his head. “I wouldn’t let you go there with a whole battalion of warriors armed to the teeth, let alone by yourself as a female with no protection.”

Bobbi wanted to argue that she could take care of herself, but she had to admit that the gangland situation going on at the other inhabited planet in the Orthura System sounded like bad news. As fascinating as it might be to study the cold-blooded lizard people of Saurous, it was probably much safer and less problematic to stick to the mild-mannered bird-like inhabitants of Avria Pentaura.

“All right,” she said, smiling at the Commander. “Just let me go do my research with the Orniths and I’ll stay far, far away from Saurous and its scary inhabitants.”

Commander Sylvan smiled and reached across the desk to offer his hand.

“All right, you’ve convinced me. As long as you stay on Avria Pentaura and stay way from Saurous, it’s a deal.”

Bobbi smiled in relief and delight.

“Oh, thank you, Commander Sylvan! I just can’t wait to get started! And I promise I’ll stay put and study the Orniths and leave the Saurians strictly alone.”

She had no idea how soon she would be breaking her promise.



“*B*ut...but I thought I had another solar month to make my payment! Forgive me, Rep. Zerlix, but that was what your Sire’s representative said.” Rep. Gersh gripped the counter at the front of his little shop tightly, tension showing in the lines around his eyes. He was an older male with a hunched back and his dark green scales were dry and brittle-looking. The way they were going gray at the edges showed his age.

“Well, now *I’m* telling you that the payment is due *today!*” Zerlix snapped, glaring at the old man. “So pay up! Or would you like to lose the protection of the Crimson Blades just when the Blood Scales are trying to make a move into this territory?”

Dragon frowned as he watched his “Big Brother” work on the old male. The Blood Scales’ territory adjoined the territory of his own Clan, the Crimson Blades, but they weren’t making a move—at least, not as far as he knew. The only reason they were here, shaking down a customer, was because Zerlix wanted extra money to gamble with in the blue light district tonight.

“But...but I don’t have the money yet—not all of it, anyway!” Rep. Gersh protested. “I need time to save it. I’ve been paying for protection from the Crimson Blades for as long as my business has been here—thirty solar

years, that is—and your Sire has never asked me to pay early. He knows how long it takes to save the protection money every six-months!”

“My Sire isn’t here—I am!” Zerlix snapped, his long, forked tongue slashing the air impatiently. “And I say the money is due *now*. If you don’t have enough saved, you can make up the rest out of what’s in your money box.” He tapped the old-fashioned device which took bills as well as credit chips with one claw-tipped finger. “In fact, why don’t you open it up and let’s see what you made today? It *might* just be enough to cover the difference.”

All right—enough was enough. This was turning into a fucking robbery—which was exactly what Rep. Gersh was paying them to protect him from, Dragon thought.

“Big Brother,” he muttered in Zerlix’s ear hole—as a Saurian, he had no fleshy appendages like Dragon did. He lacked ears and his nose was no more than two nostril slits in his flat, scaly face.

As a mammalian growing up among Saurians, Dragon had hated once his own appearance, so different from his adopted family’s’. However, he had accepted the way he looked as an adult. Now he used his differences to his advantage—and the advantage of his Clan. Not many Clans had a seven-foot tall mammalian enforcer in their crews. Most Saurians grew well over two meters tall, but hardly any of them attained Dragon’s own height and musculature.

He used his size now, as he towered over the male he called his brother. Zerlix had hated it when Dragon had grown taller than him—he had never quite forgiven his “Little Brother” for getting so much larger than he was himself. Zerlix was, after all, two years older—though he often acted much

less mature than his years would indicate. Case in point, the way he was trying to shake-down old Rep. Gersh right now, Dragon thought.

“Think about this before you do it,” he said now, speaking calmly and evenly—trying to be the voice of reason for his Saurian sibling.

“What I’m *doing* is getting some gambling money. If you’d shut up so I can get it!” Zerlix snapped, his tongue lashing.

“And what are you going to tell our Sire when his collectors come next solar month and Rep. Gersh tells them, ‘Oh, sorry—I already paid my protection money to your son last month.’ How well do you think that’s going to go down?” Dragon demanded.

Zerlix glared up at him, his yellow-green eyes narrowing to slits.

“My Sire won’t care. He knows a young male has needs.”

“What you’re doing here is basically stealing from our Clan,” Dragon pointed out. “If anyone else did that, Komendant Vizlar would have their scales plucked out and their claws chopped off!”

“Yes, but I’m his son. His only *true*, natural born son,” Zerlix sneered. “He’d probably do that to *you*—you’re just an adopted mammalian—but *I*’m going to be Komendant after him and lead the Crimson Blades.”

“How can you lead if you can’t even follow the rules?” Dragon asked, ignoring the barb about his adoption.

He was used to such insults from his Saurian brother. Though the bond between a Big Brother and a Little Brother was supposed to be a lifelong friendship—like the relationship between Dragon’s adoptive father, Komendant Vizlar, and his Advisor, Rep. Yariz—he and Zerlix had never developed that bond.

Maybe it was because Dragon was mammalian and Zerlix was Saurian or maybe it was just that Zerlix liked being the star of the show and Dragon had stolen his spotlight by being so different. But for whatever reason, his Big Brother didn't like him and never had.

But that didn't mean Dragon could avoid him. They were on the same crew, after all. And lately, it seemed like he spent most of his time trying to keep the other male from making poor decisions, like this one.

"If you keep shaking down the people we protect, they're going to look elsewhere for protection," he pointed out to Zerlix now. "How will it look to our Sire if a bunch of shop owners on the border between our territory and the Blood Scales turf start defecting to the Blood Scales and asking *them* for protection against *us*? Komendant Vizlar will have no choice but to wage war to get them back. You want to start a war, Zerlix?"

Zerlix scowled, his scaled face wrinkling and his nostril slits flaring briefly.

"You always look too far into the future, Little Brother. Why complicate tonight's pleasure with tomorrow's worries?"

"Because you can't just live for *today*," Dragon pointed out wearily. "Fuck, didn't his Big Brother *ever* think past his own pleasure?"

Unfortunately, Zerlix had never been made to think past what he wanted at the moment. As a prince of the Crimson Blades Clan, his every whim had been indulged from an early age. The adults around him as he was growing up had known that he was destined to lead the Clan one day and they had given him the same respect that his father, Komendant Vizlar received, though Zerlix hadn't done anything to earn it.

The power had gone to his head. By the time Dragon had been adopted

into the family, Zerlix had already been a little tyrant. He had teased and beaten Dragon constantly until a growth spurt had made his mammalian brother bigger than him. Now he relied mainly on insults to try and needle his “Little Brother.”

“You’re so fucking boring,” he said now, still glaring up at Dragon. “Live a little, why don’t you? Let’s get the money and go gamble—maybe play a while in the blue light district tonight. You might find a girl you want to fuck—or even Claim—not that you ever have before. But there’s a first time for everything.”

Dragon shook his head. He wasn’t much of a gambler—at least, not like Zerlix, who would recklessly bet everything he had and lost more often than he won. He had quite a huge tab going at his favorite gambling house, the Blue Olar—a tab the management only allowed because it was known that his father would come and pay down his debts once a month.

But even The Blue Olar had their limits—from what Dragon had heard, Zerlix was cut off until his tab was paid. Which was probably why he wanted money, so he could gamble someplace else.

As for the pleasure houses located in the district, well, Dragon wasn’t much for them either. He simply couldn’t get that worked up about sex. He wondered sometimes if there was something wrong with him. Why couldn’t he lust after the smooth-scaled Saurian Pleasure Girls with their hooded yellow eyes, lined in pink and purple kohl and their vaginal slits, likewise outlined in exotic colors to accent their hidden treasures?

Maybe it was because their body temperature was cooler than his own, Dragon thought. Or possibly he was asexual and didn’t need to “sow his wild oats” the way other young males needed to. Nor did he want to “Claim” a

female and bring her home to stay with him so that he could have her any time he wanted.

That was another reason Zerlix needed money, he was sure. It cost a lot to keep so many Pleasure Girls in style—it used up most of the monthly allowance their Sire gave him, for Zerlix to maintain his constantly rotating harem. Yet, that never seemed to stop him from Claiming new girls to bring back to the family compound. He kept the girls until he tired of them and got rid of them—sending them to a different Clan’s territory or selling them back to their pimpts—but he seemed to add them more quickly than he let them go.

Everything he wants to do costs money—money he’s determined to get at all costs, Dragon thought. I have to keep him out of the blue light district and get him somewhere that isn’t so expensive—someplace with fewer temptations, if I want him to leave Rep. Gersh alone.

“Forget about playing for tonight,” he told his Saurian brother. “What about our Sire’s feast? Weren’t you put in charge of procuring the Ornith eggs? I thought you promised him the freshest and the best money could buy. When do you plan to take care of that if you’re whoring and gambling all night long?”

“Fuck!” Zerlix ran a clawed hand with six short, stubby fingers and one long, three-jointed thumb over the scaled ridge that rose in the middle of his skull. Dragon could see him trying to justify the night of drinking, gambling, and womanizing he wanted to do and weighing it against the idea of failing to keep his promise to procure the feast-day delicacy he’d been put in charge of.

“Komendant Vizlar forgives you a lot,” he said to his brother. “But he’s *not* going to be happy if there aren’t any Ornith eggs for his feast-day.”

“Shit. All right, you’re right,” Zerlix admitted at last. “What a fucking kill-joy you are, Little Brother.” He sighed deeply. “I guess we’d better go get the fucking eggs while we can. Gods, all I do all day is work, work, *work!* When do I ever get to have any *fun?*”

Since the other male spent nearly all his time drinking, gambling, fucking, and sleeping off his nightly binges, Dragon had no sympathy.

“Come on,” he said. “We need to get to Avria Pentaura during the Orniths’ daylight hours if we want to trade for the freshest possible eggs.”

Zerlix sighed heavily and ran a hand over his skull ridge again.

“Fine. Gather the crew and let’s go.”

He turned and left the little shop with a *ding* as the front door indicator chimed.

“Er...then I *don’t* need to pay any money now?” Rep. Gersh looked at Dragon hopefully.

Dragon shook his head.

“No. Just have the money ready when my Sire’s representative comes next solar month. And I’m sorry for the, uh, misunderstanding,” he added.

“That’s all right. May the great Saurian god, Goeth, bless you, son.” Rep. Gersh gave him a grateful look. “You’ve saved everyone a great deal of trouble—myself most of all!”

Dragon just nodded at the old male and left the shop. He might have narrowly averted a disaster nearly brought on by his Big Brother’s greed and heedlessness, but he had to keep an eye on Zerlix to make sure they got to the spaceport without a side trip to the blue light district. His Big Brother was always easily distracted—the sight of a pretty Pleasure Girl would turn his

thoughts away from his responsibilities.

He sighed as he jogged down the sidewalk to join Zerlix, who was still scowling and muttering about how hard he worked and how he never got any time off. Watching the other male, Dragon wondered where his life was going—or if it was going anywhere at all. He believed in the honor of the Crimson Blades—he had been raised in their traditions from the age of five, when his mammalian parents had been killed by a rival Clan and Komendant. Vizlar had adopted him.

But was he really going to spend the rest of his life chasing Zerlix around, trying to keep him from doing damage to the proud tradition of their Clan? And once Komendant Vizlar retired—what then? Dragon had no illusions about his relationship with his adoptive Big Brother—Zerlix didn't like him and never had. He wasn't going to make Dragon his Advisor, the way Komendant Vizlar had with his own adopted Little Brother, Rep. Yariz.

What was more probable was that Zerlix would either cast him out of the Clan altogether, or else bust him down in rank, making him a lowly collector at the very bottom of the Clan's food chain.

Either way, Dragon was afraid he would have to watch the Clan he loved spiral down the waste chute. Zerlix had none of the cold, considered calculation that his Sire was known for. He was incapable of making decisions that would benefit anyone but himself. The Crimson Blades, under his leadership, would descend into ruin in fairly short order. And Komendant Vizlar was getting old—it probably wouldn't be long before he gave up the role of Komendant and allowed his oldest son to step into his shoes.

It's too bad he can't see his son for what he really is, Dragon thought, casting a sidelong look at his Big Brother. *A selfish, spoiled brat who only*

thinks of himself.

He was tired of cleaning up Zerlix's messes and trying to avert disasters brought on by his poor judgment. But what else could he do? Where could he go? His life was here, on Saurous, and his place was with his Clan.

No matter how obnoxious his adoptive Big Brother was, Dragon was fiercely loyal to the Saurian family that had taken him in when his mammalian family had been murdered. He owed Komendant Vizlar, his adoptive father and Res. Tizlah, his adoptive mother, everything. He wouldn't abandon the only parents he had known and leave the Clan he had sworn his allegiance to just because the next leader of the Crimson Blades was an egotistical asshole.

I'll just have to keep trying to keep him out of trouble, Dragon thought with a sigh. Hopefully the trip to their neighboring planet, Avria Pentaura, to get Ornith eggs would go well and take enough time that Zerlix couldn't go gambling or whoring afterwards.

Dragon just wanted things to go smoothly for their Sire's feast-day. It was the twenty-fifth anniversary of his ascension to the leadership of the Crimson Blades as Komendant—it should be a special occasion, unmarred by any foolishness that Zerlix might thoughtlessly get into.

At least, Dragon fervently hoped so.



Bobbi sighed with satisfaction as she stood up and stretched, letting her back muscles flex after a long day of labor. The grain was all gathered into the storage area and the little tribe she was living with was assured of having plenty to eat for the coming rainy season.

The setting sun felt good on her skin—which was mostly exposed, due in part to the warm climate and in part to the fact that she was copying the dress of the Orniths in order to fit in.

Instead of a bra and blouse, she was wearing a kind of sling which looped under her breasts and held them up while exposing her nipples. It was tied at the back of her neck a little like a halter top. For a bottom, she was wearing a simple grass skirt with no underwear beneath it. The long, greenish-blue strands of dried grass fell to her mid-thighs and rustled softly when she moved.

At first it had felt strange to be so exposed, but the weather was warm and she was surrounded by female Orniths dressed exactly the same way—although they had three breasts, rather than two. By now, Bobbi had gotten used to it.

There was nothing sexual about the native uniform of the bird-like people—it was all purely for the sake of convenience and comfort. The Orniths laid

eggs like birds but breast-fed their young like mammals—a detail that Bobbi found fascinating.

The halter, which supported but didn't cover the breasts, allowed for easy breast feeding of the downy chicklings and the grass skirts allowed the Ornith women to lay eggs easily, without any need to remove undergarments to do so.

They were an unusual looking people—though Bobbi was used to them now. They had humanoid bodies no bigger than her own petite frame but their necks were long and snaky, like an ostrich or an emu's neck, which meant that every one of the adults—and some of the children—were taller than her. When they talked to her, they ducked their small heads with their large, liquid black eyes, down to meet her face-to-face, which made conversation easier. The Orniths also had beaks instead of lips and tiny green and blue and purple feathers covered their bodies.

“Greetings be to you, Bobbi,” said a shy, fluting voice.

Bobbi turned to see Therena, a good friend of hers. Therena was around thirty-five but she was only now coming of age—the Orniths were a long-lived people and they took a long time to mature.

“Greetings be to you, Therena,” she responded. “How was your first mating?”

The Ornith females mated only once a year, leaving their simple village of wooden and straw huts and going off into the tall grass to meet the male Orniths who were nomads. The males wandered from settlement to settlement, hovering around the edges of the female-only villages and waiting for female Orniths who were having their fertile period to come out and mate with them.

Mating usually took a day and a night and was, as far as Bobbi had been able to observe, a period of intense copulation where the male and female Orniths were joined for nearly the entire mating time.

It didn't look very comfortable to Bobbi—she couldn't imagine wanting to have sex with anyone for that long. But maybe that was just the lingering bitterness from her break-up with her fiancé, Stephen. Sex with *him* had certainly never lasted a day and a night—it barely lasted five minutes *if* she was lucky—and it had been pretty boring too, if Bobbi was honest with herself.

At least we never got married—really dodged a bullet there, she told herself, her thoughts wandering for a moment to the life she'd left back on Earth. If they *had* gone through with the wedding, she'd be tied down and miserable now, instead of millions of light years away, living with the Orniths and having a fascinating time studying their culture.

It was a pregnancy scare that what had broken them up, Bobbi reflected. Missing her period had made her realize that she wasn't ready to settle down yet. There was more she wanted to do and see and experience and Stephen *wasn't* the man she wanted to experience it with—or the man she wanted to be the father of her children.

If that pregnancy test had been positive, she would probably be weighed down with a boring husband and a giant belly right now, Bobbi reflected. And she would have been stuck that way for nine months. Too bad humans couldn't just have sex for a day and a night and then lay an egg like the Orniths did—it seemed a lot easier in the long run.

The females laid eggs weekly in the communal laying house, but it was only after mating that they laid a fertilized egg which might grow and mature

and eventually hatch into a baby Ornith or “chickling” as their young were called.

Bobbi had gotten to see a hatching just the other day and she was somewhat surprised when the large egg—about twice the size of a football—hatched a chickling the size of a small toddler. The baby Ornith had come out able to speak right away, too. Apparently they learned and absorbed language through the shell of their egg during the two-year long maturation process.

Because it took the eggs so long to mature and the Orniths only mated once a year, fertilized eggs were rare and precious. They were carefully guarded by the elders of the tribe, who were too old to lay fertile eggs themselves anymore. They sat on the fertilized eggs and “brooded” over them while the younger Ornith females worked in the gardens that provided most of the tribe’s food. It was a simple system, but it worked to everyone’s benefit and they were a happy and contented people.

“My mating was successful,” Therena said, pulling Bobbi’s mind back to the present. She ducked her long, snaky neck shyly and cocked her head to one side, looking at Bobbi with only one large, liquid black eye.

It wasn’t easy to read an Ornith’s facial expressions since you couldn’t see their pupils and they had beaks instead of mouths, but Bobbi had learned to interpret this sideways look as an expression of suppressed excitement.

“Then the mating was fruitful?” she inquired, smiling.

Therena bobbed her head in acknowledgement.

“I...I have laid an egg. And oh, Bobbi—it is *deep purple!*” she said in an excited whisper.

“Oh, Therena! I’m so happy for you!” Bobbi ducked her own head rapidly up and down, which was a gesture of joy and excitement among the

Orniths. She understood the significance of the egg's color because the bird-like people laid color-coded eggs.

Unfertilized eggs were creamy white—much like a chicken egg on Earth, though many, many times bigger. A pale green egg held a male Ornith chickling—these were rare but not very prized, since males weren't much use to the female Orniths and were only needed once a year for mating.

A pale violet egg held a female chickling. But a dark purple egg held a female with special significance. It was said among the Orniths that females hatched from dark purple eggs were extra long-lived and extremely wise. All of the elders of the tribe had been hatched from dark purple eggs.

According to local legend, the egg of Jemeena, who was the oldest elder and the de facto head of the tribe, had been hatched from an egg with a shell that was such a dark purple it was almost black. She was a hundred and seventeen years old and still an extremely sharp and competent leader.

“Will you come and see it?” Therenia asked, still bobbing her head excitedly.

“I would be honored to see your egg,” Bobbi said, smiling.

Together, they walked down the curving dirt lane edged with pinkish-white pebbles towards the long, low grass hut which was the communal laying house. To one side were the individual wooden huts where the Orniths lived and to the other side were the vast gardens which fed the entire village.

If there was anything the villagers needed that they couldn't grow or make themselves, they bartered for it with the few traveling traders—mostly male Orniths—who passed by occasionally.

Their main item of barter were the unfertilized eggs that almost all Ornith females laid weekly. These were gathered, wrapped in grasses, and kept in a

cool pit which had been dug in one corner of the laying house. The traders took the large eggs to port cities where they traded them with the very few visitors that came from other planets. Apparently, Ornith eggs were considered a delicacy on other worlds. Just one of them could probably have fed twenty people, Bobbi thought.

They entered the long, low laying house which was warm and stuffy and smelled of hay and dried grass. The reason for that was evident—huge bunches of the stuff were piled in four separate mounds, almost as tall as Bobbi’s head. Three of these had elders sitting on them, brooding fertilized eggs. Their long necks drooped to their chests and their eyes were sleepy or completely closed.

Brooding eggs was restful work since the elders only had to sit there on the nest, making sure the eggs they were tending were kept warm. They sat on them easily since they had backwards-bending knees—or at least, they would have been backwards for a human, Bobbi reflected. It had been startling at first to see their joints bending the “wrong” way, but like everything else in Ornith society, she was used to it now.

The fourth nest didn’t have an elder but it *did* have a large, oval egg sitting right in the middle of the depression in the center of the straw. Bobbi walked over to it, leaning against the huge mound of straw and standing on tiptoes to get a good look.

“Oh, Therea, the shell is so dark!” she marveled, looking over to her friend. “And it’s really big, too!”

“It was a difficult laying process,” Therea admitted, ducking her head with shy pride. “But it will double in size before the chickling hatches.”

The strange thing about Ornith eggs was that the shells didn’t harden until

the second year of gestation. Up until then, they had a stretchy, rubbery consistency that allowed them to expand as the chickling inside grew.

“Shouldn’t someone be sitting on this and brooding it?” Bobbi asked.

Therena shook her head.

“Not for a day and a night. The egg needs time to cure before anyone broods it. And it takes that long for the heat of the laying to dissipate.”

“I see.” Bobbi went back to marveling at the football-sized, dark purple egg. “May I touch it? Or is that not safe?” she asked, looking at her friend.

“It is safe if you are gentle,” Therena said, bobbing her head. “Go on—you may touch it if you wish to.”

Gently, Bobbi put her hand on the side of the newly laid egg. It had a rough, pebbly texture which would expand into a smooth shell as it grew. But she couldn’t touch it for long—it was really hot—like metal that had been warmed in the noonday sun.

“Wow—you weren’t kidding—it really *is* hot!” she exclaimed, pulling her hand away and shaking her fingers to cool them.

Therena nodded.

“It would burn anyone who tries to brood it right now,” she said. “Once it cures, one of the elders can sit on it and begin the brooding.” She dropped her voice to a whisper. “I was hoping that maybe Jemeena herself would take a turn brooding it. Because the shell is so very dark. I mean, I know she’s very busy but—”

“I bet she will,” Bobbi said, nodding encouragement to her friend. “It’s a special egg—you can tell just by looking at it. The chickling that hatches from it may even be the next leader of your village! You must be very proud,

Therena.”

“I...I am.” The young Ornith bobbed her head. “Not only have I had a successful first mating and laying, but now my breasts will fill with milk and I can help nurse the chicklings.”

Though they were very proprietary of their eggs, once they hatched, the Ornith females didn't really consider any of the chicklings to be their individual children. Instead, the baby Orniths were cared for by all the women collectively and nursed by every female of child-bearing—or in this case, egg laying—age.

“That will be a blessing to the village,” Bobbi said formally to her friend. “Long may your milk flow to feed the chicklings.”

“Thank you, Bobbi. Thank *youuuuu*.” The last word ended in a cooing sound which meant that Therena was extremely pleased.

Bobbi smiled to see her friend so happy. Therena was shy and quiet and she had worked hard to secure the young Ornith's friendship. Not just because she wanted to study her, but because she could tell that Therena would be worth knowing. Her instinct had been correct and Bobbi was certain the two of them would be friends for life, even after her year of living on Avria Pentaura was over and she went back home to Earth to publish her findings on the Ornith society.

“Well, it's almost time to eat Late Day meal,” Therena said, breaking into her thoughts. “I have some juicy *toola* roots I have been saving for a special occasion.” She ducked her head. “Would you like to come eat with me tonight? To celebrate?”

“I would love to!” Bobbi exclaimed. “Thank you for inviting me! I have some *vogen* grain put by that might pair well with your *toola* roots,” she

added. “Shall I bring it?”

She was glad now that she’d traded a few trinkets to the last traveling trader who had come through the village for the rare grain. The Orniths were vegetarians and Ornith society dictated that she must always bring something to add to the meal when she was invited to share food at another hut.

Therena bobbed her head.

“*Toola* roots and *vogen* grain—a feast indeed!” she exclaimed. “That sounds delicious. Thank you, Bobbi.”

“Let’s go by my place and get it and then we can head to yours,” Bobbi suggested.

Therena nodded agreement and they were just about to leave the laying hut when the arched doorway was filled by a large, feathery body. And then another and another.

Bobbi stared in dismay as Ornith after Ornith crowded into the laying hut—was the whole village coming in? What was happening?

“What is it? What’s wrong?” she asked the agitated female beside her—a large Ornith named Murble with bright purple feathers above her eyes. They looked rather like eyebrows and made her look constantly surprised.

“Intruders!” Murble exclaimed, ducking and bobbing her head in agitation. “Intruders from another world!”

“That useless trader, Yerm brought them here!” another Ornith exclaimed. “I saw him with them—he led them to us!”

“We will never trade with him again!” someone else said.

“Never mind that now,” a cracked but strong voice said, lifting above the clucking sounds the Orniths made when they were upset or agitated.

It was Jemeena, Bobbi saw, craning to look around the crowd in front of her. She and Therena had been pushed to the far back of the hut and it was difficult to see past all the long, snaky necks and bobbing heads that were in her way.

“Everyone stay calm,” the elder continued, cocking her head to one side and eyeing the crowd of flustered Orniths sternly. “The main thing is to protect the chicklings and the fertilized eggs. Nothing else matters, do you hear?”

There was a ragged chorus of “Yes, Elder,” from the assembled group.

“Good.” Jemeena nodded, her head bobbing. “Then let’s just stay together until they leave. Is everyone here? Good. Then put the chicklings in the center of the group and stay put.”

There was a rustling and bustling and the youngest members of the tribe were pushed to the center so they were surrounded by adults. This had the effect of pushing Bobbi and Therena even further back against the wall, though Bobbi could see her friend eying her newly laid egg with obvious concern.

“Don’t worry, Therena,” she whispered, reaching for her friend’s hand—which was cool and hard, more like a claw than a human hand. “I’m sure it will be all right.”

“Oh, do you really think so?” Therena asked, her black eyes wide with worry. “This has never happened before! I have never met outsiders other than you and the Kindred who sent you, Bobbi. They have never come here to bother us—the traders always go to them!”

“They probably just want to come trade for the eggs for themselves and get them fresh, right from the source,” Bobbi said, hoping she was right. “I’m

sure they won't—”

But just then, a dark figure filled the rounded doorway, cutting off the golden light and casting the laying hut into gloom.

Bobbi bit her lip as the words died in her throat. She couldn't console Therena or promise her friend that everything would be all right any longer.

She had no idea what was going to happen but she had a feeling it was going to be bad.



The visitors—or outsiders, as Therena had called them—were freaking *huge*. They had to duck to get through the doorway and when they straightened up, their heads brushed the top of the peaked straw roof.

“Fucking dusty in here,” one of them snarled, choking on the words, which ended in a coughing fit.

“*You* were the one who wanted to come get the eggs for the feast right from the source,” the one beside him replied.

Bobbi squinted, trying to get a better look at the two of them. As she watched, several more of the big males—because there could be no doubt that they were, in fact male—came pushing into the already crowded hut.

Beside them was a male Ornith—the trader she’d heard the females talking about. He ducked his head miserably and his narrow shoulders were hunched in what looked like fear and shame to Bobbi. She thought it was likely that he hadn’t wanted to bring the alien males here—he probably hadn’t been given a choice.

But it wasn’t the Ornith trader that captured most of her attention. The alien males were much bigger—all over six feet or two meters tall, she estimated. And they looked like giant lizards.

Flat faces with slits for nostrils were barely revealed in the gloom of the crowded laying hut. Instead of skin like humans or feathers like the Orniths, their bodies were covered in dark green scales and their eyes were yellow-green with vertical slits for pupils.

The reptilian eyes made them look even more menacing, as far as Bobbi was concerned. They were dressed in black leather clothing which molded to their muscular forms and they appeared to be armed—at least, she saw what she assumed were blasters or some other kind of weapons on their belts.

But as she scanned their faces, lifting her chin to try and see through the forest of long, snaky Ornith necks, she saw that one of them was different. He was the biggest one of all—half a head taller than the rest—but he was standing near the back, which was why she had missed him at first.

He's no lizard! Bobbi thought, frowning as she tried to make him out. *He looks almost...Kindred. At least from the size of him. But what is a Kindred doing with these guys?*

There were no answers on his face, which had strong, regular features with a straight nose and large, bronze eyes that almost seemed to glow in the dim hut. He had black hair—at least Bobbi *thought* he did. It was slicked back from his high forehead as close to his skull as possible. On the side of his neck, she saw a black tattoo—or *was* it a tattoo? It seemed to be shifting slowly, forming shapes that flowed into one another. A tattoo that moved?

On his arms were more tattoos, but these had colors. They flowed down to cover his massive biceps and strong forearms in multiple shades, ending right at the wrists. These seemed to be pictures of some kind and they, too, appeared to be moving. What were they doing? And how in the world had they been done? How—

Her thoughts were cut off when the head lizard guy spoke up. He was slightly larger than the others—except for the Kindred, who towered over them all—and had bands of yellow scales around his slitted eyes. These gave him a mean, calculating look—at least Bobbi thought so—and his voice was loud and booming in the small hut.

“Listen up, we’re here for eggs,” he snarled, glaring at the assembled Orniths. “We were told by our good friend, Yerm, here, that you lot have the freshest and the best eggs around!”

He clapped the male Ornith on the back, nearly knocking the much smaller being over.

“Yerm, you should not have brought them here,” Jemeena said, glaring at the miserable male. “You traded with us not three solar weeks ago and took all the eggs we had. You know we don’t have a big enough store of eggs built up for trading again so soon!”

“Forgive me, wise one.” Yerm ducked his head in apology. “They...they cornered me at the spaceport and your tribe was the first one that came to my beak.”

“Better to bind your beak closed than speak our name and bring danger to us,” the elder Ornith scolded.

“All right, old lady, you can stop with the fucking complaining. We only need a dozen,” the head lizard snapped, his long, forked tongue flickering from his lipless mouth as he spoke.

“The egg pit is there.” Yerm pointed with a trembling finger to the far side of the hut.

“You heard him,” the head lizard barked at the others. “Go get the fucking things and let’s get out of here! Too fucking hot on this damn planet

—I'm roasting!"

Several of the lizard males trooped over to the pit and began pulling the straw which concealed the eggs out of the way. They counted as they lifted the eggs out, passing them along in a chain to some others who had remained outside and were presumably storing the large white eggs in some kind of packing crate for transport back to their home planet.

"What will you pay us for our eggs?" Jemeena demanded, as the lizard men emptied the storage pit. "We worked hard to lay them—we should be compensated."

"I'll *pay* you by not blasting your little bird brain out of your fucking *skull*," the head lizard snarled, his forked tongue lashing. "Shut your beak, you old bitch!"

For the first time, the Kindred-looking male with the bronze eyes spoke up.

"That isn't right, Zerlix. You told the trader we'd pay." He had a deep, quiet voice and his tone was mild enough, but his eyes seemed to flash in the dimness, Bobbi thought.

"Fuck you, Dragon," the lizard named Zerlix swore. "It's not like these fucking Orniths are another Clan. Why should I pay a bunch of weaklings who can't do a damn thing to me if I don't?"

"Because you *promised* to. The word of a Crimson Blades clansman is his bond!" the Kindred guy growled. He pushed forward, through the lizard men, who made way for him, to stand beside the other male. Bobbi saw that he was taller than Zerlix by almost a head.

He must be at least seven feet or taller, she thought, looking up at him. He towered over everyone else in the room and the lizard named Zerlix had

to look up at him to answer.

“Fuck that,” he snarled. “Promises were made to be broken.”

“You think our Sire would like it if he knew that you broke your word?” the Kindred named Dragon asked, frowning down at the lizard man. “Where is your honor?”

“He’s not *your* Sire, *Little Brother*,” Zerlix snapped and Bobbi thought she saw a flash of pure hatred in his slitted eyes, as he looked up at the other male. “What are you gonna do—run back home to Saurus and tell on me?”

“No, I’m going to make you pay, like you promised.” The Kindred spoke mildly enough, but his eyes flashed dangerously. “The reputation of the Crimson Blades Clan demands that you honor your word. You told this trader you’d pay for the eggs. So fucking *pay*.”

His voice had dropped to a menacing growl that Bobbi could feel in her bones.

“You fucker!” Zerlix suddenly shoved the big Kindred, planting his scaly hands, which seemed to have too many fingers, against the other male’s broad chest and pushing with all his might.

The Kindred—Dragon—took a single step back, which caused his broad back to collide with one of the lizard men who happened to be holding an egg. With a loud curse, he dropped it and the large white egg dropped to the ground and burst open, its brittle shell shattering into several large pieces.

Slimy clear white and a vast purple yoke as big around as a half-flattened beach ball spilled onto the straw-covered floor of the laying hut. The Orniths, who had been mostly silent with fear, began making distressed clucking sounds. The breaking of an egg—even an unfertilized one—was believed to herald terribly bad luck in the near future.

“Now look what you fucking did!” Zerlix’s slitted eyes narrowed as he pointed to the mess on the floor. “I suppose you want me to pay for that one, too, even though *you* broke it!”

“I want you to pay for *all* of them—for the honor of our Clan’s name,” the Kindred returned, frowning.

“Whose gonna know if I don’t? Who cares about the honor of the Crimson Blades on this backwater planet?” Zerlix demanded.

“I do.” The Kindred’s voice had dropped to a growl again. He glared down at the other male, their eyes clashing. “Pay up, Big Brother—*now*.”

For a long moment, the two of them stared at each other, bronze eyes warring with the slitted, yellow-green ones. At last, however, Zerlix looked away.

“Fine—I’ll fucking pay. But only to keep you from telling my Sire,” he snarled. “Gebitz—how many do we have?” he shouted through the doorway to the lizards outside.

“Uh...eleven, boss,” came the reply. “Would have had twelve if we hadn’t broken that one.”

“That one’s on Dragon,” Zerlix snapped. “But I wanted twelve so each member of my Sire’s council can have one at the feast. We need one more.”

“There *are* no more,” the lizard man by the pit told him. “Sorry, boss—it’s empty.”

“Fuck!” Zerlix stormed. “I said I’d pay for an even dozen and that’s what I fucking want!”

“You got your dozen—you just broke one,” Dragon pointed out. “So pay up and let’s get out of here. You’re right about one thing—it’s too fucking

hot.” He opened the leather vest he wore and tugged at the black, short-sleeved shirt under it, which showed his muscular arms.

“No!” Zerlix stormed petulantly. “I said I want a fucking *dozen!*” His slitted yellow-green eyes flitted around the laying hut and came to stop on Therena’s newly laid egg. “That one!” he exclaimed, crossing over to the laying nest and pointing to it. “Look—it’s even a different color! Bet it’s special—I can give it to my Sire to do him honor.”

The Orniths all around Bobbi began clucking noisily and Therena began bobbing her head in obvious agitation.

“My egg,” she whispered in a low, frantic voice. “Oh, Bobbi—my egg!”

“It’s all right,” Bobbi tried to reassure her, gripping her friend’s hand harder. “I’m sure Jemeena won’t let them take it!”

Indeed, the elder Ornith had moved to position herself between the laying nest and the lizard man named Zerlix.

“You may not take this one—not at any price,” she said sternly, looking up at him. “This one is precious—it is not for sale.”

“Fuck you and your ‘not for sale,’ you old bitch,” Zerlix said rudely. “I want that one for my Sire and I’m fucking well going to take it!”

He reached for the egg and when Jemeena tried to stop him, he shoved the elder Ornith roughly and walked around her as she lay clucking weakly on the straw-strewn floor.

“My egg! He’s going to take it! My special egg!” Therena ducked her head and began plucking the soft, green downy feathers that covered her chest out with her beak. This form of self-harm was a sign of extreme agitation and grief in the Orniths—Bobbi had only seen once before at a funeral when they were burying one of their elders that had been beloved by

the whole tribe.

At the sight of her dear friend's grief, Bobbi's temper rose like hot lava flowing to the surface. Nothing made her angrier than seeing someone get bullied and she'd had just about enough of these bastards!

Dropping Theren's hand, she started shoving her way to the front of the pack of Orniths, who let her through with surprised clucking and cooing sounds and a great swiveling of necks to see what was going on.

"Hey, asshole!" Bobbi shouted at the lizard called Zerlix. "Yes, you!" she snapped, when his eyes widened in surprise at her sudden appearance. It occurred to her that up until now she'd been hidden from the invaders' eyes but now she was out in the open.

Not that she gave a damn.

"That's a fertilized egg you're looking at," she said, pointing to the dark purple egg that Zerlix was still reaching for. "That means you're talking about taking one of their *babies* home with you to eat for supper! Do you understand now why it's not for sale? How would you like it if someone came to your planet and asked to buy one of your kids to make into canapés?"

For a moment, she thought that maybe her words had gotten through to the asshole lizard man. But then a cruel smile curved the corners of Zerlix's lipless mouth.

"Fertilized, you say? So there's extra meat in there? Truly, that will be a fine treat to lay before my Sire!"

He scooped the newly laid egg up in his hands and held it up over his head like a prize. But just as quickly, his expression changed from triumph to pain.

“Ow! Fucking hot!” he gasped and dropped the egg, which plummeted towards the ground.

The Orniths shrieked in a chorus of horror but before the egg could hit the floor, the big Kindred—moving with lightning speed—scooped it out of mid-air and deposited it safely back into the laying nest it had come from.

Zerlix was blowing on his scaly palms, which had turned from dirty yellow to dull red, presumably from the contact with the red-hot egg. He glared at Bobbi as though it was her fault he had burned himself.

“Look what you made me do, you little bitch,” he growled. “What’s a mammalian doing with a bunch of avians anyway?”

“That’s none of your business,” Bobbi snapped. “Why don’t you just pay for the eggs you took and get out of here? You’re *not* wanted in our village.”

“Oh, so it’s *our* village, huh? You must really like these fucking birds,” Zerlix spat. His slitted eyes raked over Bobbi’s bare breasts and the short grass skirt she wore. “You don’t look anything like them, though. Fucking Orniths are ugly as the first sin but you’re a pretty tasty little package, aren’t you?” He was leering at her now, his forked tongue flickering out as though he wanted to taste her.

The thought turned Bobbi’s stomach. She took a step back from him, covering her breasts with her arms, though she kept her head high.

“I’m a Xeno-Cultural Anthropologist, here on a research gathering mission and I’m affiliated with the Kindred of the Mother Ship,” she said, hoping the words might put some fear into the big, scaly bastard. “They come to check on us regularly and they’re *always* armed,” she added.

“They’re not here now, though—are they, girly?” Zerlix smirked at her. “You know, I might just take you in lieu of that twelfth egg. I bet you’re

almost as tasty. I can fuck you and then eat you when I get tired of wearing out your tight little pussy with my spike. Or maybe I'll fuck you and eat you at the same time. I just *love* the taste of mammalian flesh.”

His forked tongue flickered out and he made a snatch at her.

Bobbi jumped away, trying to avoid his stubby, claw-tipped fingers. She stumbled and fell backwards but instead of hitting the floor, she fetched up against something warm and solid that was right behind her. Two big hands—human-looking hands, not a lizard's claws, she saw—came down on her shoulders and held her in place.

“Not another step forward, Zerlix,” the big Kindred behind her rumbled. “You can't have her—I formally Claim this female as my own.”



Zerlix's slitted yellow-green eyes narrowed as he glared up at the big Kindred.

"You can't Claim her!" he protested. "I *already* Claimed her! I was reaching for her—wasn't I?"

"You didn't say the words, though, boss," one of the other lizard men pointed out. "You gotta say the words."

"He's right," chimed in another one. "Besides, Dragon *never* Claims females. You got so many back home you don't know what to do with 'em all."

"Shut up, you fucking idiots!" Zerlix roared. He pointed a black-clawed finger at the big Kindred, who still had Bobbi firmly by the shoulders. "She ought to be *mine*, Dragon—I saw her first!"

"You didn't Claim her though—I did." The Kindred's deep voice was mild but Bobbi could feel his huge hands tightening on her shoulders possessively. "Don't make me fight you for her, Zerlix," he added in a lower tone. "You know I'll win and that will only bring down your status in the Clan."

"You fucker!" Zerlix snarled, his forked tongue lashing. "You'll be sorry

for this—I swear you will. I’ll have that little mammalian bitch one way or another!”

“You can’t touch her,” Dragon said calmly. “She’s mine and she’s coming home with me.”

These last words seemed to break the paralysis that had fallen over Bobbi the moment she’d felt the Kindred’s big hands close on her shoulders.

“Hey!” she exclaimed, attempting to shake off his grip—with absolutely no success. “Hey, I’m not going home with either one of you! I’m not for sale—you can’t just ‘claim’ me and drag me away.”

“Too late—I already did. Come on now—we’re going.” Dragon had her by the arm and he was dragging her out of the laying hut. The Orniths were all clucking in alarm but none of them dared to come after her—not that Bobbi blamed them.

“Hey, let me go! I said I’m *not* going with you!” she exclaimed. Twisting in his grip, she attempted to kick him in the balls.

But Dragon was too fast for her. Moving with the same lightning speed she’d seen when he had caught Therena’s egg, he stepped out of range of her kick and slipped an arm around her waist. Then, before Bobbi could voice another word of protest, he swung her up and draped her over his shoulder. Clamping a heavy arm over her thighs, he began to walk.

Bobbi found herself face down with her long red mane swaying from side to side with every step the big Kindred took. Craning her neck and pushing her hair out of the way, she could see the Orniths pouring out of the laying house to watch her go. Therena was in the front and she was plucking at her own feathers again and wailing in a high, despairing voice.

Her friend’s gesture of hopelessness and grief made Bobbi feel cold

inside. Obviously, the Orniths had written her off as lost. They didn't have any weapons and couldn't stop the big Kindred from taking her. They couldn't do anything but tell the Kindred of the Mother Ship what had happened when they finally came to check on her—which wouldn't be for another solar month at least!

Anything can happen in a month, Bobbi thought, despairing. I can't let him take me—I have to get loose!

Screaming like a wild-woman, she began beating on the broad back and struggling as hard as she could—even though she didn't relish the fall from his shoulder to the hard ground—which would be at least six feet.

Dragon's response was to clamp down harder on her thighs and growl,

“Hold still, little one. You're coming with me whether you like it or not—and you only have yourself to blame for it!”

“What? What are you talking about? How is it *my* fault that you're basically kidnapping me?” Bobbi demanded.

But she got no answer. And before she could ask again, Dragon was walking up a metal ramp and bringing her inside a large black spaceship. The rest of the lizard men—including the still simmering Zerlix—trooped inside after him, some of them carrying the eggs which were nestled inside a padded box.

As Bobbi watched with horror, the spaceship's thick metal door clanged shut and a strange, bluish-purple light clicked on overhead. It reminded her of being in a club when they turned on the black lights so that everything white glowed. It made the yellow scales that were on some of the lizard men seem to glow and flow in strange patterns and her own skin—which was always pretty pale—glowed like a beacon in the strange light.

“Prepare for liftoff,” she heard one of the lizard men shout.

There was the sound of the ship’s engines thundering to life and Dragon sat her on a cold metal seat and strapped a harness across her bare chest and lap.

“Don’t move,” he warned her as he strapped in beside her. The black-light made his teeth look extremely white in his dark face. “G-forces will give you a wicked headache if you do anything but sit still during liftoff in a Saurian ship.”

Bobbi paid him no attention. All she knew was that this was her last chance to get away before the alien ship took off. Fumbling with the harness, she somehow managed to unbuckle it. Scrambling out of her seat, she raced for the door.

All around her, the lizard men were all strapped in to the metal chairs that lined the walls of the ship but none of them tried to stop her. They all held still, leaning back against the metal walls, only following her with their slitted yellow eyes. Even Zerlix didn’t try to get to her, though she could see his clawed hands clenching on his knees, as though he longed to make a grab for her.

She reached the metal door and searched frantically for a release lever. She spotted one but it was far above her head. Not for the first time, Bobbi damned her short stature.

Have to get to it somehow, she told herself frantically. Have to get out of here before they lift off!

She crouched low and jumped up, reaching as high as she could. Her fingertips just brushed the lever but she couldn’t...quite...grab it.

As she was preparing to try again, the ship gave a sudden roar and

lurched into the sky like a drunken albatross. All of a sudden, it felt as though a massive hand was pushing down on the top of Bobbi's skull.

She gasped and crumpled to the floor as the pressure increased. It was like being at one of those rides at the State Fair that used centrifugal force to whirl you around and press you against the wall—only in this case she was being flattened onto the cold, dirty metal floor instead.

The pressure got worse and worse until she was struggling to breathe. The giant hand was pressing down on her entire body now, crushing her, smashing her like a bug. She was going to die! She couldn't get any air into her lungs. They had flattened out like paper bags and were refusing to inflate. She was dying! She—

Suddenly she was floating. Her entire body lifted off the dirty metal floor and she began drifting upwards. Screaming, she reached for something to hold onto but there was nothing.

Bobbi kept flailing as she floated upwards. What was going on here? Where was the artificial gravity? This kind of thing was never an issue when she rode on Kindred ships—a trip in one of them was as smooth as riding in a luxury sedan or sailing across a calm lake. Was she going to whack her head on the ceiling? Was she—

Suddenly a big hand grabbed her by the wrist—a hand attached to an arm covered in colorful, shifting tattoos. It was Dragon, she saw. He had unfastened his own harness and was holding onto it with one hand. With the other, he was reeling her in.

With a yank on the harness, he settled back into the metal seat he'd left. He managed to buckle the lap part of the harness one-handed and then pulled Bobbi down and buckled her in as well.

“Enough of that,” he growled at her. “It’s too late to get away now—we’ve left Avria Pentaura’s orbit and we’re on the way to Saurous.”

“But...but I...You can’t just *take* me like this!” Bobbi exclaimed, shaking her head. It turned out to be a bad move. Her temples were beginning to throb and the sudden head-movement only made the growing headache worse. “Ohhh...” she moaned, clutching her head in her hands. “Oh, my head!”

“Told you not to move,” Dragon remarked. But there was no satisfaction in his deep voice—he just sounded matter-of-fact. “Try to sit still for the rest of the trip,” he told her. “When we touch down, I’ll get you something for the pain. Think we have some in the med kit.”

Clutching her throbbing temples, Bobbi pulled up her legs and rested her forehead on her knees, refusing to look at him. She just couldn’t believe that her life had changed so drastically so suddenly. She ought to be back on Avria Pentaura with Therenia right now, preparing their vegetarian feast to celebrate the laying of the special egg. Instead, she had been kidnapped and was even now being dragged to Saurous—the very place she had promised Commander Sylvan she would never go.

Oh God, how had her life gotten so completely screwed up so quickly?



*I*t was the little female's own fault that he'd been forced to Claim her and take her with him, Dragon thought, watching her from the corner of his eye. She'd brought herself to Zerlix's attention and then insulted him.

Not that his bastard of a Big Brother didn't deserve to be insulted, but Zerlix *never* let an insult slide. He really *would* have taken the little mammalian female home and fucked her and eaten her, just as he had threatened. If Dragon had talked him into leaving her alone, Zerlix might have done it. But then he would have gone back to Avria Pentaura the first chance he got, found the female, and tortured her or raped her or both.

The only way I could keep her safe was to Claim her and bring her where I could keep an eye on her all the time, Dragon thought. *Otherwise, she would have been dead inside a solar week.*

Dead and most likely digesting inside Zerlix's scaly belly. He hadn't been kidding when he said he liked the taste of mammalian flesh. Dragon had several scars from before he'd gotten old enough to fight his Big Brother off, where Zerlix had taken a bite out of him for the hell of it. He really was a bastard.

And now I have a female to care for and protect, Dragon thought, frowning as he looked over at the shivering little mammalian. She had

wrapped herself up in a ball with her face to her knees. He couldn't see her eyes—which were an unusual deep blue, he'd noticed earlier—because her long, silky strands of hair were in the way.

He had never seen hair that color, Dragon thought. But then, he'd almost never seen hair at all. The Saurians were hairless and the few times he'd seen other mammalian traders on Saurous, they were mostly males with short-clipped hair in dark colors like his own. But this female had long, wavy strands of flame-colored hair that seemed to go everywhere.

Why didn't she control it, he wondered? He kept his own hair slicked back with the same shellac that his Saurian family used to oil their scales—it kept the stuff out of his face when he was fighting. He bound the bottom of it into a kind of club at the back of his neck and cut it off with a knife occasionally, when it got too long. In fact, it was almost time to cut it now, he thought. It was down to his shoulders when he unfastened it.

But the little mammalian female's hair was even longer than his. Long and thick and wavy and shiny and silky...Dragon had the urge to reach out and touch it—to see if it was as soft as it looked. But he restrained himself. Clearly, the female didn't want his hands on her—for which he could hardly blame her. It wasn't like she was a Pleasure Girl who could be Claimed and taken home for the right price with no questions asked. In fact, if what she'd said to Zerlix was correct, it sounded like she was some kind of scientist.

She talked about other Kindred too—from some place called “The Mother Ship,” Dragon thought. *But I thought all the Kindred were gone from the universe.*

That was what his adoptive father, Rep. Vizlar had told him, anyway. According to him, Dragon's birth family—whom Dragon couldn't remember

—had been the last of a dying breed. When the rival Clan shot them, they had killed off the last of the Kindred. Well, except for Dragon himself.

But this little female talked as though there were a lot of them somewhere. But where? They must be far away—but then, how did they get to Avria Pentaura? Do they have ships that can travel not only within their own solar system, but across the universe to visit other systems too?

He couldn't imagine a ship like that. His own ship, which he had modified to go long distances on a small amount of fuel, still would have taken ages to reach the solar system nearest to their own. Such technology would be fascinating to study.

Dragon had always had an affinity for ships and their engines. He liked tinkering around in his spare time, building new things and modifying others. He had often reflected that if his birth family had lived and he had not been adopted by the Komendant of the Crimson Blades Clan, he probably would have made some kind of career for himself dealing with engines or flying ships.

But that future was closed to him now, he admitted to himself. He was an enforcer for his Clan—though he would probably never rise higher, because of Zerlix's hatred of him. But still, he had sworn his oath of loyalty at the age of thirteen cycles, when a boy becomes a man, and had never looked back. The black live-tat on his neck marked him forever as an adopted Little Brother of the Crimson Blades and it was permanent. Everywhere he went, he would be known for what he was—there was no getting away from it. There was—

A low, agonized moan from the female beside him drew him back to the present. He looked at her in concern and saw that she was still clutching her

head, but now she was shivering as well.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, leaning down to look at her. “Is your headache getting worse?”

“Yes, b-but it’s n-not just th-that. So c-c-cold,” she whispered, through chattering teeth.

“Cold? Really?” Dragon couldn’t keep the surprise out of his voice. True, it wasn’t as wretchedly hot and humid in the Clan’s transport ship as it had been on Avria Pentaura, but it was still pretty stuffy. After the humid heat of the other planet, he was looking forward to getting back to the cold, dry climate of Saurous. But the little female acted like they were already there. And she really *must* be cold—at least, from the way she was shivering.

“Y-yes, *r-really*,” she flashed at him and he saw a glimmer of that hot temper of hers that had put her on Zerlix’s radar. “It’s freaking fr-freezing in here! Wh-why does it have to b-be so c-c-cold? Do you have a blanket I c-could use?”

Dragon looked around but the transport ship didn’t have much in the way of creature comforts. It was a utility vehicle, used to go from one planet in the solar system to another—nothing more. But he had to do *something* for the little female, he realized, or she might shake herself to pieces.

Since there was nothing else to give her, he stripped off his leather vest and then his shirt, which was made of thin, strong *yaseem* silk. He had purposefully worn it because it was his thinnest outerwear and he didn’t want to get overheated when they went to Avria Pentaura, which was always horribly hot. Now he wondered if it would be enough to keep the little female warm.

She’d be warmer if she wasn’t so exposed, he thought, as he handed the

shirt to her and said, “Here—put this on.”

She voiced no thanks—only snatched the shirt from him and began pulling it on.

“I’m called ‘Dragon,’” he said. “What’s your name?”

“None of your Goddamned business!” she snapped, her voice somewhat muffled by the fabric she had pulled over her head.

“Fine.” Dragon shrugged. If she didn’t want to tell him her name, she didn’t have to.

He couldn’t help noticing her large, luscious breasts as she struggled into the black shirt, which fell to her knees. She was so tiny she was practically swimming in it but that was all right—hopefully the extra fabric would keep her warm.

She had nipples like his own, Dragon thought. Well, not *exactly* like his, which were little more than flat copper disks on his chest with tiny nubs in their centers. Hers had wide pink bands as big around as a *crentha* coin and her nubs were much longer and bigger than his. He wondered if they were more sensitive, too and what they would feel like if he touched them.

He frowned to himself as he noticed the trend his thoughts were taking. First he’d had the urge to stroke her long, red hair and now he was wondering what it would be like to palm her heavy breasts and stroke her ripe, pink nipples. What was wrong with him? He had never had such thoughts about the Saurian females that he’d been raised around.

Of course, Saurian females didn’t have much in the way of breasts, which were a minor secondary sexual characteristic for their species. Most chose to emphasize their narrow yellow eyes or to decorate their vaginal slits to draw male attention.

But he didn't think the little mammalian female had been intending to draw male attention—at least not with her outfit. It was the same thing he'd seen the Orniths wearing—it just looked more provocative on her for some reason. Maybe because her breasts were so much fuller and softer-looking and weren't covered by feathers or scales. He could see all of her soft, pale skin that looked silky-smooth and almost as touchable as her long, red hair...

But the little female was still shivering, he saw with some alarm. Could she really be that delicate? If she couldn't stand the inside of the transport ship, how would she manage once they got to Saurous?

That's your problem now—not hers, whispered a little voice in his head. *You Claimed her—now you have to take care of her. And the first thing to do is to warm her up.*

There was only one other thing he could think of to do, since his shirt hadn't warmed her sufficiently. Unbuckling her harness, he scooped her into his arms and cradled her close to his bare chest, holding her close to make sure she didn't float away in the zero G.

“H-hey,” she whispered hoarsely, squirming against him. “Wh-what do you th-think you're d-doing?”

“Warming you up—I hope,” Dragon told her.

He was fairly sure he could manage it—he put out heat like a furnace himself. It was one reason he was never cold on Saurous, which was known for its frigid desert climate. Some of the Saurian Pleasure Girls he'd tried, out of curiosity before he'd decided he wasn't much interested in sex, had even protested that he “burned them” with his body heat. So if the little female in his lap would just hold still, he might be able to transfer some of his warmth to her much smaller frame.

“P-put me down and d-don’t t-touch me,” she told him, holding herself rigid in his arms. “I don’t w-want you anywhere n-near me!”

“Fine.” Dragon opened his arms, releasing his hold in her. Immediately, she began to float upwards in the Zero G.

“Oh my G-god! Wait! Stop!” she gasped and flailed, reaching for him by instinct. Her small hands found his broad shoulders and then Dragon reached up and plucked her out of the air before folding her against him once more.

“Better now?” he asked, looking down at her as he held her against his bare chest.

She glared up at him.

“No, this is *n-not* b-b-better,” she replied, her teeth still chattering. “I t-told you, I d-don’t want you touching me!”

“So you’d rather freeze to death?” Dragon demanded. “Sorry, little *feela*, but I can’t let that happen.”

“*Feela*? What the hell is th-that supposed to m-mean?” she snapped, remaining rigid in his arms.

“You won’t tell me your name and I have to call you something. ‘*Feela*’ means ‘flame’ in the ancient Saurian tongue,” Dragon explained.

He’d had to learn it as part of his training when he was officially adopted—though almost none of the younger generation of Saurians knew it now. But Komendant Vizlar had thought it was important knowledge, since he was mammalian—a way to immerse himself in his new culture.

“Wh-why would you c-call me ‘f-flame?’” she demanded.

“Your hair,” he said, taking a long lock of it between his fingers. Just as he’d thought, it was soft and incredibly silky. It also smelled faintly of

flowers. And her skin smelled warm and sweet instead of sour and dry and reptilian, which was how the Saurian females always smelled. “It’s the color of flame,” he said, indicating her hair. “So—*feela*.”

“I s-said, d-don’t touch me!”

She yanked her head to one side, trying to get her hair free of his grip and then groaned and clutched her temples.

“Don’t move your head too much,” he told her. “Hold still. When we land the G forces are going to be as bad as when we took off—you don’t want to make your headache worse.”

“We have to go through all that *again*?” she demanded. “What’s wrong with your ship? Did you lose your artificial gravity or something?”

“Artificial gravity?” Dragon looked at her with interest. “Your people have ships that can make artificial gravity?” He noted that her teeth weren’t chattering anymore. Good—it seemed that his body heat was warming her.

“We don’t but the Kindred do. They—”

“Wait—who is ‘we?’ If you’re not a Kindred female, what are you?” he asked, frowning down at her.

“I’m from Earth—it’s a planet on the other side of the Blind,” she explained, still rubbing her temples.

“The Blind?” Dragon frowned.

“It’s a huge cosmic dust cloud that limits visibility. It kind of divides the universe in two—well, our part of the universe anyway,” she explained.

“Oh, do you mean Night’s Curtain?” Dragon asked. “That’s what my people—the Saurians—call it. Are there really other Kindred on the other side of it?”

She frowned.

“Didn’t you know that? Aren’t you Kindred yourself? I mean, you *look* like a Kindred—at least from your size. Although I’ve never seen a Kindred with eyes your color. And I’ve never heard of a Kindred *kidnapping* women out of the blue either,” she added, glaring at him.

“I am Kindred,” he said, ignoring her words about kidnapping. “Actually, a mixture of two kinds of Kindred. My mother was a Vision Kindred.”

“So you’re what they call a ‘hybrid?’” She seemed to have forgotten to be afraid of him, though she was still holding herself stiff in his arms. “I’ve never heard of the Vision Kindred. What kind of Kindred was your father?”

“Don’t know.” Dragon shrugged. “I don’t remember my birth parents at all—I only know what my adoptive father told me.”

“So these people adopted you?” She looked with wide eyes at the group of Saurians sitting against the walls. They were all part of Zerlix’s crew—most of them enforcers like Dragon himself. One or two stared back with lazy interest, but most had their eyes closed, catching a quick nap.

Dragon nodded.

“They did. I’m part of the Crimson Scales Clan. Have been since I was five cycles old.”

“Well, that’s nice for you, but you need to bring me back to Avria Pentaura,” she said. “You can’t just *take* me, you know. The Kindred—*my* Kindred—are going to come looking for me and then you’re going to be in *big trouble*.”

“Bring it on,” Dragon said, shrugging. “I’d be happy to meet more of my own kind—especially since I thought they were all dead.”

“They’ll hurt you or kill you if you so much as lay a finger on me,” she warned him, her blue eyes flashing. “Kindred—*real* Kindred—worship a Goddess and revere all things female. They don’t believe in kidnapping or... or raping women!”

“Who said I was going to rape you?” Dragon raised an eyebrow at her. “I don’t force myself on females who don’t want me.”

“Then why did you take me in the first place?” she demanded. “Are you thinking I’ll be your maid, or something? Because I have news for you, Mr. Dragon—I didn’t work for years to earn my PhD just so I could pick up your dirty underwear!”

Dragon had no idea what she was talking about and was opening his mouth to say so when Zerlix unbuckled himself from his harness and, using the handholds on the center ceiling support, swung himself over to hover over the two of them.

“Well, aren’t you two looking *cozy*,” he remarked, his slitted yellow-green eyes narrowing as he stared down at them.

Unconsciously, Dragon tightened his grip on the small female, pulling her possessively close to his chest. He didn’t realize he was doing it until she squeaked and struggled weakly in his arms. Only then did he loosen his grip—but just a little.

“What do you want, Zerlix?” he asked, frowning. “Hadn’t you better get back to your seat? We’ll be landing soon.”

“You know what I want,” his Big Brother snarled, his forked tongue lashing. “I want what’s rightfully mine—the female I Claimed before you took her!”

Dragon felt something stirring within him—something huge and angry

that was extremely protective of the female in his arms. It was almost like a set of invisible wings unfolding—as though some enormous creature was getting ready for battle.

“You never Claimed her—I did. And I have witnesses to prove it,” he growled. “I’m not giving her up or letting her out of my sight, so you might as well forget it, Brother.”

Zerlix’s eyes flashed, the nictitating second eyelid every Saurian had covering his slitted yellow-green eyeballs and making him look blind for a second.

“You’ll be sorry you took what is rightfully mine,” he snapped, his tongue lashing. “And you’d better keep an eye on her, Little Brother. Remember *Nibbles*.”

Then he turned and glided back to his seat, using the handholds as before, until he could buckle himself back in.

“What the hell is that guy’s problem?” the little female demanded. “And who or what is ‘Nibbles’?”

“You don’t need to know,” Dragon said darkly. He knew that no one else on the transport would understand his adoptive brother’s threat, but to him, it was perfectly clear. He *was* really going to have to be on his toes to protect the little female in his arms. The huge thing inside him—the thing he didn’t understand and had never felt before—turned restlessly inside him. A possessive growl rose in his throat and he swallowed it down with some difficulty.

“But—” she began.

“To answer your question, *that’s* the reason I took you,” he said, nodding at Zerlix, who had strapped himself in and was glaring at them from across

the ship. “And it’s your own damned fault for bringing yourself to his attention. If you had just kept hidden in the back of the hut, he never would have seen you and you’d still be safe on Avria Pentaura.”

“I *couldn’t* stay hidden!” she exclaimed. “That was my *friend’s* egg he was trying to take! Her first egg from her very first mating and the fact that it was dark purple makes it sacred to the Orniths! I couldn’t just stand by and let him take it!”

“I wouldn’t have let him take the damn egg,” Dragon growled, losing patience. “But the minute you stepped up and shouted at him, I had no choice but to take *you*.”

“You did *too* have a choice,” she snapped. “You could have left me there, on Avria Pentaura! I’m sure he would have forgotten about me once the bunch of you got back to Saurous!”

“You don’t know Zerlix,” Dragon said shortly. “He *never* forgets. He would have come back for you and you wouldn’t have liked the result.”

“So you kidnapped me in order to *protect* me?” She didn’t bother to try and hide the sarcasm and doubt in her voice. “I’m sorry, but you’re going to have to do better than that.”

Dragon wasn’t sure how to respond to that—how to convince her that he’d taken her for her own good. But at that moment, the pilot announced over the com-link,

“Getting ready to enter Saurous atmosphere. If anyone’s floating, better strap in quick.”

Reluctantly, Dragon decided it would be better to put the little female back in her own seat.

“Hey, what are you doing?” she demanded, as he shifted her from his lap

back to the metal chair beside him and started strapping her in.

“Putting you back before we touch down.” Dragon raised an eyebrow at her. “Besides, I thought you didn’t want me touching you?”

“I *don’t*.” She crossed her arms over her breasts protectively. “But, well...you *are* really warm. And it’s so damn cold in this ship!”

“Just wait until you feel the weather on Saurous,” Dragon told her.

Her eyes widened. “It’s colder than *this*?”

“Considerably.” Dragon leaned back against the wall and closed his eyes, trying to ignore the way Zerlix was still glaring at him from his seat across the ship. “Just try to hold still this time, all right? Unless you want to be mashed like a bug by the G-forces.”

She didn’t reply but she didn’t unbuckle herself and try to run again, either, which he considered to be progress. He really was somewhat concerned about how she would handle the climate of Saurous, though. He would have to take her back home to his Clan’s family compound as soon as possible, he decided.

Too bad he didn’t have his vehicle parked at the spaceport—they had gotten there in Zerlix’s flashy red racer and there was no way he was asking his Big Brother for a lift. He didn’t want the Saurian male anywhere near *his* female.

The possessive thought made him frown. Really, the little *feela* wasn’t his at all—he had only taken her to protect her. But he couldn’t stop the low growl that rose in his throat when he thought of Zerlix getting anywhere near her.

Well, for all intents and purposes, she *was* his, Dragon decided. He had Claimed her, after all, so now he was responsible for her safety and well-

being. He must clothe her and feed her and keep her safe—that was the Saurian way when a male Claimed a female. Eventually, when Zerlix lost interest, he would release her. But in the meantime, he had to keep her close.

He just hoped he could get her home without her freezing to death.



Bobbi huddled in the icy metal seat, wondering miserably if the landing in the Saurian ship would be as bad as the take-off had been. And was Saurous really as cold as the big Kindred called “Dragon” had indicated?

But she had more than the touch-down of the ship and the temperature of the planet they were headed for to worry about. What was going to happen to her once they got to Saurous? Why had the big Kindred *really* taken her?

She didn’t buy his excuse that he was protecting her for one minute. But then, what did he actually intend to do with her? All the Kindred warriors she knew—the ones who lived on the Mother Ship—were respectful and protective of women. But did they have a genetic disposition to such behavior or was it just the culture they were raised in?

According to Dragon, he had been raised by the Saurians, who clearly didn’t give a crap about women—at least, if the awful Zerlix was any indication. So would he ultimately act like a Kindred or a Saurian? Which part of him would decide her fate—his DNA or his cultural conditioning?

I guess I’m about to take part in one of the most intense Nature vs. Nurture experiments ever, Bobbi thought unhappily. It would have been fascinating if she was just observing the situation. But since she was actually *living* it, she wasn’t nearly so amused.

If only there was some way to contact the Kindred of the Mother Ship! Unfortunately, there wasn't and they weren't supposed to come check on her for another month.

A lot can happen in a month, Bobbi thought grimly. I might be dead by the time the Orniths tell them what happened and they come looking for me.

Because she had no doubt that Commander Sylvan would send a rescue team for her once he found out her fate—he was an honorable male and he took the safety of the people under him seriously.

The question was, would anyone he sent be on time to save her?

She just didn't know. She wrapped her arms around herself and shivered. God, it was so *cold* in this damn ship! After living in a semi-tropical climate and wearing next to nothing for the last six months, she was ill prepared for the chilly Saurian transport.

She cast a glance at Dragon who was sitting to her left. She hadn't liked him holding her—the way he could pick her up so easily, like she was a doll, made her feel weak and helpless. But there was no denying that the big Kindred really *was* warm. He smelled good too—especially compared to the Saurians all around her. His dark tan skin had a warm, spicy, masculine scent very different from the dry, sour stench of the Saurians. Their smell reminded Bobbi of the reptile house at the zoo—not at all pleasant.

Just then, the horrible feeling of a giant hand pressing down on her started again. This time Bobbi didn't try to fight it. Hoping it would help, she leaned her head back against the icy metal wall and closed her eyes, just like the Saurians—and Dragon—were doing.

Hope I don't puke or faint, she thought dizzily as the pressure grew and grew. Dear God, I don't think I can take much more of this! It feels like

someone huge is trying to smash me like a fly!

Again, she had difficulty breathing. It just seemed like such an *effort* to make her lungs expand so she could take a deep breath. Bobbi struggled, trying to inhale and get enough oxygen but though she tried with all her might, she began to lose consciousness. Huge black flowers with crimson centers bloomed in the middle of her vision and everything around her seemed to be going gray.

Can't breathe! she thought weakly. She was so dizzy now that if the giant hand hadn't been pressing her against the wall, she thought she would have slumped right out of her chair. *Can't breathe...I can't—*

And then everything went dark as blackness ate the world.



The minute the ship touched down, Dragon opened his eyes and looked over at the little mammalian female. To his dismay, she was slumped in her seat, clearly unconscious. Only the harness buckled around her was keeping her from sliding to the floor.

“*Feela? Hey, feela?*” Damn it, he didn’t even know her real name, he realized as he patted her cheeks. “Wake up, okay?” he muttered. “Come on—please be all right!”

To his intense relief, her vivid blue eyes fluttered open and she looked up at him blearily.

“Who’re you?” she slurred and began to shiver. “And why’s it so cold in here?”

“It’s me, Dragon,” Dragon said. “Look, you passed out during the re-entry and landing. Are you all right?”

“Think so.” She put a hand to her head. “Hurts, though. Like a migraine.” She shivered again. “And so *cold*.”

That was probably because one of the crew had already popped the door open and a gust of chilly, dry air was circulating through the cabin. It felt refreshing to Dragon, but the little female was shivering even harder.

“Come on—let’s get you home,” he murmured and began unbuckling her harness.

She let him, not trying to interfere or help in any way. In fact, she still seemed only halfway conscious to Dragon, which worried him. Had some kind of permanent harm been done to her? Would she be okay? How could he help her?

Well, right now what he needed to do was get her home, he decided. He could worry about everything else once she was safely locked in his private rooms.

“Looks like the little female you stole from me isn’t doing too well.”

It was Zerlix again, smirking as he leaned over the limp form of the little *feela*.

“Get away from her,” Dragon growled, glaring at the other male. “The last thing I need is interference from you. I just need to get her back to the compound.”

“Well, good luck with that,” Zerlix snapped. Raising his voice, he called, “Anyone who gives Dragon and the female he stole from me a ride back to the family compound can forget about his cut of the loot for a solar month!”

There was silence and some uneasy glances thrown in Dragon’s direction, but nobody spoke up to object. His heart fisted in his chest as he realized that any chance he had of getting a ride home with one of the crew had just been blown to smoke. The crew of Saurians feared him—his reputation with a blade alone was enough to strike fear in their scaly hearts. But Zerlix was the leader of the crew and a vindictive son of a bitch. If he said he would withhold the crew’s pay, he would do it.

Of course, Dragon could threaten one of the crew and *make* them give

him a ride—he had no doubt he could make any one of them comply. But then that male would be stuck between a boulder and a cave wall, as the Saurian saying went. Should he risk losing his pay to please his boss, or risk bodily harm from the most feared enforcer in the Clan?

It wasn't fair to put anyone in that position, Dragon thought. He would just have to carry the little *feela* home on his own. Carefully, he lifted her into his arms and cradled her against his chest.

She had drawn her arms and legs up inside the thin silk of his shirt, which she was still wearing, but her cheeks and the tip of her tiny, cute nose had already turned bright red with cold. The family compound was only a few blocks away, but would she make it?

Dragon didn't know. As he watched Zerlix saunter out of the spaceship, throwing a satisfied smirk over one scaly shoulder, he suddenly thought that he had never hated anyone more.



Somebody was carrying her through the city in winter—a winter she was *not* dressed for. Bobbi shivered and cuddled closer to the single heat source—a hard, warm wall that was pressing against the left side of her body. But as warm as the wall was, it couldn't dispel the chill from the icy wind that was cutting through the thin, inadequate clothing she was wearing. Her shivering grew worse and she was aware that her toes and fingers felt numb. To add to her misery, her head ached fiercely.

“Cold,” she moaned. “So...*cold*...”

“Hang on, *feela*,” a deep, rumbling voice said in her ear. The words seemed to vibrate her entire body. “Hang on—we're almost home.”

Home? What home? Where am I? she wondered woozily.

There were no answers forthcoming and she was beginning to feel sleepy despite the intense cold—or maybe because of it. Hadn't she read somewhere that you should never go to sleep in the snow because you might not wake up once hypothermia set in?

It seemed like a true thought, but even the imminent danger she was in couldn't break the spell the cold had on her. She was drifting...drifting...drifting away.

“Hang on,” the deep voice said again but this time it sounded like a voice in a dream—or like someone calling to her from very far away.

Bobbi tried to answer but couldn’t—her mouth felt too heavy to move just as her eyelids were too heavy to open. Later, she would answer the voice later...

She drifted away.



“Mother Tizlah, please—I need your help!” Dragon came rushing into the main domicile, shared by his adoptive parents and their children, and straight into the kitchen where he was certain his mother, Res. Tizlah, would be.

“What is it, son? What’s wrong?”

Frowning, his adoptive mother put down the stirring stick she’d been using on the huge, bubbling pot of *burz* meat stew and came over to him, wiping her hands on her apron.

“It’s this mammalian female—Mother Tizlah, I need your help!” Dragon held out the still, limp form of the little female anxiously. “She barely seems to be breathing and she’s unresponsive when I try to wake her,” he explained.

“Alright, let me see her.”

Rather than ask him any questions about the strange mammalian female he’d brought into her home, Res. Tizlah was all business, just as Dragon had known she would be. He held out the little female, who felt so light in his arms, despite her luscious curves, for his adoptive mother’s inspection.

Res. Tizlah put a hand to the little female’s forehead and then pulled up her eyelids—which had long lashes, several shades darker than her hair—to

peer into her blue eyes.

“She’s too cold for one of her kind,” she said, laying one scaly hand against the female’s cheek. “It would be fine for a Saurian but mammals need to be much warmer than this.” She looked up at Dragon. “It was never a problem for you—your kind of mammalian seems to be able to regulate your body temperature. But most of them will freeze if they’re out in cold weather too long.”

“She was shivering and complaining about being cold on the transport but I didn’t know she’d react this way once we got back to Saurus.” Dragon looked down at her with concern. “What should I do?”

“You need to warm her up,” Res. Tizlah said briskly. “Fill the soaking tub in your room with warm water—just warm, not hot, mind you. Mammalian skin is delicate—no scales to protect them—so you can burn it easily. Then submerge her but keep her head above the water because they’re not good at holding their breath, either.”

“And that should revive her?” Dragon asked anxiously. “She also seemed to have a bad reaction to the landing. She was unconscious after we touched down and she said the take-off gave her a headache.”

Res. Tizlah frowned.

“Just get her into the warm bath and I’ll make a hot brilla-honey posset for her to drink—that should warm her up from the inside and take care of any aches and pains.” She shook her head. “Mammals are so *delicate*. Have you Claimed her, son?”

Dragon straightened and drew the little female close to his chest.

“I have, Mother,” he said formally. “She is mine.”

Res. Tizlah sighed, her forked tongue hissing through her long, sharp

teeth in disapproval.

“Well, I always hoped you’d find a female to Claim as your own, I just hope you can keep this one alive. Other than your own kind, the Kindred, I’ve not known any mammals that can stand the climate of Saurous for long.”

At the idea of the little female dying, a knot of guilt and anxiety formed in Dragon’s gut like a large, indigestible chunk of *hartha* meat. He had Claimed her—he was responsible for her. He *had* to heal her and keep her well!

“But what—” he stared to say.

“Go on and get her into that warm bath,” his adoptive mother said, making a shooining gesture at him. “I’ll bring the posset as soon as I make it.”

“Yes, Mother Tizlah.”

Drawing the little female close to his chest, he turned and left the large kitchen, heading down the hallway to his own suite of rooms. He had to heal this little female—the idea of being the cause of her death was horrible, unthinkable.

But even as he took her into his rooms and started the bath in the soaking tub, that lump of guilt and fear in his gut refused to fade.



She was floating in a warm lake and someone was holding her head above the surface of the water. It reminded Bobbi of when she was little and her father had taught her how to swim.

“Just float to start with, Bobbi-girl,” he’d said, supporting her gently as she lay on her back in the water. *“Just let the water hold you up like a big hand. It wants to support you—you just have to let it.”*

“Daddy?” she murmured, her eyes still closed. “Daddy, is that you?”

“It’s Dragon,” said a deep voice. “Are you all right, little one?”

Bobbi frowned, her eyes still closed.

“Dragon? The kind that flies and breathes fire?” she murmured. Another past memory surfaced—watching *The Hobbit* and seeing *Smaug* the dragon sitting on a huge pile of golden treasure.

“The kind that’s worried about you,” rumbled the voice. “How are you feeling? Are you warmer? Do you think you could drink something?”

This was too many questions and they didn’t seem to have anything to do with the memories she’d been having. Confused, Bobbi opened her eyes.

She saw a man looking down at her—a huge man with black hair slicked back from a high forehead and bronze eyes fringed thickly with black lashes.

He was the one supporting her head and he looked familiar somehow.

“Who are you?” Bobbi asked dreamily. “Do I know you?”

“I’m Dragon,” he said, frowning. “I took you from Avria Pentaura. Have you forgotten?”

Avria Pentaura? That name was familiar, Bobbi thought. She seemed to remember large bird-like people laying eggs...

And then lizard men came and took the eggs and one of them took me too...

Suddenly, everything came rushing back and Bobbi woke all the way up. The man holding her head was the big Kindred called “Dragon,” she remembered. He had stolen her away from her research project on Avria Pentaura and taken her to Saurous and now he had apparently decided to strip her and put her into a kind of pool or tub.

Looking down, she saw her bare breasts bobbing just above the warm water, her tight pink nipples poking above the surface like two little telescopes looking up from a submarine. Or was the word periscopes? Either way, the fact was that the big pervert had stripped her while she was unconscious and put her naked into a huge tub!

She sat up in a rush, intending to cover herself, only to feel a bolt of pain go through her head.

“Ow! Ow, ow, ow!” she moaned, clasping the sides of her head in her hands and pressing her forehead to her knees. “Oh, God—that *hurts!*”

“Is it your head again? Are you all right?” He sounded honestly anxious about her but Bobbi wasn’t about to let him off easily.

“I’d be *fine* if you hadn’t kidnapped me and dragged me to this freezing

hell hole!” she snapped. She was already shivering, now that the top half of her was out of the warm water. “God, my *head*,” she rubbed her temples fiercely. It felt like someone was driving railroad spikes into her eyes.

“My mother is making a posset for your pain,” Dragon told her, still sounding worried.

“Your *mother*?” She spared him a glance and then closed her eyes and winced as the light from overhead caused fresh spikes of pain. “You brought me home to meet your mom? *Seriously*?”

He frowned.

“Where else should I have brought you besides my family’s compound? And my mother is a healer—she knows a lot about mammalian physiology. She’s also the one who recommended I put you into the soaking tub,” he added.

“So stripping me naked was your mom’s idea, huh?” Bobbi demanded. “God, what a weird planet!” She wondered how long she’d been lying there, floating naked in the water while he was watching her—maybe even *touching* her. The idea made her feel violated and angry.

“She said I had to get you warmed up—that most mammals are delicate and they don’t do well on Saurus because of the cold,” he rumbled. “Are you ready to get out now or would you like to soak some more?”

Part of her wanted to stay where it was warm—but a stronger part wanted to get out and get decently covered. She’d spent the last six months wearing extremely revealing clothing, but she’d never been fully naked and besides, she’d been living in a village of all women.

“I want to get out. Do you have a towel I can dry off with?” she demanded. “And something I can wear to keep me warm?”

“Here.” He held out a large blue sheet for her. “Do you need help to stand up?”

“You’ve helped *quite* enough, thank you very much,” Bobbi snapped. “Just give me the towel and turn around so I can have some privacy, please.”

He gave her a doubtful look but turned his head, pointedly looking away as he continued to hold out the towel.

Bobbi gripped the sides of the tub—which were extremely high—and hauled herself to her feet. God, she felt so *dizzy*. She held onto the tub for a moment, shivering in the chilly air. Then, when she could stand it no longer, she snatched the towel from his hand and tried to wrap it around herself and step out of the deep tub at the same time. But her foot slipped and suddenly, she found herself overbalancing.

“Oh!” She gave a shriek as she slipped over the side of the tub and headed for the black tiles of the floor below.

Turning with inhuman speed and grace, Dragon caught her in midair and held her, dripping, to his broad chest, which was still bare, she noticed distractedly. The colorful tattoos that covered his arms and shoulders didn’t extend to the broad expanse of his muscular chest and it was hard to say if there were any on his back or not—not that she cared at the moment.

“Hey, let me go! Put me down!” Bobbi protested angrily. “Isn’t it bad enough you stripping me and leering at my naked body while I was unconscious without grabbing me, too?”

“I was *trying* to keep you from bashing your brains out on the floor,” he rumbled, frowning at her. “And I wasn’t fucking ‘leering’ at you. I told you—I was trying to warm you up!”

“Well, I’m just fine now, so please put me down.” Bobbi tried in vain to

cover her breasts and sex with her arms as she spoke. She didn't know when she'd felt so vulnerable and her head still ached miserably, which didn't make her inclined to give the big Kindred the benefit of the doubt.

He set her carefully down on her feet and then draped the blue sheet-towel around her shivering shoulders.

Bobbi grabbed the fabric—which seemed to be surprisingly absorbent—and wrapped it around her chest, making sure her breasts and naked body were covered. The sheet fell down to her feet—apparently it was made to dry someone the huge Kindred's size, not hers. But too much was better than too little, as far as Bobbi was concerned.

Looking down, she surveyed herself. There—at least she felt a *little* less vulnerable than she'd felt in the bath—though considerably colder. Her long red hair was wet and dripping down her back in icy rivulets.

“D-do you have anything I c-could use to dry my hair before I f-freeze to death?” she asked, teeth beginning to chatter. “Why d-do you keep it so c-cold in your house?”

He shrugged as he handed her another one of the long blue sheets.

“This is a normal household temperature for Saurians. They're cold-blooded so cold temperatures don't bother them.”

Bobbi hastily wrapped the second absorbent sheet around her dripping hair, turban-style. She used the rest of the long length of fabric to drape around her shoulders, which made her moderately warmer. At least her teeth stopped chattering.

“See, now on *my* planet, being cold-blooded means an animal can't regulate its own body temperature,” she told Dragon. “Which generally means they live in warmer climates—like rain forests and tropical jungles—

in order to stay warm.”

“Your planet called...Earth? Is that right?” he asked, frowning. “What kinds of cold-blooded animals do you have there? Are any of them sentient like the Saurians?”

“No, thank God.” Bobbi made a face at the thought of sentient reptiles. “We have all kinds—snakes, lizards, turtles, alligators. One time we found a great big gator in our swimming pool when we came out to swim,” she added, remembering her fright at the huge shape hovering near the bottom of the clear blue depths of the pool. “Of course, we lived in Florida and you hear all kinds of crazy gator stories from there.”

But Dragon was frowning and shaking his head.

“I don’t know any of those animals,” he rumbled. “I *do* know that Saurians thrive in the cold and can easily get overheated in warmer climates. That was why we had to make our trip to Avria Pentaura short.”

“Well, it was plenty long enough for you to *kidnap* me,” Bobbi pointed out. She put her hands to the side of her head, which was still aching. “Look, did you say your, uh, mom was getting me some kind of medicine? Because my head is *killing* me.”

“Of course. Come with me into the sleeping chamber. I’ll get you settled and then go see if the posset is ready.”

He led her from the large, black-tiled bathroom with the enormous tub and a very-strangely shaped toilet—at least Bobbi *thought* it was a toilet—into another room which was apparently his bedroom. There was no bed in evidence, however. Instead, there was a deep, rectangular hole in the floor.

Bobbi didn’t even see it—the floor tile was black and the hole was dark. Plus, her feet got tangled in the damn towel-sheet. She stumbled and nearly

fell right into it.

“Be careful!” Dragon wrapped one muscular, tattooed arm around her waist and pulled her back from the edge of the hole. “Don’t fall into the sleeping pit. Are you still dizzy and disoriented or is there a problem with your sense of balance?” he added, frowning down at her. “You appear to be extremely clumsy—I’ve had to catch you several times now.”

“I am *not* clumsy!” Bobbi exclaimed grumpily. “I’m usually *very* graceful. But how was I supposed to know you sleep in a freaking *pit*? I mean, who sleeps in a hole in the ground?”

“Saurians do,” he said, shrugging. “Why—where do you sleep?”

“Not with you, that’s for sure!” Bobbi snapped. “So you can get the idea of me joining you in the ‘sleeping pit’ right out of your mind, Mister!”

He sighed and rolled those strange, bronze eyes of his in apparent irritation.

“Told you, I don’t fucking force myself on females who don’t want me,” he growled.

“You kidnap them and take them home with you, though,” Bobbi said, sarcastically. “Oh but wait, I forgot—but you kidnapped me for my *own good*, right?”

He let out a frustrated growl and shook his head.

Going to the door, he opened it and looked out. Apparently, the coast was clear—though what he was looking for, Bobbi didn’t have any idea.

“Why are you looking out there? Where are you going?” she asked, frowning.

“To get your posset,” he said shortly. “I’ll be back in a minute—stay

here.”

Then he shut the door behind him and Bobbi heard a clicking sound.

He was gone and she was betting the big bastard had locked her in.



Dragon strode down the long hallway, irritation making his steps quick as his boots clicked on the tiled floor. Why did the little female keep accusing him of wanting to force her sexually? That wasn't his way!

It's the Saurian way, though, a little voice in his head pointed out.

Well, that was true enough. In Saurian society, it was usually only necessary to Claim a female in order to have sex with her—whether the female wanted to or not. It was easier with Pleasure Girls, of course, who were only for fucking. They could be had immediately for the right price, paid to their pimps.

If a male wished to Claim a female of repute who came from a good family, it was a more difficult and lengthy process. He must first bargain with her father or her older brother or uncle—whatever male family member was closest to her and considered the head of her household—and pay the correct bride price. But after they were legally Joined, he had the right to breed her and try to fertilize her eggs with his seed whether she wanted him to or not.

In Saurian society, once a male Claimed a female as his own, he could fuck her as often and as hard as he wanted to—she had no option to refuse. Dragon had been raised in that culture and yet somehow it had always felt wrong to him—wrong to his very *bones*.

He remembered the night of his Feast of Maturity—the time, at the age of eighteen cycles—when a male was considered ready to fuck or “spike” a female for the first time. As tradition demanded, his Sire, Rep. Vizlar, had provided him a female to Claim and breed for his own for a single night. She was just a Pleasure Girl but she had been a young one—perhaps a year younger than himself—barely of the legal breeding age.

Dragon could still remember that night—vividly. The Pleasure Girl his Sire had hired from a pimp in the blue light district had been a small female—though not as small as the little *feela* he’d left back in his rooms just now, he thought.

She’d had two rings of pink and blue scales that highlighted her large, yellow eyes. When he had entered the sleeping chamber where they had put her, those eyes had gone wide with fright and she had cowered before him, bowing low to the ground and groveling. He’d been able to smell the sour stench of her fear—it filled the small room, making his nostrils sting with its astringent odor.

“Please, Rep. Dragon!” she had begged, cringing in terror. “Please, I will submit to you, but please—I am only newly a Pleasure Girl! I...I have never had a male’s spike in my vaginal slit before. Please, do not hurt me too much!”

“You’re a virgin?” Dragon had demanded blankly. “Truly?”

The girl nodded, her eyes wide and sad.

“My Sire only sold me yesterday. And I heard your Sire telling the pimp that he wanted a female with an unused slit—one that hadn’t grown rough from having...having too many spikes thrust into it,” she had finished in a soft, frightened voice.

Any desire Dragon might have felt had melted away at the sight of her groveling there, pleading with him not to hurt her. He wasn't much attracted to Saurian females anyway and he certainly didn't wish to harm this little virgin who was begging so pitifully. But if he didn't do this deed—if he didn't Claim and breed a female—he would be ridiculed and laughed at and considered less of a mature male.

Still, he couldn't bring himself to hurt her.

“Get up,” he'd said roughly. “I'm not going to hurt you—not going to spike you tonight.”

“You...you're not?” She had looked up uncertainly.

“No—not if you work with me,” Dragon told her. “I won't spike you, but we've got to make it *sound* like I am. Do you understand?”

Clarity had dawned in her bright yellow eyes and she had nodded eagerly.

“Yes, yes—I understand. I can make them think you're breeding me—I swear I can!”

“Good.” Dragon nodded. “Then let's go.” He began to thump the floor and make the low grunting sounds males sometimes made during breeding. When he nodded at the little Pleasure Girl, she began to howl in the manner of a female being bred or “spiked” as the Saurians called it.

“Oooo! Oooo!” she howled loudly. “Your spike—I can feel it in me! I can feel you fertilizing my eggs!”

They had gone on like that for quite some time—it wouldn't do to have his first breeding sound too short, Dragon had thought. They had put on an effective display and when he finally left the room—after the little Pleasure Girl whispered, “Thank you! I swear never to tell!”—his male relatives had all congratulated him loudly.

The cacophony he and the little Pleasure Girl had made had convinced everyone except Zerlix, in fact. Dragon found that out because, a couple of days later, his Big Brother had come swaggering into their family compound, a satisfied smirk on his flat, scaly face.

“So, Little Brother,” he’d said, throwing an arm around Dragon’s shoulders—which were already broader than his own, despite their two-year age difference. “I went to see that little whore my Sire hired for your first spiking.”

“You what?” Dragon had rounded on him. “What did you do to her?”

“I spiked her, of course—damn near fucked her brains out,” Zerlix bragged. “And you know what, it *seemed* like she’d never been spiked before. I mean, I don’t know—maybe your mammalian shaft isn’t hard enough or sharp enough to pierce a Saurian’s vaginal slit properly—but when I spiked her, she shrieked like she was fucking *dying*—like she’d never felt a shaft inside her before.”

For the first time, Dragon had felt something like Rage stir inside him as anger flowed through him, turning his vision blood-red. He could imagine—all too vividly—Zerlix forcing himself on the little Pleasure Girl, who had begged so pitifully not to be hurt. The thought of that—of the other male forcing an unwilling female—enraged him almost to the point of murder.

“You *bastard*,” he had growled. He punched his Big Brother and kept on punching as the invisible thing inside him gave him strength to beat the older male.

The two of them had rolled in the dust in front of the compound gates, punching and kicking and—in Zerlix’s case—biting like crazy. They hadn’t stopped until Komendant Vizlar had pulled the two of them apart.

“That’s enough, my sons!” he had roared, his forked tongue lashing in displeasure. “Why should the two of you be fighting like this?”

Dragon couldn’t remember when he’d been so angry. The image in his head of the little Pleasure Girl begging and cringing with fear and fright as his Big Brother fucked her—spiked her—was almost more than he could stand. She’d been so innocent—so small and helpless! His instinct was to protect her—why was it Zerlix’s instinct to hurt instead of to help? To rape and pillage and despoil? What was *wrong* with him?

Though he was well aware that from a Saurian point of view, the real question would be, what was wrong with Dragon *himself*. His Sire’s words, when he explained the situation, only reinforced the idea.

“He went to the Pleasure Girl you hired for me!” he had shouted when Rep. Vizlar demanded an explanation. “He...he *took* her!” He would not dishonor his Sire by using the cruder terms for breeding.

“And why should he not?” His Sire had given him a confused look. “Son, females are *meant* to be taken—it is the divine order of things. They submit so that our species can continue. And after all, you only Claimed the girl for a single night. I know you must feel possessive of her since she was your first, but you’re too young to take a wife and you wouldn’t want a Pleasure Girl for a wife, anyway. She went back to the blue light district where she will be taken by many males. It is our way.”

“Well, I don’t like it,” Dragon had said, refusing to concede his Sire’s point. “It doesn’t seem right to me that just any male can go there and...had hurt her like that—especially Zerlix!”

“Well, it *was* rather tactless of you to go and take the female that had only just been given to your Little Brother, Zerlix,” Rep. Vizlar had admonished

his older son.

“Yes, Sire.” Zerlix had put on a look of sincere shame and repentance—a look he had long perfected—which let him get away with almost anything he wanted to do. “Forgive me—I didn’t think.”

“Apologize to your brother,” Rep. Vizlar had commanded. “And next time, *think* before you act.”

“I’m sorry, Little Brother,” Zerlix had said, with apparent sincerity, holding out his hand with its six stubby fingers and one long, triple-jointed thumb. “I will never do such a thing again.”

Dragon had been forced to take his adopted brother’s hand in a friendship clasp, watching as Zerlix’s long thumb wrapped securely around his wrist.

Of course, the moment Rep. Vizlar walked away, the look of sincere apology had faded from Zerlix’s scaly face. He had leaned forward and whispered,

“Tonight I’ll go to her again. And the next night and the next night and the next and there’s nothing you can do to stop me!”

It was at that moment, Dragon thought, that he had truly understood the depth of his adopted brother’s cruelty and depravity. He had known from the moment they were first introduced that Zerlix disliked him, but he had never quite understood how much until that very moment...

He shook his head, trying to push the ugly memory away. He had done that little Pleasure Girl no good by refusing to fuck her on his ceremony night, he thought. All he had done was make her a target for Zerlix—and unfortunately, now the little *feela* was a target, too.

I’ll protect her, though, he swore to himself, feeling that invisible, protective presence rise inside him once more. *I couldn’t protect the Pleasure*

Girl—she was in the blue light district and she belonged to her pimp—there was nothing I could do for her. But the little feela is in my rooms, locked away, where even Zerlix can't get to her. She's safe—I'll keep her safe, I swear it!

And he would never hurt her or take her against her will—even if it was the Saurian way, and even if she *thought* he was going to. It wasn't *his* way, Dragon told himself. The idea of forcing a female was disgusting to him—*wrong*. He wouldn't do it no matter how luscious her naked body had looked, floating in the soaking tub.

She's so beautiful, he thought and remembered, uncomfortably, how his shaft had stirred and hardened when he looked at her. He had never had that reaction to a Saurian female—never longed to touch and caress their naked bodies as he had wished he could touch and caress the little *feela's* curvy form.

It's only that she looks so different from a Saurian female, Dragon thought. Her skin looked so soft and extra naked, somehow, because it wasn't covered in the thin, close-set scales he was so used to seeing. Her breasts were so large and full, her nipples so ripe and pink. Saurian females had inverted nipples that only came out during the very brief time they breast-fed their young. But the little *feela's* nipples seemed to poke out all the time, almost as though they were begging to be sucked and touched.

He had also noticed that she had hair elsewhere—not just on her head. She had a soft little thatch of red curls at the apex of her sex, which was much fuller than a Saurian female's. Instead of a dry slit, she had plump outer lips that looked like they would be incredibly soft and yielding.

Watching her in the soaking tub, Dragon had had the strangest urge not

just to touch her but to kiss her there...to taste her. He had a brief mental image of himself kneeling before her and spreading her legs wide so that he could slip his tongue between those soft, sweet lips and explore her intimately...

Of course, such an idea was madness. A male did not debase himself before a female in that way—it would be seen as a sign of weakness and depravity in Saurian society. But even if a male licking a female's slit had been socially acceptable, no male would want to do it. A Saurian female's vaginal area was dry and rough and not very pleasant even for a male's shaft—let alone his tongue. What male would want to lick that? It would be like lapping a dune in the desert.

But the idea wouldn't leave Dragon's mind. He wondered if the little mammalian female was dry and harsh inside like a Saurian female...or if she was different. Those plump outer lips seemed to indicate that softness and perhaps an interior that was more welcoming to a male's shaft and perhaps even his tongue...

Dragon shook his head, pushing the illicit thoughts away. The little *feela* was beautiful and he had Claimed her, but she had made it clear she didn't want him, so he wouldn't take her.

It was as simple as that.



Walking quickly to the door, over the freezing cold floor tiles, Bobbi found that the son of a bitch really had locked her in!

“That bastard!” she muttered to herself, after yanking uselessly at the door latch for a moment. “If he thinks he can keep me here, he’s got another think coming!”

Then she felt another spike of pain in her temples and groaned. Damn, could things get any worse? She was damp and cold and she had a pounding headache. Plus, she was being held prisoner by a rogue Kindred who lived with the Saurians she’d been warned against. And hadn’t he said something about being a member of a “Clan?”

Remembering Commander Sylvan’s explanation of the way things worked on Saurous, she wondered if that was some kind of a gang or Mafia family. Was her situation like someone who had been kidnapped by the Mob? If so, would the Kindred of the Mother Ship be able to get to her, even if they were able to somehow track her to this part of Saurous?

“Wherever this part it is,” she muttered to herself, clutching her head. “I don’t even know where I am!” She was feeling dizzy again, she realized—everything was swimming around her. “Oh God, I need to sit down!”

There was a long, low couch in one corner of the large room—which was

mostly bare of decorations and lit from above by a soft, golden light that seemed to come from some unseen light source in the corners of the ceiling. Well, at least it wasn't the weird, black-light that had lit the Saurian ship, she reflected. But the room *was* really bare. In fact, it was almost Spartan in appearance with no pictures or paintings of any kind.

There *was* a large white banner with red markings that looked like some kind of words hung on the wall opposite the couch, Bobbi saw. She squinted at it as she sank down onto the couch, trying to make it out. But though the translation bacteria she'd been given aboard the Mother Ship generally allowed her to speak and read just about any alien language, the red lettering refused to translate itself in her brain.

The couch, as it turned out, wasn't very soft at all—in fact, it felt like she was sitting on a piece of wood. Which wasn't surprising since, upon closer inspection, she found that the couch didn't actually have cushions at all.

“I think it's just a wooden bench covered in fabric,” Bobbi muttered, frowning as she prodded the hard surface beneath her bottom with her fingertips. “Who would make a couch like that? Don't they care about being comfortable at all?”

Then again, they—meaning the Saurians, she supposed—also apparently believed in keeping their houses so cold you could see your breath—hers was puffing out in front of her every time she exhaled. So she guessed that comfort wasn't high on the list. Or, more probably, their idea of comfort was different from a mammalian's like herself.

Shivering, she drew the blue towel-sheet closer around her bare shoulders and looked around the room some more. Besides the banner on the wall and the sleeping pit, there was an extremely high table—or was it a desk?—in

one corner and what appeared to be a closet on one wall.

In front of the extra hard couch was a low table with a large, flat, rectangular screen on it, which curved slightly inwards at either end. Bobbi wondered if it was a kind of viewscreen like the Kindred used for communications or some sort of television set. Or maybe it was a computer screen?

She looked around for a remote or a keyboard but the only thing on the low table besides the curved screen was a round metal ball. It was about the size of a softball and it seemed to be covered in tiny silver buttons. Could *that* be the remote?

Curiously, Bobbi leaned forward and picked it up. Like everything else on this planet, it was ice cold, and extremely heavy—so heavy that she nearly dropped it on her bare foot.

“Oops!” she exclaimed, saving the thing from falling on the floor at the last minute. She clutched it tightly to keep from fumbling it again, which pressed some of the many buttons covering its round surface.

Suddenly, the curved screen in front of her flared to life. A lizard man in a high, stiff black collar that emphasized his yellow-tipped scales was projected about two feet in front of the screen. It was a 3-D image like a hologram, Bobbi thought, staring at it in surprise. The lizard man was talking in a serious voice, his long, forked tongue flickering with every word, his slitted nostrils flaring for emphasis.

“...the Nine Daggers Clan has apparently declared war on the Deadly Flowers Clan,” he was saying. “After negotiations failed earlier this solar week, violence seems imminent. Citizens living on the border between the two Clans’ territories are advised to go to ground or, if you have family in a

peaceful Clan's territory, to go stay with them until the conflict is over. The last time the two Clans went to war, many innocent lives were lost in the bloody conflict of 5217."

Bobbi frowned as she watched the hologram of the serious-looking lizard man. He seemed to be some kind of reporter or newscaster and he was talking as though a war between two of the Saurian Clans was normal business.

It was almost like he was predicting a natural disaster like a hurricane, Bobbi thought, and telling people to get ready for it. But why in the world didn't the police step in and stop this kind of activity? *Were* there police here? Or did the Clans all operate independently, like some kind of city-states?

She had no answers, and no real interest in the rest of the Saurian newscast. But maybe there was something more interesting on another channel?

Experimentally, she pressed some of the other buttons. The projected 3-D image of the newscaster lizard man changed to a whole new scene.

The new projection seemed to show some kind of a butcher shop, Bobbi thought. There were lots of different cuts of meat laid out on a long table and there were even larger chunks of various animal flesh hanging from hooks behind them.

"Come on down to Rep. Hisler's Bountiful Buffet of Meat!" a booming male voice announced. "We have every kind of meat you can imagine—avians and mammalians all right on the buffet line, just for you! And the Bountiful Buffet isn't just for mature diners—bring your whole brood! We have fun, furry snacks for your broodlings to munch and crunch!"

The picture changed and Bobbi was horrified to see a smaller buffet filled

with little, furry animals. Some looked a little like rats with scruffy purple and green spotted fur and long, naked tails, but there were also hamster and guinea pig and bunny rabbit type animals. All of them were scampering around in wire cages and there was a stack of plates right beside them.

“Yes, fresh protein for growing broodlings and tasty meat morsels for the adults!” the booming voice continued. “And if you like your meat still moving, we can accommodate you there, too!”

The image changed to a Saurian chef in a bloody white apron-type garment with a long, curving blade in one hand. He had the tip of the knife poised to cut the throat of a large animal that looked like a purple cow with tall, curly green horns that stuck straight up from its skull like weird exclamation points. The cow-thing’s eyes were rolling frantically, as though it knew what was coming.

“If you’d like to have an animal butchered right in front of you, for only a nominal fee—” the booming announcer’s voice began.

But Bobbi didn’t want to see that—not if she could help it! Hastily, she pushed some more buttons and a new scene popped up.

This one was of a Saurian male and female—at least, Bobbi assumed the second actor was female, since she had small bumps like breasts on her chest, though her nipples appeared to be inverted—locked in a tight embrace. Also, both of them were naked and their scales were shiny, as though they had just been oiled.

“You will submit to my spike in your vaginal slit!” the male Saurian was growling menacingly, looking down at the smaller female.

“Oh please, I do not even know you!” the female Saurian begged, her yellow eyes growing wide with apparent fright. “I have never even *seen* you

before!”

“That doesn’t matter—I have Claimed you and you must submit to me,” the male Saurian growled. “Spread your slit for me at once that I may fertilize your eggs!”

Moaning and trembling, the female Saurian leaned over a conveniently placed table and spread her legs wide. The orifice between her legs really was nothing but a vertical slit, Bobbi saw. The scales around it were a slightly lighter shade of green but there didn’t appear to be any moisture present. How were they going to do it if she was completely dry? *That* was certainly going to be uncomfortable, Bobbi thought with a wince.

Of course, different species of people would certainly have different kinds of sexual appendages and orifices, she reminded herself. So maybe this was normal for the Saurians. The Orniths had a cloaca—a multi-purpose opening which served them for waste elimination, sexual reproduction, and egg laying all at once. Still, the sight of the dry vertical slit between the female Saurian’s legs was a strange one.

But what she saw between the male Saurian’s thighs was even stranger—and a good deal more frightening. She hadn’t noticed it so much before—maybe because it wasn’t all the way hard—but now, as he prepared to enter the female, she eyed the Saurian’s shaft with amazement and disgust.

It was scaly and thick and the head of it wasn’t rounded like a humanoid man’s penis. Instead, it had four sharp ridges that ended in a lethal-looking point.

“Like an arrowhead or a pyramid,” Bobbi muttered to herself, eyeing the weird-looking thing. “A really *sharp* one!”

But that wasn’t even the strangest thing about the Saurian male’s penis.

The shaft of it was shaped like a corkscrew!

This made Bobbi remember an article she'd read about the mating habits of ducks some time ago. She'd been researching all kinds of birds before her trip, trying to get ready for her time on Avria Pentaura, and the article on ducks had caught her eye, mostly because it was so unexpectedly bizarre.

Some species of ducks had penises similar to what she was seeing on the male Saurian, she remembered now. Some could be as long as forty centimeters in length and they often had barbed tips to scoop out the sperm of other male ducks, in the hopes of fertilizing the female's eggs with their own seed while getting rid of their competitors' seed.

Naturally, this made for very painful mating for the female ducks, who didn't seem to enjoy copulation and actively tried to avoid it, at least according to the article. It also said that something like 93% of duck sex was forced—not a great track record for any animal, sentient or not, Bobbi thought.

She wondered now if the lizard people of Saurous were anything like the ducks of her own home planet. If what she was seeing projected from the curving screen was accurate, she thought they might be.

The female Saurian was still leaning over the table with her legs spread and now the male Saurian was inserting the sharp, pyramid-shaped head of his cock into her dry, narrow slit. As he entered—literally screwing himself into her—she lifted her head and let out a long, eerie howl.

“Oooooo! Oooooo! Your spike is so sharp! You are piercing me so deeply!” she howled.

“Take it, bitch!” the male Saurian growled, his forked tongue lashing. *“Take my spike deep in your slit! Going to fertilize all your eggs tonight!”*

Then he began hammering in and out of her with a brutal, twisting motion of his hips, making a deep grunting sound that reminded Bobbi of a pig rooting around in mud.

The display was disgusting but, as a Xeno-Cultural Anthropologist, she had to admit that she also found it fascinating. Was this scenario indicative of normal sexual practices among the Saurians? Or was it some kind of sick rape and domination fantasy, aimed at males to make them feel more powerful and macho, like the rough sex vids found on the Internet back on Earth?

She could only hope it was the latter since, as awful as it was, assuming this little fantasy was the norm for this culture, certainly didn't bode well for female Saurians. She continued to watch, with a disgusted kind of academic interest as the two lizard people kept at it.

“Take it! Take my spike deep in your slit, you little whore! *Ungh! Ungh!*” the male grunted.

“*Oooooo! Oooooo!* My vaginal slit can barely contain your enormous spike! I can feel you piercing my egg sac! *Oooooo!*” the female wailed, bracing herself on the table which was rocking and thumping in time to the rhythmic thrusts.

Between all the grunting and howling and moaning and thumping, Bobbi almost missed the sound of the door unlocking. When she heard the clicking sound, however, she sat up straight on the hard couch.

“She's in here, Mother Tizlah,” she heard Dragon saying. “Thank you for making her a posset.”

“Of course, Son—it is the least I can do, considering you have never Claimed a female before,” a female voice answered him.

It belatedly occurred to Bobbi that the bizarre program she was watching was the Saurian version of porn. And she was about to be caught watching it by Dragon's mom.

Of course, it wasn't like he was her boyfriend or fiancé or anything—he was her freaking *kidnapper* for God's sake! But Bobbi still didn't want to be caught by his mom—by anyone's mom for that matter—watching porn!

She fumbled with the remote ball again, trying to change the channel. But it was so cold in the room, her fingertips had gone numb. The heavy ball slipped from her hands and landed with a heavy *thump* on the tiled floor. Worse, it seemed to have landed on the volume button.

The chorus of grunts and howls and moans got exponentially louder and when she looked up, Bobbi saw—to her horror—that the projected image had gotten bigger too—a *lot* bigger.

The Saurian figures—which had been about half life-sized to start with—were now four times as big. They filled the entire space between the couch and the curved screen with their enormous forms and the camera had zoomed in on the below-the-belt action going on.

Bobbi watched in horror as the Saurian male's enormous, two-foot-long, corkscrew dong shoved ruthlessly into the Saurian female's vaginal slit, which was now as big as her head. Oh God, she had to do something before the door opened!

Falling to her knees, she fumbled for the remote ball, pressing all the buttons as fast as she could, trying desperately to change the channel.

But all her frantic pressing did no good. The Saurian TV seemed to be stuck on the porn channel. All she managed to do was turn up the volume *again*.

“Ooooo! Ooooo!” the female Saurian wailed like a fire alarm.

“Take my spike in your tight little slit!” the male Saurian thundered.

And just at that moment, the door opened and Dragon came in with an older female Saurian right behind him. The older female was holding a steaming mug in her scaly hands.

Both of them stopped dead when they saw what was being projected from the curving screen.



Bobbi had never been so embarrassed in all her life—she could feel herself blushing all over—her face was probably as red as her hair!

She sat up straight from her crouch, clutching the blue sheet to her chest to keep it from falling down.

“I’m so sorry!” she babbled, looking at the stunned expression on the female Saurian’s face—on Dragon’s *mom’s* face, she reminded herself, feeling even more embarrassed. “I...I didn’t mean to! I mean, I wasn’t watching it on purpose! I was just flipping through the, uh channels and it seemed to get stuck on this one! I swear I didn’t—”

At that point, Dragon came over and scooped the round remote-ball out of her hands. It looked no bigger than a plumb in his big hands, though it was at least as big as a large grapefruit, Bobbi thought distractedly. Without a word, he pressed a couple of buttons and then—mercifully—the images of the mating Saurians disappeared and the earsplitting grunts and howls faded to silence.

“Mother Tizlah,” he said, straightening up and speaking formally, “May I introduce you to the female I Claimed. I regret that she has not given me her name, so I am calling her *‘feela.’*”

“Oh, um, Dr. Roberta McClelland, PhD—but you can call me Bobbi,”

Bobbi said, hopping up and holding out a hand to the female Saurian.

“Doctor?” The female raised her scaly brow ridges, which Bobbi supposed passed for eyebrows on Saurians, in apparent surprise. “So...you are a healer?”

“Oh, I’m afraid not—my doctorate is in Xeno-Cultural Anthropology,” Bobbi said quickly. “I’m very interested in studying other species’ cultures, you see. Which is why I was, er, watching that program,” she went on, feeling suddenly inspired. “You see, the mating habits of any people tell a lot about their societal values and norms. It’s all very valuable to the research.”

“I see,” the female Saurian said—rather flatly, Bobbi thought. “And so you have come to study us here on Saurous?”

“Er...yes, I suppose you could say that,” Bobbi said carefully.

It was irritating because she would have liked to be extremely angry and aggrieved and talk about how Dragon had kidnapped her and was holding her against her will. But now that she had used her profession as an excuse for watching the weird, alien porn, she didn’t quite see how she could backtrack.

“I *was* studying the Orniths of Avria Pentaura when your son, er, ‘Claimed’ me,” she added. “They’re also a fascinating people.” She didn’t know why it felt so important to make a good impression on the woman who was Dragon’s adoptive mother, but she couldn’t help it—she didn’t want to be thought of as “that perverted girl we caught watching porn.”

“I’m sure they are,” the female Saurian said neutrally. “My son said you were feeling unwell so I made you this.” She held up a steaming stoneware mug. “Would you like to sit down and drink it?”

“Oh, yes—thank you so much,” Bobbi nodded enthusiastically, which caused a bolt of pain to spike through her head. “Ouch!” she gasped, putting

a hand to her temple. “Sorry—I’m still not recovered from the trip from Avria Pentaura.”

“All the more reason to sit down and sip some of this posset,” Dragon’s adoptive mother said, leading her back to the couch. She settled on one end of it and motioned for Bobbi to sit in the middle while Dragon sat on the other end.

Feeling nervous about being bookended between the two of them, Bobbi lifted the heavy stoneware mug to her lips and blew on the steaming liquid before taking a small sip.

A flavor like a very rich, meaty bone broth filled her mouth. It was surprisingly good, though there was a bit of a sweet aftertaste.

Bobbi had been working hard that day, helping the Orniths with their harvest, and she hadn’t had anything to eat since noon when she’d slurped down a small bowl of *grilin* grain porridge and eaten a few sweet *chilla* leaves. Of course she hadn’t been hungry earlier—she’d been scared to death about being kidnapped. But now she felt her hunger returning with a vengeance—she was a curvy girl, after all, and not much could kill her appetite.

“This is delicious,” she said, sipping eagerly. “I’ve never had anything like it! What do you call it?”

“It’s just a *brilla*-honey posset,” the Saurian female said dismissively, but Bobbi thought she caught a flash of pride in the other woman’s yellow eyes. “It should help you regain your equilibrium and ease your flight-sickness.”

“I think I’m feeling better already—thank you so much,” Bobbi said, smiling. “Dragon said you were a healer—this is excellent medicine.”

The pale gray-green scales around the Saurian woman’s cheekbones

turned a slightly darker green—perhaps it was a blush of pleasure, Bobbi speculated.

“Well, being a female, I’ve never had any formal education,” she demurred modestly. “But my father was the healer for our Clan and he taught me everything he could, before my husband, Komendant Vizlar, paid my bride price and Claimed me as his wife. And of course, I had to learn all about mammalians and how to feed and treat them once he brought Dragon home to be the Little Brother of my firstborn son, Zerlix.”

“How *interesting*,” Bobbi said, really meaning it. “That must have been a big undertaking for you—raising a son from a whole different species, I mean.”

She loved learning about new cultures and she couldn’t help herself—she was going into interview mode. Just because she had been kidnapped didn’t mean she had lost her curiosity.

In fact, if anything, she ought to find out as much about the Saurian culture as she could, she reasoned with herself. Knowing their customs better might enable her to find a way out of this situation.

“May I ask a question, er...” She paused, realizing she didn’t remember the other woman’s name.

“Oh, forgive me—I’m Res. Tizlah,” Dragon’s mother said. “And please, ask as many questions as you like.”

“Well, you said that your husband brought Dragon home to be Zerlix’s ‘Little Brother’. Is that a common occurrence here on Saurous?” Bobbi asked. “I mean, do you often adopt outsiders into your family?”

“Not with females or daughters,” Res. Tizlah said. “But with sons, yes, it’s very common for Clan leaders to exchange sons—usually second sons—

as a sign of friendship and a willingness to live side-by-side in peace.”

“Fascinating! So the sons that are traded are raised by their new family as a kind of living peace treaty?” Bobbi asked, raising her eyebrows.

Res. Tizlah nodded.

“That’s a very good way to put it. Of course, I had only the one natural-born son—Zerlix—and so we were unable to do any kind of a trade with any rival Clans. But then my husband found Dragon in a very bad situation. He rescued him and brought him home to me to join our brood.” She shot a fond glance over Bobbi’s head at her adopted son, who was listening in bemused silence to their conversation.

“That can’t have been easy—suddenly being given a child from a whole different species to raise,” Bobbi remarked. “Where did you even start?”

“Well, I read everything I could about mammals and their habits and dietary needs to start with,” Res. Tizlah said. “And luckily, Dragon has never been what you might call a ‘delicate’ child.”

Bobbi cast a glance over her shoulder at the huge Kindred and snorted.

“No—‘delicate’ isn’t exactly how I’d describe him,” she remarked.

The corners of Res. Tizla’s lipless mouth turned up and she made a hissing sound which Bobbi realized must be laughter.

“Oh my, no—not *now* at least!” she exclaimed. “But you should have seen him when my husband brought him home. He was so tiny and frail-looking, I was really afraid I wouldn’t be able to keep him alive! And of course, for the first few solar months he didn’t say a word, so it was really difficult to know if I was doing the right things or not.”

“He didn’t speak? Why not?”

“Well...he had been through a...a traumatic incident.” Res. Tizlah’s yellow eyes flicked up to Dragon’s face uncertainly.

“It’s all right, Mother Tizlah—you can tell her,” he murmured.

“Well, as long as you don’t mind, son.” Res. Tizlah cleared her throat. “Someone—in one of the rival Clans—had, er, killed Dragon’s people. My husband said he found him sitting in a room with their corpses—just a little boy all alone with the bodies of his parents laying right there beside him.”

“Oh my God!” Bobbi exclaimed, though she usually tried not to interrupt when she was interviewing someone. But the mental image the other woman painted was both vivid and shocking. “That’s terrible!” she said.

“I thought so, too. And so sad.” Res. Tizlah shook her head. “When my husband told me the circumstances, well, I was determined to take Dragon in and treat him as one of my own, no matter that he was mammalian. And he’s always been a good, kind boy,” she added, smiling up at the big Kindred. “A mother couldn’t ask for a more thoughtful son.”

Bobbi thought about pointing out that this “good, kind boy” had kidnapped her and dragged her away from her research project against her will, but they seemed to have gotten beyond that talking point by now.

“You’re very kind,” she said to Res. Tizlah instead. “So I guess eventually you got him to come out of his shell? Er... to talk again?” she said, seeing that the Saurian woman didn’t understand her metaphor.

“Oh, yes. It took months, as I said, but he finally started speaking. Thankfully, he doesn’t remember any of the trauma,” Res. Tizlah said. “Do you, son?” she asked, speaking to Dragon over Bobbi’s head.

“Not a bit,” he rumbled. “It’s like a blank wall in my mind when I try to remember anything before my fifth year.” He shrugged, his broad shoulders

rolling. “I didn’t even know my name, when my Sire brought me here for Mother Tizlah to raise.”

“Really? Then did you remember it later?” Bobbi asked, curious despite herself.

He shook his head and Res. Tizlah did as well.

“Dear me, no! I’m afraid he *never* remembered his given name. At first we just called him ‘Little Brother’ because I kept hoping his name, at least, would come back to him. But we couldn’t call him that forever, so we finally wound up giving him a new name.”

“How did you settle on ‘Dragon’ though?” Bobbi asked.

“Well, there was a particular sleeptime story I used to tell the boys that Dragon just loved. All about a boy who was picked on and bullied in school, but unbeknownst to him, he had the bloodline of our ancient Saurian ancestors.”

“The Dragons,” Dragon said. “They were much larger than the modern Saurians today,” he added. “And in some legends, they can fly.”

“Yes—he just *loved* that story because in the end, the little boy turns into a Dragon and flies away.” Res. Tizlah smiled fondly.

“Not before he roasts everyone who tormented him, though,” Dragon said blandly.

“Well, of course the ending was a bit bloodthirsty but it’s a tale for boys, so it *has* to be violent,” Res. Tizlah said, as though this was a fact everyone knew. “I mean, how else are they supposed to learn?”

Bobbi blinked.

“I...suppose that’s a valid point,” she said slowly. And maybe in the

Saurian culture, it was, she thought to herself. It would certainly explain some of Zerlix's horrible behavior. But if the lizard people expected males to be violent predators, she wasn't sure about her odds of getting away from here.

*But Dragon is a Kindred—not a Saurian, she reminded herself. Surely his Kindred DNA must have **some** effect on him!*

She hoped, anyway.

“Well dear, I'd better be going.” Res. Tizlah was rising from the couch and giving her another smile. “You just finish that posset and feel better. I'm prescribing a good night's rest and I'll come and check on you in the morning.” She turned to Dragon and pointed a scaly finger at him. “No breeding her tonight,” she ordered briskly. “She's much too small and fragile and she's been through a lot. So keep your shaft to yourself, for tonight at least.”

Bobbi was surprised at the Saurian woman's frank appraisal of the situation.

Dragon frowned.

“I wasn't going to hurt her, Mother. You know I don't enjoy hurting females—I'm not like Zerlix.”

“Now, I won't have you speaking badly of your Big Brother,” Res. Tizlah said, frowning. She looked at Bobbi and sighed. “Though I'm afraid my older son *is* very dominant with the females he Claims—I'm always having to go to his rooms to patch them up. It's lucky for you that Dragon took you before he could—I've never known my second son to treat a female roughly.”

Bobbi blinked again. Was the Saurian woman really saying that she *knew* her oldest son was abusive to women and she didn't do anything about it?

Was it really so common for females to be hurt and raped and abused in this culture?

If so, she *really* was in trouble here.

“I’d better be running along now,” Res. Tizla continued, taking the empty stoneware mug from Bobbi. “I have to start cooking for tomorrow night’s feast—there’s so much to do!” She reached up and Dragon leaned down to receive a swift peck on the cheek.

“Thank you for the posset, Mother Tizlah,” he rumbled. “And for coming to look over...Bobbi.” His bronze eyes flicked to Bobbi to see if she would object to his use of her name. But again, it seemed they had gotten past that point. She could hardly tell him to call her Dr. McClelland now that she had been chatting with his mother in such a friendly way and learning all about his childhood.

In a way, this felt like some bizarre first date or maybe the date where the guy brings you home to meet his parents—whichever one that was, Bobbi thought.

Of course, you don’t usually have to worry that the guy you’re dating is going to rape you as soon as his mom leaves the room, she thought with a small shiver.

What was Dragon going to do when his mother left? Would he follow her orders not to “breed” Bobbi tonight—or would he disregard them and do whatever he wanted with her? And even if he didn’t assault her tonight because of what his mom had said, did that mean he would think she was fair game tomorrow night and the rest of the time he held her here?

Bobbi just didn’t know.

“I’ll be by to check her again in the morning. Mind what I say now—no

breeding tonight,” Res. Tizlah said again, frowning up at her adopted son. “Her eggs will still be there, waiting to be fertilized when she’s feeling better.”

Then she left the room, throwing one last nod over her shoulder at Bobbi as she went.



Dragon couldn't have been more surprised by the interaction between the little *feela* and his mother. He had expected Bobbi—what a strange name for a female—to be on her guard, to be suspicious and angry—maybe even hostile. He had been pretty sure she would refuse to speak.

Instead, she had been charming and gracious, drawing Res. Tizlah into conversation and getting her to open up and discuss Dragon's past and the ways of the Saurian people. Was she truly interested or had she simply been pretending to earn goodwill?

I think she truly was interested, Dragon thought to himself as he watched Bobbi from the corner of his eye. After all, she claimed that studying other species' cultures was her job—another strange concept, a female working outside of the home! But if what she said was true, it was clear she enjoyed her vocation.

“How do you make a living studying other cultures?” he asked, turning to look at her. “And why do you have to? Do you have no male to provide for you, back on your home planet, ‘Earth?’”

She stiffened and the smile she'd been wearing for his mother fell right off her face.

“All right, I would call that question *extremely* misogynistic if I hadn't

just spoken with your mother and learned a little something about your culture. I'm betting that there aren't many women involved in any kind of work outside the home on Saurous."

"That's a bet you'd win," Dragon remarked. "Females are much too vulnerable to be outside the family compound—it's too dangerous for them."

"Maybe in *your* culture," Bobbi said, frowning. "But not in mine—or in the culture of the Kindred of the Mother Ship, for that matter. *They* believe that women and men are equal and that women should have the same opportunities as men."

Dragon frowned, feeling confused.

"So...they allow their wives and daughters to just wander around in the open? Don't many of them get Claimed by strange males and bred by force or even killed?"

She shook her head.

"No, of course not! Is it really *that* unsafe for women on Saurous? They can't ever leave the house?"

"Of course they can leave the house! They can go out on their regular Market Day—as long as they stay in the boundaries of their own Clan's territory and go in a group," Dragon said.

Bobbi rolled her big blue eyes expressively.

"And what's that—one day a month?"

"Market Day happens once a solar week," Dragon said, frowning. "And the women are free to come and go as they please on that day, as long as they stay together and get back to their family compounds before it gets dark."

"Wow—one whole day a week, straight to the market and back again,"

she said sarcastically. “Now *that’s* what I call freedom!”

Dragon shook his head.

“I don’t understand—how is that a bad thing?”

“It’s bad because the women should be as free to come and go as the men—at any time of the day or night and any day of the week,” she said.

“But...if they went out at night or on any place but the Market they might be Claimed and taken by strange males,” Dragon pointed out.

She raised one eyebrow at him.

“You mean the way *you* ‘Claimed’ *me* and dragged me away from my research project on Avria Pentaura?”

“I told you—I *took* you to keep you *safe*,” Dragon growled. “You have no idea how vindictive my brother is—he would have come back for you.”

“That’s what you say, anyway.” She crossed her arms over her full breasts. “I think it’s just an excuse.”

Dragon cast about for a way to convince her, though he knew he shouldn’t have to. No Saurian male would bother explaining why he had Claimed a female—he would just take her and breed her and be done with it. But somehow, he found himself wanting to make the little *feela* understand his reason for taking her.

A sudden thought occurred to him and he went over to the sleeping pit. Leaning down, he snagged a blanket and brought it over to her.

It was a patchwork blanket, made up of many small, furry hides, none of them bigger than the span of his hand. Dragon held it carefully as he handed it to her.

“Do you see this?” he asked, pointing to one gray hide, spotted with

purple.

“What is this? Some kind of an animal pelt quilt?” She looked at it with interest. “This looks like something that might have been made by indigenous people back on my own planet.”

“My mother made it for me—so that I could remember my pet—Nibbles,” Dragon told her.

“Nibbles?” She frowned. “Wait—didn’t your brother say something about that on the ship?”

Dragon nodded grimly.

“It was a warning—one you’d do well to heed. Nibbles was a *heechee*—a small, furry rodent with a long nose and big, purple eyes. A mammalian used for food here on Saurous,” he explained. “We got a shipment of them from the butcher—live ones because my mother prefers them fresh—when I was just a boy.”

“And you picked one to be your pet?” Bobbi asked, tilting her head and looking at him curiously.

“Yes, Dragon admitted, somewhat stiffly. “It’s... not something that’s done here on Saurous—they don’t have what you call ‘pets’ here. But my mother saw me feeding Nibbles little pieces of *partha* bread and stroking his fur and she decided to let me keep him.” He ran a hand over his hair. “Of course, the minute she said I could have him, Zerlix started complaining that Nibbles was the *heechee* he had wanted for his Last Meal.”

“He wanted him because *you* wanted him,” Bobbi guessed.

Dragon nodded, impressed by her understanding of the situation.

“Zerlix and I have never properly bonded, the way a Big Brother and

Little Brother are supposed to,” he said. “I think he hates me because I’m mammalian—or maybe because he wanted our Sire and mother all to himself, or he resents the attention I draw away from him by being different. I don’t know—but I *do* know if he’s decided to Claim something—or someone—he won’t ever give up until he gets what he wants.”

“Did your mother know that?” she asked. “I mean, when she let you keep one of the, uh, *heechees* as a pet?”

“I don’t think she thought of it much—she’s always had a blind spot when it comes to Zerlix.” Dragon shrugged. “As for letting me keep Nibbles, I think she read some books on mammalian psychology that said it was good for a mammalian child to have another warm-blooded creature to look after.”

“Well, it was a very kind gesture,” Bobbi murmured sincerely. “She seems like a remarkable woman, your mother.”

“She’s the best and kindest mother any male could have,” Dragon said honestly. “But I’m afraid the story of my ‘pet’ *doesn’t* have a happy ending.”

“Oh, no...” She looked down at the patchwork fur blanket. “What happened?”

“I built Nibbles a cage and kept him in my room for months. It was...a great joy to have him,” Dragon murmured. “He made me feel less alone in an alien world.”

He smiled, remembering the soft, furry body in his arms—the way Nibbles had made that funny purring sound as the little animal snuggled against his chest when Dragon stroked his silky, purple-spotted fur. The little *heechee* had known his name and always came running when Dragon opened his cage door, eager for the little bits of bread he fed him as a treat. At the time, it had been good to have something smaller and weaker than himself to

care for—it had made him feel stronger and more sure of himself.

“What...what happened to him?” Bobbi whispered, bringing Dragon back to the present. “I’m almost afraid to ask, but...” She shook her head and made a gesture for him to go on.

“I was careful to hide him from everyone—especially Zerlix,” Dragon told her. “Months passed and I thought it was safe—I thought he’d forgotten all about my pet. Then, one day I came into my room and found him standing there with Nibbles in his hands.”

He closed his eyes briefly, remembering the way the little *heechee* had been squeaking in fear...the way his big, liquid eyes had been so wide and terrified...

“Oh, no...” Bobbi put a hand to her throat. “I don’t want to know this, do I? Oh please, tell me he didn’t...didn’t hurt the poor little animal right in front of you!”

“I begged him not to. Begged him to let Nibbles go—I told him I would do his chores for the rest of my life, that I would pay him all my allowance—that I would do anything he said, anything at all, if only he would put my pet down and let him go.”

Dragon was surprised at the lump he felt in his throat as he spoke—surprised at the emotions that came rushing over him. He hadn’t thought of this old, painful memory in years. He pushed the feelings back down and continued speaking. The little *feela* had to know what kind of danger she was in—had to understand why he had Claimed her.

“I’m guessing he *didn’t* put him down,” she whispered, her eyes wide.

“No,” Dragon said flatly. “Zerlix said, ‘I told you I’d have him for my dinner and I fucking well will!’ Then he bit off his head, right in front of

me.”

“Oh, *no!*” Bobbi clapped her hands to her mouth and her eyes filled with horrified tears. “Oh, Dragon—that’s *terrible*,” she whispered in a choked voice. “How *horrible* for you!”

Dragon was rather surprised at her reaction. He’d been hoping to scare her—to impress on her the reason why he had Claimed her to keep her safe. But he hadn’t expected her to react with sorrow and pity to his story.

It wasn’t a story he had ever told anyone before—because no one would care. Well, except for his adoptive mother, who had done her best to comfort him and had made the blanket of skins so that he could always remember the furry little animal he’d had for such a short time. But any other Saurian would have shrugged their shoulders and said, “So what? *Heechees* are meant to be eaten. What’s the big deal?”

But this little female—this little *feela*—was *crying* for him—weeping in a way that Saurians never did, for they didn’t have tear ducts, the way his species of mammalian did.

“Tears...” Dragon reached out with a single finger and brushed one off her flushed cheek. And for once, she didn’t jerk away from him. “You’re shedding tears for me?” he asked.

He hadn’t shed any tears himself since he was a child. The Saurians thought it was strange and had made fun of him until he learned to keep whatever emotions that caused him to want to weep under control. It had been years since he had cried and he was surprised that seeing the little female cry affected him so strongly. Her tears made his heart ache and throb in his chest, as though a cruel fist was squeezing it.

“Of...of course, I’m crying—it’s such a sad, *awful* story!” She sniffed,

swiping at her eyes with the edge of the drying towel she was still wearing. “I...I had a guinea pig when I was a little girl so I can sort of understand—though my little guy died of natural causes. Not...not the way Nibbles went,” she added, with a shiver. She stroked the soft, furry blanket, examining the little hides it was made up of. “From the size of these, your pet must have been about the size of mine,” she added.

“I didn’t tell you the story because I wanted you to pity me,” Dragon growled, frowning. “I’m trying to make you understand why I Claimed you—and why I have to keep you close. Zerlix *won’t* forget about you. It wouldn’t have been safe to leave you on Avria Pentaura once you caught his attention—he would have come back for you. Do you understand now?”

She frowned and stopped stroking the blanket.

“Okay, I get your point. But you can’t keep me forever—the Kindred are going to come looking for me and believe me, they have a *lot* of firepower.”

Dragon frowned as another emotion rose in his chest—possessiveness. He felt suddenly as though invisible wings were spreading inside him and he wanted to enfold the little female in them and keep her close.

“Let them come,” he growled. “I have Claimed you. You’re mine now, *feela*. I won’t let anyone take you away from me.”

“Ugh!” She threw up her hands. “Just when I thought you were more enlightened that these misogynistic Saurians!”

“I was raised by them—I *am* Saurian,” Dragon said.

“No, you’re not!” she shot back. “If you were, I bet what happened to poor Nibbles wouldn’t have bothered you at all! You’re warm-blooded, Dragon—you’re a *Kindred*. And Kindred *don’t* treat women this way!”

“I am what I am,” Dragon said stolidly. “And you are now my female.

Now come on—it's late and we're going to the sleeping pit."

"What? I don't think so!" She pulled the drying towel she was wearing higher up her chest, as though to hide her breasts from him more thoroughly. "I am *not* going to bed with you!" she declared.

"Oh yes you are, unless you want to freeze to death," Dragon growled. "It's sleeping time and the temperature in the house is about to drop about twenty degrees so the Saurians can rest easily."

"What?" Her eyes widened. "You mean it's going to get even *colder* in here?"

Dragon shrugged.

"This is the middle of summer on our part of Saurous—it's considered quite warm right now and the house has to be cooled to sleeping temperature."

"But that's crazy! I can already see my breath." She exhaled a puff of white vapor as she spoke, as though to prove her point. "I mean, that posset your mom made me warmed me up some, but I can't expect it to help if it gets even *colder* in here."

"Which is *exactly* why you're coming to bed with me," Dragon told her, frowning. "And before you ask, *no*, I am not planning to breed you tonight. But we *will* be sleeping together naked."

"What? Absolutely not!" she exclaimed. "What possible reason—"

"So I can keep you warm more efficiently with my body heat," Dragon growled. "I don't want to hear any more about it. Either come to the sleeping pit with me, or I'll take you there. Either way, you're going."

For a moment, she just glared at him, her blue eyes snapping mutinously.

The drying towel she'd wrapped around her hair had slipped down and her long, flame-colored tresses were like a halo around her head. Dragon couldn't help thinking that she looked magnificent—and more beautiful than any female he had ever seen in his life.

But he kept his gaze cool and level, not allowing the admiration to show in his eyes. He wasn't prepared to budge on this point. If he let her sleep outside the pit, he was quite certain she would freeze—she was simply too small and delicate. He *had* to keep her close in order to keep her safe and well.

“Fine,” she said at last. “I'll sleep in the pit with you, but I *don't* want to be naked. At least give me another one of your shirts to wear.”

Dragon considered for a moment, then nodded. It seemed like a good compromise.

“All right,” he said. “But if I see you shivering, I'm taking it off you so I can warm you up.”

His answer to this was more glaring but at least she was silent while he went to get her another of the thin, silky shirts he wore when it was warm outside. He handed it to her and she turned her back and pulled it over her head before pulling off the drying sheet. When she turned back to face him, Dragon had to work hard to keep his face blank.

The white shirt clung to every bit of her small, curvy body, emphasizing her heavy breasts and full hips. Her ripe, pink nipples, which he had noticed earlier, poked at the thin material, tenting the fabric around them and making her look almost more enticing than if she'd been completely naked, Dragon thought.

To his discomfort, he felt his shaft twitching in his leather trousers.

Damn, he *never* had any sexual reaction when he saw half-dressed Saurian Pleasure Girls—not even when they flashed their vaginal slits provocatively in a way that seemed to make the other males in his crew crazy with lust.

It's just because she looks so different—because she's mammalian, he told himself uneasily. *It's not a problem—just a normal reaction.*

Still, he hoped the problem wouldn't get worse or sleeping with the little female was apt to be more awkward than he'd at first thought.

“Come on,” he said roughly, trying to mask his confusion. “Let's get to bed before they start dropping the temperature.”

Right on cue, a gust of chilly air *whooshed* into the room through the overhead vents, blowing over both of them.

Dragon was used to this—his skin didn't even break out in chill bumps. But the little *feela* gasped and wrapped her arms around herself, shivering violently.

“Oh m-my G-god!” she exclaimed, her teeth chattering. “That's *f-f-freezing!*”

“Come on—before you get any colder,” Dragon commanded. When she didn't answer, he simply picked her up bodily, swinging her into his arms and depositing her carefully into the sleeping pit.

“Hey!” She was standing on the mattress at the bottom of the pit on her tiptoes, but she was so tiny she could barely see over the lip of the pit, which was lined with smooth, red tiles. “Hey, you c-can't just p-put me down here!” she protested.

“The hell I can't,” Dragon growled. He dropped the fur blanket down to her and she wrapped it around her trembling shoulders. “Scoot over—I'm coming in with you as soon as I undress,” he told her.

He was still bare-chested—having never bothered to put another shirt on, since it was so warm earlier—so all he had to take off were his boots and trousers. He didn't try to hide himself from her and she watched, her eyes growing wider as he stripped.

Though he tried not to, Dragon couldn't help feeling self-conscious. He knew his shaft was the wrong shape—straight instead of twisted—and he had no spike at the end of it with which to properly pierce a vaginal slit. It was one reason his two attempts at sex with Pleasure Girls hadn't been successful or pleasurable to either him or to them. A female *needed* to be spiked in order to have her egg sac pierced and her eggs fertilized and the blunt head of his shaft wasn't suited to that at all.

It had bothered Dragon that he couldn't give the females he had been with pleasure—bothered him greatly. Though most of the Saurian males he knew were only interested in their own satisfaction, he seemed to have a deep, inner need to please a female sexually. It was one of the reasons he had lost any interest in having sex—well, that and the fact that he didn't really find Saurian females appealing.

Not like he found the little *feela*—she was fucking gorgeous, staring up at him with those big, blue eyes—such an unusual color!—and her flaming red hair all wavy down her back. Still, he could have done without her gawking at him.

“What are you looking at?” he growled, glaring down at her.

“Oh, um...” Her cheeks went suddenly red, which Dragon was learning meant that she was embarrassed or ashamed. It was difficult to know, since he hadn't seen many mammalians other than his own reflection in the mirror growing up.

“Well?” he demanded, turning to face her more fully.

“Your...your tattoos,” she said and gestured at his back. “I was looking at your tattoos—honestly. They *move*. I mean—I knew that the one on your neck moved but I didn’t really get a good look at your back until now.”

“My live ink?” He turned to look over his own shoulder, catching a colorful flash from the corner of his eye.

“What does it mean? It looks like a dragon—is that because of your name?” she asked.

“Partly. And partly because of the sleeptime story my mother used to tell me,” Dragon said. “The one about the boy turning into the dragon?”

He turned so she could get a better look at the little story that played out on his broad back. It was a boy—a mammalian boy—transforming into a red Dragon with huge, black and red wings. When they unfolded, they stretched from shoulder to shoulder, covering his entire back as flame and smoke spouted from the dragon’s maw. Then it shrank down and turned back into a boy and the whole scene started again.

“It’s fascinating,” Bobbi murmured. “I’ve never seen living tattoos before.”

“They’re very common among the Saurians,” Dragon explained. “The one on my neck spells out the name of the Crimson Blades—my Clan—in ancient letters. The one on my back is sacred to me—a representation of my past and a reminder of who I want to be.”

“And the ones on your arms?” She gestured to his arms, which both had full tattoo sleeves down to his wrists. They also shifted and moved, but more subtly than the one on his back.

“The ones on my arms tell of my kills,” Dragon said shortly.

“Your...your kills?” She put a hand to her throat. “How...how many people have you killed?”

“How many colors do you see on my arms?” Dragon responded, raising an eyebrow. “Don’t worry, little one,” he added. “I only kill males from rival Clans—I have never killed a female.” Which was more than many of the Saurian males he knew could say. “Now scoot over, I’m coming down into the pit,”

he told her.

She moved hastily away from the side of the pit and he lowered himself down and stretched out on the comfortable mattress. The silky sheet that covered it felt cool against his bare skin. He felt almost totally relaxed—which was more than he could say for the little *feela*, who was still standing against the other side of the pit, eyeing him warily.

“Come lay down,” Dragon told her. “I promised not to breed you against your will and I keep my word.”

“I...I don’t know if I *want* to lay down,” Bobbi said, lifting her chin defiantly.

Dragon was tempted to just let her stand there all night if she wanted to, but she was starting to shiver again, despite the patchwork fur blanket wrapped around her shoulders.

“Come down here or do I have to pull you down?” he growled irritably. “It’s been a long damn day and I need to get some sleep!”

“Fine—but don’t touch me!” she flared.

“I won’t—not unless I have to,” Dragon told her. “Just lay down and try to get comfortable.”

Reluctantly, she eased down to first a sitting position, and then a laying one. Turning herself on her side with her back to him, she got as close to the red-tiled side of the sleeping pit and as far from Dragon as she possibly could. She wrapped the fur blanket around herself tightly and curled herself into a little ball.

He watched her with a frown as the overhead lights began to dim, waiting to see if she would stop shivering. If she didn't, he fully intended to take matters into his own hands and warm her up.

Whether she wanted him to, or not.



Bobbi lay there, shivering in the dark, wondering what in the world she was going to do. She'd hoped that by appealing to Dragon's Kindred nature, she could get him to be reasonable and agree to give her up—maybe even to take her back to Avria Pentaura. But she hadn't counted on how strongly his Saurian upbringing would factor into the situation.

Well, looks like Nurture 1, Nature zero, she thought unhappily as she wrapped the patchwork fur blanket more tightly around her trembling shoulders. It was soft and warm but not much of a match for the chilly air that seemed to be blowing right down into the sleeping pit. God, how could anyone sleep like this? It was like trying to drift off in an Arctic gale!

Her mind drifted to all the Jack London stories she'd ever read—especially one called *To Build a Fire*. It was about a guy living in Alaska who was trying to get from one post to another but things kept going wrong for him. He fell in a pond and got wet and lost his sled dogs and couldn't get a fire going to dry off...

In the end, didn't he just sit down and wait to freeze to death?

Bobbi couldn't remember but she wished she could get the morbid story out of her head. It had been interesting to read when she lived in sunny Florida, where the temperature rarely dropped low enough to even wear a

long-sleeved shirt. Lying here in the sleeping pit on Saurous with an icy wind blowing down on her and her fingers and toes like ice, it was a little too close for comfort.

She shifted position, curling more tightly into herself and using the furry blanket to cover all of her head except for her nose, which she stuck out so she could breathe. The tip of it felt numb already and the rest of her wasn't much better.

Another gust of icy air rushed over her and her teeth began to chatter while her whole body shivered. God, this was terrible! She was going to freeze to death on an alien planet and never see Earth or the Kindred Mother Ship again.

The thought brought tears to her eyes. She had gone out looking for adventure, but this was more than she had bargained for. For the first time since she had been dropped off by the Kindred shuttle on Avria Pentaura, she just wanted to go *home*. She—

Suddenly a big hand was rolling her over and glowing bronze eyes were looking into her own.

“All right—that’s it. You’re going to freeze if I don’t warm you up,” Dragon growled in the darkness.

“W-wait! Wh-what are y-you—” she began, but before she could finish the question, he had unrolled her from the blanket and stripped the silky shirt off her head, leaving her completely naked. Then, before Bobbi could protest, he pulled her right up against his broad, bare chest and wrapped his long, muscular arms around her.

“H-h-hey!” she exclaimed, wiggling against him. “Y-you c-can’t just—”

“Be quiet,” he growled. “I can and I will—you’re freezing and your teeth

are chattering. You're clearly too delicate for Saurous."

"Well, m-maybe you sh-should have thought of th-that before you k-k-kidnapped me," she shot back, her teeth still chattering, despite all she could do to stop them.

"Quiet," he commanded again. "I brought you here to keep you safe. There are worse ways to die than freezing to death, you know. *Not* that I'm going to let you freeze," he continued and began rubbing her back and shoulders briskly with his big, warm hands.

Bobbi wanted to protest some more, but she had to admit, he *was* warming her up. He put out heat like a furnace and he didn't seem to mind when she pressed her cold face to his chest, even though the tip of her nose felt like an ice cube.

She inhaled deeply, noticing the warm, spicy scent of his skin again. God, he smelled good! She shouldn't notice that—or care about it—but she couldn't seem to help herself. She took in another deep breath—the dark, spicy scent reminded her of campfires in a forest at night. It was making her feel slightly dizzy but also much warmer than before.

His hands on her back and arms and shoulders were working wonders, too. She could feel the life returning to her numb limbs as he rubbed them. Soon, she was feeling better—her body stopped shaking and her teeth stopped chattering. By the time Dragon pulled the patchwork fur blanket over both of them again, she was getting *almost* toasty.

"Better?" he rumbled, his deep voice seeming to vibrate her whole body because they were pressed so closely together. Well, their top parts, anyway. Bobbi still had her knees partially up, so though her breasts were pressed against him, she was avoiding contact with anything *lower*.

“My fingers are still cold,” she said, which was true.

“Let me see them.”

Big, warm hands enfolded her own—his were so much larger than hers, Bobbi almost felt like a child. Dragon bent down and breathed softly on her icy fingertips. His breath was warm and smelled faintly of some exotic spice she couldn't name. Cinnamon? Cloves? Cardamom? It was a little like all of them, but not exactly like any of them somehow.

“Better now?” he asked after several breaths and rubbing her hands between his own.

“I...I think so,” she said cautiously. “You can let go of me now,” she added, feeling awkward. “So we can, er, sleep apart.”

“So you can start freezing all over again? I don't think so,” Dragon growled, pulling her closer.

“But you can't expect me to sleep like this!” Bobbi complained. Her bare breasts were pressed against the broad planes of his chest, which was awkward to say the least, since they barely knew each other.

“Here...” He turned her over on her side, so that her back was to his front. Then he draped one heavy arm over her to draw her close. “Maybe you'll like this better.”

“I do *not* like it better—Hey!” Bobby exclaimed, jerking when something hot and hard poked her in the ass. “What do you think you're doing?”

“Sorry,” he growled. “Can't help it when you're so close.”

“Then let me go!” she protested.

“Not a chance.” Dragon's deep voice was flat in the darkness. “But here...” He shifted his hips back considerably, so that the hard length of his

enormous shaft—which Bobbi had been eyeing nervously earlier while he undressed—was no longer poking her. “Better?” he asked again.

“I *guess* so,” she grumbled. She was still tucked neatly against him—the tiny spoon to his huge spoon—but at least his dick wasn’t poking her in the ass anymore. “Just keep your distance,” she warned him, though it wasn’t like she could do anything if he decided not to. She was helpless in his arms—he was so much bigger than her, what possible recourse did she have if he tried something? Still, she wasn’t about to show weakness if she could help it. “I mean it—keep some space between us,” she said sternly.

“I will unless you start shivering again,” he told her. “If your temperature starts going down, I’m bringing you in close and you’ll just have to deal with it, *feela*.”

Bobbi wanted to protest or try to wriggle away from him—but her body didn’t want to do it. Not *just* because he was keeping her warm—because of that warm, hypnotic scent that seemed to hang around him like a cloud of pheromones.

Maybe he is putting out pheromones, Bobbi thought sleepily. Hadn’t she heard something aboard the Mother Ship about Kindred using their scent to attract their mates? But wasn’t that after they were already Joined? Or was it before? She couldn’t remember—she only knew that the big Kindred’s warm, spicy scent drew her like a magnet and though she tried to make herself move further away, her body literally refused. In fact, if anything, she wanted to snuggle closer.

She stopped herself from doing so with an effort, reminding herself that she hardly knew the big Kindred holding her so close. This ought to be beyond awkward and yet...somehow...it wasn’t. It felt almost...almost *right*.

Which was a crazy thing to think. What woman in her right mind would *want* to be pressed naked against her equally naked kidnapper—no matter how big and handsome he was?

Do I have Stockholm syndrome? Bobbi asked herself. *What's wrong with me, wanting to be close to him and let him touch me like this?*

She had no answers. She only knew that being pressed naked against the big Kindred's muscular body made her want to get even closer, rather than running away like she ought to. It was crazy and wrong...but that was just the way it was.

Worry about it tomorrow, she told herself. *At least he's not trying anything. For tonight, just get some rest and you can think about ways to escape when you wake up.*

So thinking, she finally drifted off to sleep.



Dragon fell asleep worrying about the little *feela* in his arms. She as so small and delicate—so obviously unsuited for the cold. How could he keep her warm when he wasn't with her? He had duties to perform, of course—the rival Clans would have no fear of the Crimson Blades if he and his crew weren't patrolling the borders of their territory.

He had planned to leave her locked in his rooms during these times—it should be safe enough because he and Zerlix were on the same crew and so would always be together. He could keep an eye on his Big Brother and make certain the Saurian male wasn't trying to sneak back to the family compound to get to Bobbi.

But what good would it do to keep Zerlix away from her if she was freezing to death without Dragon there to hold her and keep her warm?

How can I keep her safe and warm? How can I protect her from the cold and from Zerlix and still do my duties all at the same time? he wondered uneasily.

Now that he was holding her close, he felt even *more* protective of her—more unwilling than ever to let her go or give her up. She felt so right in his arms with her soft, curvy body pressed against his own much larger form. And her sweet, feminine fragrance seemed to do things to him—things the

sour stench of the Saurian Pleasure Girls never had.

She makes my body react like none of them ever did, Dragon admitted to himself. Was it just because she was mammalian or because she had such a wild, exotic beauty? Or maybe it was her feisty temper, which he liked. Saurian women were typically too frightened and submissive to do anything but accept what was done to them but this girl—his little *feela*—rose up and declared her defiance. She fought him every step of the way...which only made Dragon want her more.

She made his shaft hard, too—her big, soft breasts, ripe nipples, and wide, curving hips affected him as the flat chests and scaly hides of Saurian females never had. The soft, pouting outer lips of her sex—*her pussy*, he thought—because she had more than just a vaginal slit—were lovely. He only wished that he could see more...explore her with his tongue and fingers...

I want to bring her pleasure, he thought, drawing her a little closer to his chest. She protested sleepily, but didn't try to pull away. *I want to touch her and taste her...explore her and own her. I've never had those desires before.*

All this time he'd believed himself to be asexual but that wasn't true at all. He had just been waiting for the right female—for the little *feela*—to come along...to awaken him so that he could Claim her forever...

She is MINE, a dark, wild voice whispered inside him. ***I will wrap her in my wings and keep her safe from any who dares to touch her—MINE!***

The voice was different from his own interior monologue and Dragon had never heard it before—yet it seemed to belong to him just the same. It should have frightened him to hear a strange voice in his head but it didn't. It felt *right* inside him—like something that had been sleeping, curled next to his

heart his entire life, was now beginning to awaken...

The thought made no sense but in his half-asleep state, he didn't question it.

Fine, he thought at the voice. If you're going to help her and protect her, show me how to keep her warm.

The deep, wild voice was silent but a new voice spoke in his head. It was clear and strong and feminine and the words it said seemed to toll within him like the ringing of a huge bell.

“Warrior,” this new voice murmured in his ear. ***“You must remember. Not all...not now, it would be too much for you to bear. But I will breach the barrier just a little, in order that you may learn how to keep your female warm.”***

Dragon wanted to ask who she was and what she meant about a “barrier” but by then he was so near the edge of sleep, his lips wouldn't even move to form the question.

And then he began having the strangest dream...



In his dream, Dragon saw two people—mammalians like him—not Saurians, he thought. One was a female with long, brown hair and large bronze eyes, very like his own. She was sitting huddled in a chair, wrapped in a blanket and shivering, blowing on her hands to keep them warm. Her lips were blue with cold and she looked miserable.

“I d-don’t see how we can stay here, Taurex,” she was saying to the other mammalian. “It’s so c-cold all the t-time! And my body won’t regulate its temperature like yours does.”

“I’m so sorry you’re cold, Lalish, my darling. I never want you to be uncomfortable.”

The one answering her was a male as big as Dragon was himself, with black hair and eyes like flames. He had broad shoulders and he wasn’t shivering at all, despite the obviously chilly conditions.

“Let me share blood with you,” he said to the female. “As the Blood Kindred do with their mates. That might warm you.”

Her eyes widened hopefully.

“But you are *not* Blood Kindred. Do you think it would help?”

He shrugged.

“I think it might. At any rate, it’s worth trying.”

The male with flaming eyes knelt beside her and pulled a sharp silver blade from the sheath at his belt. Drawing the blade over his wrist, he made a shallow cut that oozed crimson. He held this offering to the female’s lips.

“Go on—don’t be shy,” he said, when she hesitated. His eyes were warm as he looked at her—it was clear that she was everything to him, Dragon thought. “Drink of me and be healed...drink of me and be warmed, my darling,” he murmured.

Hesitantly, she put out her tongue and lapped a bit of the blood away. As soon as she did, her eyes brightened.

“Oh—it doesn’t taste like blood at all! It’s spicy and sweet and...” She took another taste and shook her head. “I can’t describe it. It’s like...almost like tasting liquid warmth.”

“Is it working?” the male asked anxiously. “Are you feeling warmer?”

“I...I think so.” She pressed her lips to his wrist and sucked more freely, taking more of the deep red substance before looking up again. “Yes—yes it’s definitely working,” she said, smiling. “Look—I’ve stopped shivering. I’m not cold at all anymore! It’s as though your blood is helping my body to regulate my temperature.”

“I’m glad. Take a little more,” the male said anxiously. “As much as you need, my darling. I want you to be warm and safe here.”

“Thank goodness we aren’t staying long. I don’t like these lizard people—I don’t trust them,” the female said, before pressing her lips to his wrist again.

“We’re only staying until we sell this latest shipment,” he promised, stroking her hair as she drank from him. “Then it’s off to the next inhabited

planet to see what else we can find.”

She looked up once more.

“Good—I don’t like it here. I don’t think it’s good for Tolor, even if he *did* inherit your ability to stay warm no matter what.”

The male answered her but Dragon didn’t hear what he said. The dream was breaking up and the name—Tolor—was ringing in his head.

Tolor, he thought, swimming up from the depths of sleep. *I know that name from somewhere—don’t I? But where have I heard it before? Tolor... Tolor...*

He came awake to find that he was lying on his back and the little *feela* was curled against him. Her full breasts were pressed against his side and she had thrown a leg over him, so that her soft little pussy was rubbing against his thigh.

Dragon shifted uncomfortably. Gods, she was beautiful! Just the feel of her against him made his morning hard-on throb with desire. And she was so soft—soft all over and not a bit scaly. She was so different from the Saurian females he was used to.

To distract himself from his desire, Dragon looked up at the ceiling as the golden glows in the corners of his room began their slow brightening, which signaled morning. There were, of course, no windows in the bed chambers of his family’s main house. Windows were points of entry where assassins from rival Clans could enter. It would be foolish to build such a weakness into a domicile, but he couldn’t deny that sometimes he longed to be wakened by natural light or to at least look out and see the sky.

You’ll see the sky soon enough when you go out. But what about that

dream? he asked himself.

Strangely, it hadn't faded at all, as most dreams do upon waking. Each detail of it was still bright and sharp. Dragon turned it over in his mind like a precious jewel, examining each burnished facet and trying to understand what he had seen.

*No, what I was **shown**,* he thought, remembering the strong, feminine voice that had whispered in his ear. She had called him "Warrior" instead of Clansman. And what else had she said? Oh yes...

"You must remember. Not all...not now, it would be too much for you to bear."

But *what* would be too much to bear, Dragon wondered? And what had the mysterious voice meant when she said she would "breach the barrier"? What barrier was she talking about?

Never mind that, he told himself. *Think of what the dream showed you. Could it really be a way to keep her warm?*

He looked down at the sleeping female curled against his left side. Her head was pillowed on his chest and her long, red-gold hair was spread across his shoulder like spilled flames.

The little *feela* looked so little and vulnerable, pressed against his much larger form. She was so petite that the top of her head barely came up to his bicep when they were standing, but her tiny stature only made her more attractive to Dragon. It made him want to protect her—to possess her—to warm her...

As though she felt him looking at her, her eyes fluttered open and she tilted her head and looked up at him sleepily.

"What...where am I?" she murmured drowsily. "Who're you?"

“I am Dragon—the one who Claimed you,” Dragon told her, smiling a little at her sleepy confusion.

“Claimed me?” she repeated, frowning. “What...?” Then she looked down at herself. Her eyes got wider as she woke up completely and scrambled away from him. “Oh my God—I’m naked and so are you! Did we —”

“Calm down, we didn’t do anything last night,” Dragon told her. “Don’t you remember me Claiming you yesterday on Avria Pentaura?”

“Now I do.” She clutched the patchwork fur blanket to her breasts and stared at him mistrustfully.

“Don’t look at me like that,” Dragon told her, frowning. “I didn’t touch you last night. *You* were the one who was draped all over *me* when I woke up.”

Her face went red in that adorable way she had when she was embarrassed.

“I didn’t mean to! I was probably just trying to keep warm. Which reminds me...” She frowned and rubbed her forehead with one hand. “I was just having such a vivid dream—so crazy. About these two people and the woman was freezing and the man cut his wrist and—”

“Stop.” Dragon sat up and put out a hand to her. “You’re joking,” he said flatly. “You *couldn’t* have been having that dream.”

“What? Why not?” she demanded, glaring at him. “Hate to break it to you, buddy, but you only kidnapped my body—not my mind. You don’t have any say on what I dream about.”

“No, I mean...” Dragon shook his head and rubbed his temples. “You couldn’t have had that dream because *I* was having it.”

“What—the exact same dream?” She frowned. “Describe it, then.”

“Two people, like you said—mammalians, *not* Saurians,” Dragon told her. “The female had long brown hair and eyes—”

“Eyes the exact same color as yours!” she finished for him. “But the man had black hair and his eyes...” She shook her head. “I’ve never seen eyes like that. It was like they were on fire.”

“There were flames in his eyes,” Dragon agreed. “But the female...she was freezing.”

“And he cut his wrist and gave her his blood to drink,” Bobbi said excitedly. “Then they started talking about their son.” She frowned. “Now, what was his name? Oh, I know!”

“Tolor,” they said at the same time and stared at each other.

“This is *crazy*,” Bobbi whispered. “How in the world can we have had the exact same dream? Do you think it’s some kind of Dream Sharing?”

Dragon frowned.

“What’s ‘Dream sharing?’”

She looked surprised.

“Don’t you know? I thought it was an exclusively Kindred thing.”

Dragon shook his head.

“I was raised by Saurians and I don’t remember my past—you know more about my birth people than I do.”

“Oh, I guess I do. That’s kind of sad, actually. Well, I don’t know a lot about it but as far as I could pick up, it has to do with the Kindred Goddess putting her people together—finding them mates, you know?”

Dragon looked at her closely.

“Do you believe in this...Goddess?” He almost asked her if she had heard the powerful feminine voice before the dream began, but something held him back. He felt as though that voice had been only for him, though he couldn’t explain why.

“I believe that the Kindred believe in her,” Bobbi said seriously. “As an Anthropologist, I would never discount another culture’s religious beliefs.”

“I see.” He nodded. “Well what is this ‘Dream Sharing’ anyway, then?”

Her brow furrowed, as though she was trying to think how to explain.

“Well, apparently before a Kindred warrior meets his prospective mate, they start dreaming about each other. The process can last for days or weeks—even months.” She shook her head. “But normally, they dream of the other person—the one they’re fated to be mated with. I’ve never heard of two people dreaming the exact same thing—that’s just weird.”

“It may be strange, but there might be a grain of truth in the dream,” Dragon pointed out. “Maybe if you take some of my blood, it will help your body to regulate your temperature.”

She made a face and drew the blanket more tightly around herself.

“I don’t know—I don’t exactly get off on vampire fantasies, you know.”

Dragon frowned.

“What’s a ‘vampire?’”

She shook her head.

“Never mind. The point is, I don’t love the idea of drinking blood. I mean...ugh!” She wrinkled her little nose with its smattering of freckles in apparent disgust.

“It’s worth a try, even if you don’t find it appealing,” Dragon pointed out.

“It’s better than freezing to death when I’m not around to keep you warm. I can’t be with you every minute, you know—I have duties to perform.”

She sighed and ran a hand through her wild red mane.

“You know, I wouldn’t have to *worry* about freezing to death if you’d just take me back to Avria Pentaura.”

“Not going to happen,” Dragon growled, a wave of possessiveness rolling over him. “You’re *mine* and I’m not letting you go!”

“How very *caveman* of you,” she snapped, her eyes flashing. Then she took a deep breath and seemed to decide to try a different approach. “Look, Dragon, I can understand why you’d want to keep me. I mean, I’m probably the first mammalian woman you’ve been around for a long time. Maybe you’re even a little attracted to me, because I’m so different from the Saurian women you’re used to. But—”

“You’re damned right I’m attracted to you.” Dragon didn’t see any point in denying it. “You’re fucking *gorgeous*. But I told you, that’s *not* the reason I Claimed you.”

“I know, I know—you want to k-keep me safe from your b-brother.” She pulled the blanket more tightly around herself and looked around. “God, did it just g-get colder in here?”

“No—you’ve just been away from my side for too long. Come here.”

Dragon reached for her but she scooted away quickly, until her bare back came in contact with the tiled side of the sleeping pit. She gave a little yelp and jumped forward again, practically launching herself across the pit.

“Oh my G-god, those t-tiles are l-like ice!”

“Your lips are turning blue,” Dragon said, frowning. “Are you ready to

try what we saw in the dream?”

Her eyes widened.

“You...you really do want to t-try it? You’d c-cut yourself for me?”

“Of course I would,” Dragon said simply. “I Claimed you—that makes me responsible for your health, safety, and wellbeing. I take my responsibilities very seriously.”

She didn’t seem to know how to feel about that, but her shivering grew worse and her teeth began to chatter.

“Come here.” Dragon reached for her and this time she didn’t try to evade him. He tucked her close to his side and then reached for his blade, which he never kept far from him—even in sleep.

“Oh my God—d-did you have that w-with you all n-night? While I was sleeping right n-next to y-you?” Bobbi demanded, when he pulled his sheath out from under his head bolster and drew the long, shining silver blade from it.

“Actually, you were sleeping *on top* of me—or near enough,” Dragon pointed out. “And of course I had it with me. How else am I supposed to defend myself and you if an assassin from another Clan somehow breaches our defenses and comes in during the night?”

Her eyes got even wider.

“Is that something you r-really have to w-worry about? I m-mean, does it happen a l-lot?”

Dragon frowned at the way her teeth were still chattering despite the fact that he had pulled her close.

“It has only happened in our family compound once in the past twenty

cycles,” he told her. “We repelled the attack and launched a counter strike against the fucking Poison Fangs—that’s the Clan that came after us.” He smiled with grim satisfaction. “They pay us tribute now and every one of their males is missing his dominant hand.”

Her face went pale.

“You chopped off their *hands*?”

“Only one of them,” Dragon assured her. “My Sire saw fit to let them keep their non-dominant hands—and their lives. They were lucky.”

“If that’s your idea of lucky, I don’t want to know what *unlucky* looks like,” Bobbi muttered.

The little *feela* was still shivering a bit, but at least her teeth had stopped chattering as she absorbed some of Dragon’s heat. Still, they couldn’t sit like this all day with him holding her—as intriguing as the prospect was, he had duties to perform.

Without another word, he drew the shining silver blade across his wrist—just as the male in his dream had—and offered it to Bobbi.

She made a face and drew back at first but when Dragon gave her a stern look, she sighed.

“All right—I’ll *try* it. But don’t blame me if it makes me puke.”

Then she bent her head and put out her tongue. Dragon felt her lapping—very tentatively—at the blood on his wrist. Her long, flame-colored hair fell over his hand and arm, the silky strands seeming to set his skin on fire with light. He couldn’t help thinking again how beautiful she was—how soft and small and warm.

After a moment, she looked up and licked her lips.

“You know—it’s like the woman in the dream said—it doesn’t *taste* like blood at all. It’s like...” She frowned. “There was this cinnamon red-hot candy I used to love when I was a little girl. *That’s* what your blood tastes like—hot and sweet—only it doesn’t burn my tongue.” She licked her lips again. “It’s actually really good.”

“Have some more,” Dragon told her. He was glad she liked it but that wasn’t the main point—he was hoping it would work like it had in his dream. If it did, he wouldn’t have to worry so much about her freezing when he was gone.

She lapped some more and then sucked from his wrist eagerly. As she fed from him, Dragon wrapped his left arm more firmly around her. Feeding the little *feela* in this way seemed to strengthen his already strong feelings of possessiveness and protectiveness.

Mine, he heard that deep, inner voice growling inside him and he couldn’t have agreed more. Even if she hadn’t been in danger from Zerlix, he couldn’t have let her go—any more than he could spread his wings and fly into the sky without a ship.

It was an odd thought—an odd image—which seemed to resonate inside him. But before Dragon could think more about it, Bobbi looked up, licking her lips.

“You know...I think this is actually working. Here—let me try getting away from you for a minute.”

She slipped out from under his arm, which he had looped around her narrow shoulders, and took a deep breath of the chilled air. Then she nodded.

“Yes, it’s *definitely* working. I feel like I took a really strong drink of hard alcohol—it warms me right down to my toes.” She smiled at him.

“Good.” Dragon couldn’t keep the relief out of his voice. “I’m glad you won’t freeze in here today while I’m gone.”

“While you’re gone? Where are you going?” she demanded. “And why can’t I come too? I thought you wanted me with you all the time to keep me safe?”

“I told you I have duties to perform. And I want you with me when I’m *not* with Zerlix,” he corrected her. “The less my brother sees you, the better.”

“Well then what am I supposed to do—just sit in here in your room all day and be bored?” She frowned and crossed her arms.

“You could always watch more entertainment vids,” Dragon pointed out flatly. “You seemed to be enjoying the breeding program you were watching yesterday.”

“Oh, you...”

Her face got almost as red as her hair with embarrassment and Dragon felt the corners of his mouth twitching. He liked teasing her, he thought. Her tiny stature already made her almost unbearably cute but she was even more adorable when she got angry.

“You know I wasn’t watching that on purpose,” she burst out at last.

“Oh, no?”

Grinning at her, Dragon stood and put his hands on the lip of the sleeping pit. With one smooth move, he hoisted himself up and out of the pit and grabbed a pair of black leather trousers to put on.

“No!” she insisted. “I just pressed the wrong buttons on that weird round remote of yours. Hey—are you going to just leave me down here?”

She was standing on her tiptoes, her little face tilted up as she tried to

stare over the lip of the sleeping pit. Again, Dragon couldn't help thinking how tiny and cute she was. He had never felt this way about a Saurian woman—they were never 'cute' no matter what size they were.

Maybe it was the fact that Bobbi's eyes were so big and blue or the way her hair seemed to surround her head in a mane of reddish-gold, making her face look so small and vulnerable. Or maybe it was those cute little freckles that decorated the bridge of her button nose. But for whatever reason, Dragon had the urge to pick her up and cuddle her close, pressing his face to her hair to breathe in her warm, feminine fragrance.

He succumbed to the first part of this desire. Kneeling beside the lip of the sleeping pit, he reached in and caught her by the waist.

"Oh! Oh my goodness!" she squeaked as he lifted her and reluctantly sat her down on her feet. He would rather have kept her in his arms, he admitted to himself. But he knew Bobbi wouldn't like that.

"Sorry—did I frighten you?" he asked. He was kneeling and she was standing but they were still almost eye-to-eye. He liked this position, Dragon decided, it made it easier for him to see her lovely face instead of always looking down.

"N...no. You didn't scare me." She put a hand to her chest, as though to still her heart—and also to make certain the fur cover was still wrapped firmly around her. "I just...wasn't expecting to be picked up like that. And you should be careful—you're going to hurt your back! I'm not exactly a lightweight, you know."

Dragon chuckled.

"What do you mean? You're such a tiny little thing I could carry you all day and not feel it a bit."

“But—“ she began.

Just then, there was a rapping at the door and Dragon heard a familiar voice calling his name.

“Oh—that’s my mother,” he said, frowning. “Be sure to keep that blanket wrapped around you. I wouldn’t want her to think I’d been breeding you against her orders.”

“No, we certainly wouldn’t want that,” she muttered sarcastically, but he noticed that she pulled the patchwork fur blanket more tightly around herself anyway.

When he was sure she was ready, Dragon went to open the door.



*R*es. Tizlah bustled in, bearing a steaming tray and with several garments draped over one arm.

“Good morning!” she said brightly, her forked tongue flickering as she spoke. “And how was your slumber?”

This question was obviously directed at Bobbi, who smiled brightly at the Saurian woman.

“Oh, just fine! Wonderful, in fact,” she said quickly.

Then she mentally berated herself—*why* did she keep acting like she was a guest in this house instead of a prisoner—which was what she *really* was? But she couldn’t seem to help herself—she’d been raised in a proper Southern household with a huge emphasis on good manners. The minute Dragon’s mother spoke to her, she seemed to trigger Bobbi’s politeness reflex.

“I’m so glad to hear it,” Res. Tizlah said. “And I hope my son didn’t try to breed you last night?” she added, arching one scaly eye-ridge at Dragon.

“Uh, no. No, of course not,” Bobbi answered quickly. She could feel the hot blood rushing to her face in a blush and she felt like a guilty teenager denying that she had done anything wrong. “We...we just slept—that’s all,”

she said.

“Well, good.” Res. Tizlah nodded in apparent satisfaction. “Now, I’ve brought you some hot *gizla* porridge and some meat tea for your First Meal. And I’ve got a few garments I think might fit you,” she said, as she sat the tray down and held out her arm to display the clothes draped over it.

“Oh, thank you!” Bobbi exclaimed. “Breakfast, er, First Meal smells delicious!”

“Help yourself.” Res. Tizla handed the tray to Dragon and then pressed a button on the low table in front of the couch. The curving screen sank silently down into the wooden table, leaving a flat surface for the tray to sit on.

Bobbi dug in eagerly—she loved trying new and exotic cuisines. Her foodie tendencies were one reason she was never going to get skinny. Though her weight certainly didn’t seem to be a problem for Dragon—he had lifted her out of the sleeping pit as though she weighed no more than a pillow

She put that thought out of her mind and concentrated on the food. The *gizla* porridge reminded her a little of rice congee, with little savory bits of roasted meat throughout it and the meat tea was like beef broth. It was a very protein-heavy meal, but she supposed that was to be expected—the Saurians were pretty plainly carnivores, unlike the Orniths, who were strict vegetarians.

I just hope my body can process this much meat after living on a vegetarian diet for so long, she thought as she ate. But hopefully, as long as she took things slowly, she would be all right. And nothing seemed to be disagreeing with her—at least not so far.

“You have a good appetite,” Res. Tizlah said, nodding approvingly.

“You’re an excellent cook,” Bobbi returned, smiling at her. “I always

love trying new cuisines—that’s one of my favorite parts of my job as a Cultural Anthropologist.”

This last was directed at Dragon—a little dig to remind him that she had a job and he had taken her from it. But the big Kindred didn’t seem to take the hint. He just took another sip of his own meat tea and rumbled,

“Delicious, Mother Tizlah.”

“Thank you, son.” Res. Tizlah smiled at him and then looked at Bobbi. “Are you finished, dear? Would you like to try on some of the clothing I brought?” she asked.

“Oh yes—it’s so *awkward* just wearing a blanket,” Bobbi said, nodding down at the patchwork quilt she still had wrapped around herself.

“I understand completely,” Res. Tizlah said, nodding graciously. “Please take the garments into the bathing chamber and try them on—I’m anxious to see if they fit.”

“Thank you.” Bobbi gathered the bundle of clothing—which felt silky and smooth and heavy in her arms—and trotted into the bathroom with it.

Once she had shut the door behind her, she placed the armful of clothing carefully across the sink, which was high and had three knobs and spouts. It was dry at the moment, though, so she thought it was a good place for the clothes.

Then she went about figuring out how the toilet worked. It was made of some shiny black stone and it was high—*extremely* high, actually—so that she actually had to hoist herself up onto it. Once up there, she was finally able to let loose—which was good—she’d had to pee almost since the moment she’d woken up!

She could hear the low murmur of voices outside and she wondered what

Dragon and his adoptive mother were talking about. Was she telling him it was safe to “breed” Bobbi now? How embarrassing!

The thought should have repelled her, but she found instead that she was imagining how it would be to make love to a man so much bigger than herself. How would they even manage it? And how in the world would that huge shaft of his fit inside her? The thought gave her a sexy little shiver and she felt her nipples tighten with desire.

Hey, what’s wrong with you, thinking like that? an angry little voice shouted in her head. *You’ve been taken against your will to a whole different planet and that’s your kidnapper you’re thinking about like he was some sexy guy you met in a bar and decided to take home for a one-night stand! Stop it, Bobbi! You must have Stockholm Syndrome!*

Shaking off both the illicit thoughts and the little voice, she looked around for a way to flush the toilet. There was a handle hanging from a long chain with several buttons on it. Maybe one of them would do the trick.

Experimentally, she pushed the blue button on the side of the handle.

At once, something icy cold and wet hit her undercarriage.

Bobbi bit back a shriek of surprise and nearly jumped off the toilet before she realized what it was.

“Just some kind of bidet,” she told herself, putting a hand to her hammering heart. “God, but it’s so *cold!*”

If she hadn’t had some of Dragon’s blood, she was certain she’d be going into hypothermia right now. But sipping from the big Kindred seemed to have inoculated her against the freezing temperatures—though it still wasn’t pleasant to be squirted in her most delicate areas with what amounted to ice water.

Well, now her bottom was cold and wet but the toilet *still* wasn't flushed.

"Time to try another button," Bobbi muttered to herself. "I wonder what *this* one does."

Biting her lip and squeezing her eyes shut, she pressed the red button on the other side of the handle.

There was a *whooshing* sound and a gust of hot, dry air suddenly bathed her bottom. Bobbi gasped—it was so strong it nearly lifted her off the toilet seat! After a moment, it actually felt good, though. It was the warmest she'd been since she got to Saurous.

Well, except when you were sleeping naked all over Dragon, whispered a snarky little voice in her head. Bobbi did her best to push it away—she still had unfinished business to attend to. Her undercarriage was clean and dry but the toilet *still* wasn't flushed and she didn't feel comfortable leaving it like that.

She examined the handle on its long chain, but there were no more buttons to press. How in the world was she supposed to flush this damn thing? There was only one other thing she could think of to try.

Experimentally, she pulled on the handle, yanking it firmly down. At last, she heard a sound but this time it wasn't water or air. It sounded more like *kerflump*.

When she scrambled off the toilet and looked into it, she saw that a pile of sand had fallen down into the bottom of the deep bowl. As she watched, it was slowly sucked down the hole at the bottom. Then a very little bit of water squirted out the sides of the bowl, washing away the gritty residue of the sand and leaving the inner part of the toilet squeaky clean.

"Hmm, interesting," Bobbi murmured to herself. It was a good system

which didn't use nearly as much water as the toilets she was used to back home on Earth.

Of course, on Avria Pentaura, she'd used the communal waste pit and wiped herself with large *bantha* leaves, which grew all around it. The leaves, when broken, released a slippery sap which was a kind of natural cleanser. It had been a primitive arrangement, but an effective one, since the torn leaves also released a strong, fresh scent that covered the smell of the pit.

The Saurians seem to have more advanced technology than the Orniths, she thought, still looking into the sparkling toilet bowl. But their social practices couldn't be more different. Instead of a matrilineal society, they are clearly a patriarchy. While the Ornith females rule the roost and make the rules on Avria Pentaura, the Saurians have a much different way of life...

Suddenly, she realized what she was doing—she was writing a little academic article in her head, comparing and contrasting the two different species' cultures. Well, why shouldn't she? She had already spent six months with the Orniths and now it seemed like she was going to spend at least a month—or however long it took for the Kindred of the Mother Ship to locate and rescue her—here among the Saurians. Why not make the most of a bad situation and gather as much data as she could about the lizard people while she was here? Then she could write an article when she got home about the two different peoples.

I'll do it, Bobbi decided. But in order to manage it, she was going to have to get out of staying locked up in Dragon's rooms all day. She needed to get out and interact with Saurian society to see how it really worked and understand the motivations behind the Saurians' actions.

"Bobbi? Are you all right in there?" Dragon's voice called from the other

side of the door.

Bobbi jumped guiltily.

“Oh, uh, fine! Just fine!” she called back. “Just trying on these clothes!”

She shed the fur blanket and grabbed a piece of clothing at random. It turned out to be a kind of wrap dress in a silvery, dark blue color. It was made of some heavy, silky, cold fabric that would have chilled Bobbi to the bone if she hadn't had some of the big Kindred's warming blood, she was certain.

Quickly, she put the dress on and then tugged it closed, hoping she was wearing it correctly. The long sash wrapped around her waist twice, emphasizing her full breasts, which were very visible beneath the silky fabric. Bobbi really wished her nipples wouldn't poke out so much, but it wasn't like she could help it. The chilly air didn't make her shiver or her teeth chatter anymore, but it still affected the more sensitive parts of her anatomy.

Still, what else could she do but go out? She couldn't stay in the bathroom all day—not if she wanted to convince Dragon to let her out of the room while he was gone.

Making sure her sash was tied correctly, she opened the door and looked up at him.

“Well?” She made it a question and did a little twirl so he could see how the dress looked on her.

“Gods, you look fucking *gorgeous*.” His deep voice was hoarse as he took her in.

Bobbi blushed. She told herself she was just trying to charm her captor into giving her more freedom, but she couldn't help the warm rush of pleasure she felt in her midsection when his bronze eyes went half-lidded in

admiration as he looked at her.

“It was a good choice—that shade of blue suits your odd coloring,” Res. Tizlah remarked, coming to stand beside her adopted son. She frowned. “But what shall we do about your feet? They are so soft and small—you do not even have proper claws on your toes to protect them!”

“Oh, er...” Bobbi looked down at her small pale feet. She wore a size five shoe normally, but she hadn’t had to wear any at all on Avria Pentaura. There she had been walking on grass almost all the time and it was so warm, there was no need for shoes. But she had the feeling she would certainly need them on Saurous.

“I’m afraid she won’t be able to wear any of my boots,” Dragon rumbled. Stepping behind her, he put a foot beside her own. Comparing the two, Bobbi saw that his foot was twice as big as hers.

“No,” she said dryly, “I’m afraid not. They wouldn’t fit.”

“Wait—I think I have a solution,” Res. Tizlah snapped her scaly fingers. “Just stay right here—I’ll be back,” she said and hurried out of the room.

“Where do you think she’s going?” Bobbi asked.

“Don’t know.” Dragon’s eyes were still fixed on her new dress. “She’s right though—that color looks perfect on you. Makes your eyes look even bluer,” he rumbled.

“Oh, well...thank you.” Bobbi could feel her face getting hot again as a pleased rush of embarrassed pleasure swept over her at the way he was looking at her. God, she *really* shouldn’t feel this way about her kidnapper. What was wrong with her?

Dragon directed a penetrating look at her face.

“Did I say something to make you feel ashamed or embarrassed?” he asked softly.

“What? Why...why would you say that?” Bobbi demanded.

“Because of this...” Reaching out, he brushed one long finger gently over her hot cheek. “I’ve noticed that when you feel embarrassed or ashamed, your face gets almost as red as your hair,” he remarked. “I didn’t mean to embarrass you—I just wanted to let you know how beautiful you look, little *feela*.”

Bobbi bit her lip, a rush of contradictory emotions coming over her. Part of her wanted to snap sarcastically that she didn’t give a damn if he liked how she looked but another part of her wanted to blush even harder and thank him for the compliment.

Before she could decide which part to listen to, Res. Tizlah came bustling back into the room. She was holding what looked like some kind of black slippers in her hands. They looked a little like ballet flats with straps across the top and at the ankle.

“Here.” She held them out to Bobbi. “The last time a mammalian merchant came by and I bought boots for Dragon, I also got these female foot coverings. I bought them to try for myself out of curiosity, but they turned out to be much too small for me. And besides, I really have no need to cover my feet.”

She nodded down to the scaly appendages in question, which had six toes with long, curving black talons for nails. They made Bobbi think of the raptors’ feet she’d seen in dinosaur documentaries. Clearly, there was no need for Res. Tizla to wear shoes—her feet were perfectly adapted for the cold, harsh climate of Saurous.

“Thank you,” she said, accepting the little black slippers. She sat on the hard couch to try them on and found that, while they were a little big, they were adjustable with the use of the stretchy black strap which wrapped around her ankle. Once she had them adjusted, they fit quite well.

“Do they work?” Res. Tizlah asked anxiously.

“Yes, thank you.” Bobbi took a few steps to show her. “They’re perfect!”

Res. Tizlah beamed a happy look at her, which centered more in her yellow eyes than the rest of her flat face.

“I’m so glad! The great god Goeth must have known that a female mammalian was coming for my son!”

Bobbi only nodded gravely—again, she certainly wasn’t going to disparage anyone’s religion. And she didn’t feel inclined to point out that she hadn’t come for Dragon—rather, *he* had come for *her*. Because she just didn’t see how she could say that to Res. Tizlah, who was looking at her like a girl that her son has brought home on a date to meet his family—a girl that she approves of.

“Well now...” Res. Tizlah clapped her scaly, six-fingered hands together and sighed. “Now that we’ve got you all dressed, my dear, I’m afraid I must run to the kitchens. We have my husband’s feast tonight and I have so much to do!”

“Oh, can I help?” Bobbi asked quickly. “I know I don’t understand your cooking methods,” she added. “But I can help with the prep work—peeling vegetables or chopping ingredients. I’m a very fast learner.”

“Well, I don’t see why not—” Res. Tizlah began.

“No.” Dragon’s face was like a thundercloud. “You’re to stay safely locked in my rooms while I’m gone,” he told Bobbi. “For your own

protection—and for my peace of mind,” he added.

“But how am I supposed to learn the ways of your people if I don’t get to know them?” Bobbi protested.

She wanted to add, “You big jerk!” But she realized this would be counterproductive and might make Res. Tizlah dislike her, just when she was starting to warm up. So she softened her voice and gave the big Kindred a pleading look—though what she *really* wanted to do was let him have it.

“Please, Dragon—I *like* your mother and I think she has a lot she could teach me,” she said, appealing to Res. Tizlah with her eyes. “I’m sure I’d be safe with her to guide me.”

As she had hoped, the Saurian woman took her side at once.

“Son, let her come to the kitchens—I can use every pair of extra hands I can get,” she said to Dragon.

His frown deepened.

“Under no circumstances. She must be kept safe from Zerlix—he says that he was about to Claim Bobbi before I did, and now he wants her for his own!”

Res. Tizlah brushed this off with a wave.

“Oh dear—you two, always fighting like two canines over a bone!” she exclaimed. “You and your brother are on the same crew, Dragon. So you can keep an eye on Zerlix while *I* keep an eye on your little mammalian female. I’ll have her in the kitchen the whole day with me—I promise.”

“And I’ll stay right by your mother’s side. Please, Dragon—if you’re going to keep me here, I have to know how your society works!” Bobbi pleaded. Taking a chance, she hooked her arm through Res. Tizlah’s and

smiled at her. “Besides—I like your mother. I want to get to know her.”

The corners of Res. Tizlah’s lipless mouth turned up and she got a pleased expression in her yellow eyes.

“Thank you, my dear. I would like to get to know you as well. And you’re right—as my son’s new female, the sooner you learn our ways, the better.”

“Well...” Dragon sighed and ran a hand over his black hair, which was still slicked close to his skull. “All right,” he said at last. “On the condition that she is *never* out of your sight, Mother,” he said to Res. Tizlah. “I’m serious—Bobbi isn’t just some Pleasure Girl to be picked up and discarded on a whim. She’s special to me and I mean to keep her. She’s ***mine.***”

The last word was delivered in a deep, rumbling voice that Bobbi could feel in her bones. It had a strange double echo to it—almost as though another entity was speaking through the big Kindred. Which was a strange thought, but that was what came to her mind when she heard that, wild voice.

“***Mine,***” Dragon said again and, as he spoke, he gave her a burning look that made her tremble.

My God, he really means it, she thought faintly. He’s determined to keep me here and not let me go for anything!

She had known that the Kindred were possessive of their women, but she had never seen such an outright example of it before—especially not aimed at herself. She had never had a man look at her that way—with such burning, intense desire. Her ex-fiancé could barely be bothered to glance up from his work when she came in the room. But Dragon was looking at her with a single-minded intensity, like she was the only woman in the universe for him.

He’s looking at me like he wants to eat me up! Bobbi thought, putting a

hand to her rapidly beating heart. *Like he's the big bad wolf or something!*

Suddenly, she remembered something her friend Kat had told her—something about how Kindred males had a biological need to taste their women.

“They eat pussy like nobody’s business, doll,” Kat had told her with a giggle. *“They can’t help themselves—they crave it like us curvy girls crave chocolate cake!”*

They’d been having a girl’s night out and her friend had been drinking a few too many Margaritas, which made her extremely blunt. She had gone on for some time, soliloquizing about how her two Twin Kindred husbands, Lock and Deep, took turns going down on her, while Bobbi just shook her head and sipped her drink. At the time, she’d thought that Kat was just tipsy, but now she wondered...could it be true?

Uneasily, she tried to push the thought away. Why in the world would she think of something like that now? Dragon hadn’t been raised in the Kindred society, which apparently held the act of orally pleasuring a woman in high regard. He’d been raised by Saurians so he probably never even thought of such things—especially not in connection to her. Right?

“I’ll take good care of her, Son,” Res. Tizlah said, breaking the fraught silence which had somehow fallen after Dragon had Claimed Bobbi as his own again in that deep, wild voice. “She won’t be out of my sight for a moment—I swear it.”

“Well...all right then.” Dragon gave the two of them one last, intense look. “I’m trusting you to keep her safe, Mother Tizlah.”

“I will.” Res. Tizlah patted Bobbi’s arm. “Come on, dear,” she said, giving Bobbi that lipless smile again. “Let’s go into the kitchen and I’ll set

you to work peeling and chopping *bullah* bulbs. We need a three hundred of them for tonight's feast."

"All right. Goodbye, Dragon—I'll see you tonight."

Bobbi was turning to go but before she could, Dragon put one big hand on her shoulder and turned her to face him. Leaning down, he put his forehead against hers and looked into her eyes intently.

"Be well, Bobbi," he rumbled softly. "I will see you tonight at the feast."

His burning bronze gaze set Bobbi's heart pounding all over again. What was this forehead-to-forehead staring thing about, anyway? Was it the Saurian version of a kiss goodbye? That would certainly make sense, since the lizard people had no lips and so probably didn't kiss in the traditional way. But still, it was *intense*. She wanted to look away, but somehow she found she couldn't—she was held by his eyes and couldn't stop looking at him.

"Goodbye, Dragon. Er, be well," she answered uncertainly. "I'll...I guess I'll see you tonight."

He stroked her cheek once and then rose to tower over her again.

"Tonight at the feast," he repeated. Then he stepped aside, allowing Res. Tizlah to lead Bobbi out of the room and down a long, echoing corridor which was covered in blue and black tiles on all sides.



Bullah bulbs turned out to be huge, sulfurous root vegetables that smelled like extremely strong onions mixed with raw garlic. Each bulb was about as big as a head of cabbage and they ranged in colors from deep blue to bright violet.

Bobbi set to work with a will, stripping away the tough, outer layers of each bulb and then chopping them into fist-sized pieces with an enormous knife, before dumping them into a huge stewpot big enough to take a bath in. She kept going despite the strong fumes coming up from the noxious vegetables, which made tears run down her cheeks.

“Ugh!” she murmured and swiped at her streaming eyes with the sleeve of her dress. Res. Tizlah had assured her that the *bullah* bulbs would cook down into a delicious, jammy stew which would be seasoned with roasted bones, but at the moment, it was difficult to believe anything good could come from the pungent bulbs.

The Saurian woman had left Bobbi, after swiftly peeling and chopping the first bulb to show her how to proceed. She was somewhere in the huge kitchen, which was filled with Saurian women, all wearing aprons and all doing different tasks. But to be honest, Bobbi wasn’t sure where exactly Res. Tizlah had gotten to. She was somewhere in the echoing confusion, filled

with the sounds of chopping, grinding, boiling, and grating—and of course, the ever-present chatter of the women, who all seemed to know each other.

“Oh my, are you all right?” the Saurian women beside Bobbi asked. She was working with a pile of something that looked like enormous red carrots with purple fronds. She would rinse each carrot-thing in the sink, chop off the top, and then feed it into a long silver machine on the counter that sucked it in and spat out long, thin, red ribbons. She was then curling the ribbons into rosettes and placing them in rows on a baking dish.

“I’m fine.” Bobbi tried to smile at her though her eyes were streaming. “Just fine, why do you ask?”

“Well...your eyes are producing so much water,” the Saurian woman—who seemed younger than Res. Tizlah—said hesitantly. “Are you having some kind of reaction to the *bullah* bulbs?”

“I don’t think so.” Bobbi sniffed and swiped an arm over her watery eyes again. “It’s just the fumes—they’re pretty strong, don’t you think?”

“They are,” the Saurian woman admitted. “But why don’t you just put down your second eyelid to protect your eyes? Then maybe they wouldn’t water so much.”

“Oh, I don’t have a second eyelid,” Bobbi explained. “Do you, though? That’s fascinating—how useful!”

“I’m so sorry!” The Saurian woman looked abashed. “I didn’t know your kind didn’t have a second eyelid—I didn’t mean to give offense—truly I didn’t!” she said quickly. “Please—don’t tell Rep. Zerlix that I offended you.”

“Don’t be silly—you didn’t offend me!” Bobbi protested. “If anything, you *excited* me—I love to learn about different people,” she explained. “Tell

me, do you really have an extra eyelid?”

“Well...yes.” The Saurian woman nodded cautiously. “It’s very useful in the water,” she added tentatively. “Or in dust storms, of course.”

“I bet it is! I wish I had something like that for when I go swimming!” Bobbi exclaimed. “Er...I don’t suppose I could see it?” she asked, looking up at the other woman, who was considerably taller than she was—though not nearly as tall as a Saurian male or as tall as Dragon, for that matter.

“Well...sure.” Ducking her head, the Saurian female opened her yellow eyes with their slitted pupils wide, so Bobbi could see. As she watched, a thin, translucent lid slid down over the eye like a protective film before slowly sliding back up again.

“Oh, I see it!” she exclaimed. “That’s amazing!”

The female Saurian laughed nervously.

“Not really—all Saurians have second eyelids. I just didn’t know that mammals lacked them.”

“I certainly wish I had some now! Phew!” Bobbi blew out a breath and waved a hand over the latest bulb, which she had just split open. “These are so *strong*.”

“I’ll help you if you want—I’m almost done with my *geezers*.” The young Saurian woman gestured at the pile of reddish carrot-things, which was considerably smaller than it had been.

“I’ll take you up on that, if you’ll show me how to do what you’re doing and tell me what those, uh, *geezers* are going to taste like once they get baked,” Bobbi offered. “We can finish yours first and then finish mine. I’m Bobbi, by the way,” she added with a friendly smile.

“I am Keelah.” The young Saurian woman ducked her head shyly. “You’re Rep. Dragon’s new female, aren’t you?” she added.

“I suppose I am.” Bobbi nodded. “Are you one of Dragon’s sisters?” she added, for Res. Tizlah had told her, as they walked to the kitchen, that Dragon and Zerlix had several brood-mates who were female.

“I was so relieved when Zerlix finally cracked his shell, she’d told Bobbi. All my other eggs held females—I was certain I would have the shame of bearing an all-female brood! But then he poked his little head out and I knew everything was going to be all right,” she had finished with a fond smile.

But Keelah was shaking her head.

“I belong to Rep. Zerlix,” she whispered and there was an unhappy look in her yellow eyes—at least, Bobbi thought there was. She was still learning to read the Saurian faces around her, which had different facial expressions than what she was used to.

“You do?” she asked the other woman. “Where did he get you? Er... where were you when he *Claimed* you?” she amended.

“I was just a Pleasure Girl on the space docks.” Keelah spoke in a low voice. “Rep. Zerlix tried me and liked my services. So he paid the Claiming price to my owner and took me away with him. Now I live here—until he gets tired of me, that is.”

Bobbi was appalled at her confession. What a terrible life this poor girl had led—being sold on the docks to whatever male wanted her and then winding up with the sadistic Zerlix. The Orniths might be more primitive than the Saurians, but you didn’t see *them* pimping each other out, she thought indignantly.

“That must have been a hard life,” she said, trying to commiserate with

the other woman. “How old were you when...when you started working at the, uh, space docks?”

Keelah ducked her head again.

“Fifteen,” she whispered. “It’s not supposed to be allowed so young, but my owner got a special permit for me,” she added, looking down at her hands.

“Oh my—and how old are you now, if you don’t mind me asking?” Bobbi asked. It was still difficult for her to judge Saurian ages—they didn’t seem to get wrinkles like mammals did and of course you couldn’t judge by hair color since they had no hair.

“I’m eighteen,” Keelah murmured. “Rep. Zerlix bought me when I was seventeen and a half,” she added. “I’ve been here at the Crimson Blades family compound almost six solar months—much longer than many of the girls he chooses.”

“Is that right?” Bobbi said neutrally.

“Yes.” Keelah’s eyes grew wide. “I hope that he never tires of me! I do my best to please him.”

“What does he do when he’s done with his, uh, Pleasure Girls?” Bobbi inquired.

“Nobody knows.” Keelah shrugged her slim shoulders. “Some say that he sends them to rival Clans as presents to make peace—so the males there can use the girls as they see fit. But some say...” She dropped her voice to a whisper. “Some say he gets rid of them more *permanently*. I just hope that he keeps me. As I said, I do my best to please him.”

“But that’s not right,” Bobbi said, frowning. “You shouldn’t have to live that way—fearing that he’ll get rid of you, always depending on a man to

take care of you. Aren't there any independent females here on Saurous?"

A shocked look came into Keelah's yellow eyes.

"Independent females? But how could we live independently of men? Who would protect us during the conflicts and wars between the Clans?"

"Is the whole planet divided into Clan territories, then?" Bobbi asked.

"The Southern Continent is," Keelah told her. "It's all one big city divided up into Clan territories. But the Northern Continent isn't like that at all. There are families there that love each other. And..." She paused for a moment and Bobbi thought she looked like she might cry—if Saurians had been capable of producing tears, that was.

"What is it?" she asked gently. "What about the Northern Continent?"

"It's where I was taken from," Keelah admitted brokenly. "I was out playing with my brothers. My mother told me I was too old for such games, but my youngest brother, Garrish loved it so much. I told him to run and hide and that I would close my eyes and count. When I finished the count, I would come find him. But when I opened my eyes..."

She paused again, as though choked with emotion.

"Yes?" Bobbi murmured, gently urging her on.

"When I opened them, the raiders were standing there. They steal girls from the Northern Continent and bring them here, to the Southern Continent for sale. They...they had me before I even knew what was happening. And the next thing I knew, I was at the space docks being...being sold for the very first time."

Her words ended in a whisper and the look in her eyes was so sad, Bobbi nearly started crying. She wanted to put her arms around the other woman

and just hold her, but she didn't know how Saurian society felt about casual touching. She contented herself with rubbing Keelah's arm gently.

"I'm so sorry, Keelah. But...couldn't your parents come find you?"

The Saurian girl shook her head.

"They're poor farmers. They can't afford the money to hire a tracking team to locate me. But sometimes I...I miss them so *much*," she whispered.

"Of *course* you do," Bobbi said sympathetically. "Just like I miss my friends on Avria Pentaura and my mom and dad and sister back on Earth. Do the uh, men of the Southern Continent go all over the place stealing women, then?"

Keelah shrugged and nodded.

"It's common practice for them. Almost all of the Pleasure Girls have been stolen from somewhere else. No one would come and be one by choice, of course—especially not from the Northern Continent. Females are more free there—that they can even make a living for themselves in ways other than being wives or servicing men." She shook her head and began feeding more *geezers* into the slicing machine. "But not on the Southern Continent. Here a female of low birth can only be used by men until she is all used up and discarded."

"But that's horrible!" Bobbi protested.

The other girl shook her head listlessly.

"It's not so very bad. Especially in this house. Rep. Zerlix often gives us the red hand potion before he takes us—that makes everything much easier to bear."

"What is the 'red hand potion'?" Bobbi asked. They had finished with the

geezers and now her new friend started helping her with the *bullah* bulbs.

“It’s a formula that makes the sex act easier for females to bear,” Keelah explained as she peeled one of the enormous bulbs, releasing its pungent aroma.

“But how?” Bobbi asked in confusion. “Does it knock you out so you don’t feel anything?” She was thinking that this “red hand potion” must be some kind of roofie or something.

But Keelah shook her head.

“Oh no—nothing like that.” She frowned, as though trying to think how to explain. “It...makes you *eager* for the sex act rather than dreading it,” she said. “So eager that you’ll do almost...almost *anything* in order to get your male to breed you.”

She looked studiously down at the bulb she was working on as she spoke but Bobbi thought she could see a faint greenish tinge in her flat cheeks. Was she blushing in shame?

“So it’s some kind of mind-altering aphrodisiac, then?” she asked, frowning. “Keelah, you shouldn’t have to take something like that just to want to have sex. If you’re with the right guy—a man who truly loves and respects you—”

“Men love and respect their wives—not their Pleasure Girls,” Keelah interrupted her. “And I will never be a wife now. I have been used by too many men. The most I can hope for is that Rep. Zerlix is able to fertilize at least one of my eggs and that it hatches into a son for him. Then he would certainly keep me so that I could raise the broodling.” She shook her head. “But that’s not likely. The owner he bought me from had me go through the sterilization process—it makes all a female’s eggs so brittle they break even

as they form. So my chance of laying an intact, fertilized egg—especially one containing a male—is almost nothing.”

“Oh, Keelah—I’m so sorry!” Bobbi squeezed the other girl’s arm sympathetically. What a terrible life she’d had—prostituted at such a young age and then stripped of any chance of having children! Her heart ached for the female Saurian, who was so young and yet had already lost so much.

“It’s not so bad.” Keelah lifted her chin and tried to smile. “As I said, I’ve lasted here a lot longer than most of the Pleasure Girls that Rep. Zerlix brings home. Maybe he’ll decide to keep me forever.” She looked at Bobbi. “What about you? Do you think Dragon will keep you?”

“Oh, I think he’ll try,” Bobbi said grimly. She was thinking again about the Kindred of the Mother Ship. They were certain to come looking for her and when they did, there would probably be a bloody showdown. It might be better if she could escape on her own first. But how could that be accomplished?

“You think he’ll *try*?” Keelah echoed, her eyes going wide. “What do you mean by that? Are you afraid that another male will try to take you from him?” She lowered her voice confidentially. “I *had* heard that Rep. Zerlix was saying that he Claimed you first and he was determined to have you, whether Rep. Dragon agreed to give you up or not.”

“You did?” Bobbi wasn’t exactly surprised, but it *was* disconcerting to know that Zerlix was spreading his intentions to take her away from Dragon far and wide.

“Oh yes.” Keelah nodded solemnly. “There is some concern over what will happen. A Blood Feud between brothers of the same Clan is bad business—very bad business indeed. Some are saying that Rep. Dragon

should simply give you to Rep. Zerlix to keep the peace, since he is Rep. Dragon's Big Brother, after all."

The idea of being given over to the sadistic Saurian made Bobbi's blood run cold. But then she remembered the look in Dragon's bronze eyes and the strange, rumbling echo in his deep voice when he said, "***Mine.***"

"That's not going to happen," she said confidently.

"I hope not—for your sake," Keelah said and then her voice sank to a whisper. "For unless Rep. Dragon beats you unmercifully and uses you very hard, you're better off where you are."

Bobbi felt a stab of sorrow go through her for the Saurian girl. She understood what Keelah was saying—Zerlix abused her horribly. And yet, she wanted to stay in this abusive situation because things could get so much worse for her!

Poor thing! Bobbi thought. *If I do run away, I have to try and take her with me.*

But it was too early to start planning her escape yet. First she had to learn more about the Saurian culture and then she had to use that knowledge to her advantage.

"Dragon won't give me up," she said confidently. "He's Kindred—once they Claim a female, they don't let go of her for any reason."

"I hope you're right," Keelah murmured. "Well, that's the last of the bulbs," she added, wiping her six-fingered hands on the long, pale blue apron she wore. "Now we just have to get this pot to the floor cooker—it's much too big to lift onto the counter stove."

Bobbi took one handle and Keelah took the other. Between them, they managed to walk the enormous pot, now filled with chopped *bullah* bulbs, to

a far corner of the kitchen. Here Bobbi saw a dull metal plate, about half a meter by half a meter square. She and Keelah got the pot situated on it and then Keelah slapped a switch on the wall and the metal plate began to heat. It turned cherry red in no time and Keelah quickly got a paddle as big as an oar off its hook on the wall and began stirring the chopped bulbs with a slow, steady motion.

“We want them brown but not burned,” she told Bobbi, who was watching with interest. “Get some of the *uulah* oil from up there on that shelf and pour a bit in to help lubricate the chunks.”

Bobbi went where she was told and found an industrial sized jar of pale purple oil with a spout for pouring. She glugged in a good amount—until Keelah told her to stop—then watched as the other girl threw in a few large scoops of a dark gray powdery substance she called *voola*, (which tasted like salt to Bobbi,) and several large ladles of a sticky, pale blue, honey-like syrup.

The Saurian girl did all this without measuring anything and Bobbi hoped uneasily that it would come out all right. But Keelah seemed to know what she was doing and by the time the chopped bulbs had cooked down to a soft consistency, she realized what they were making reminded her of.

“Oh, this is like a recipe from my home planet called French onion soup!” she told Keelah. “First you have to chop an ungodly amount of onions, then you cook them down and caramelize them and then you add stock or broth.”

“We are about to add roasted bones and the meat broth in just a moment,” Keelah assured her. “I think you’ll like the result—it might not be exactly like your ‘French onion soup’ but it really is delicious.” She looked at the pot with longing in her yellow eyes. “I hope I get to have some.”

“Why wouldn’t you?” Bobbi frowned. “After all this hard work? You certainly deserve some.”

“Oh, this is all feast food,” Keelah assured her. “It’s not for the likes of Pleasure Girls—even if they have been Claimed. Of course, there might be leftovers. Or…” She brightened. “Rep. Zerlix *might* even choose me to sit beside him at the head table! If he does, I’ll get to have some for sure.” She sighed longingly. “It would be a nice change from the usual nutritional paste and stale bone meal bread we get in Rep. Zerlix’s harem.”

“Harem?” Bobbi frowned. “How many girls do you live with, anyway? I mean, how many has Zerlix, uh, Claimed?”

“Oh, there are at least twenty of us at the moment, though the numbers differ according to Rep. Zerlix’s taste and how often he gets bored,” Keelah told her. “When I first came, there were almost thirty—but that really was too many,” she added in a hushed voice, glancing around to make certain no one was listening to them. She leaned closer to Bobbi and murmured, “I do not think Rep. Zerlix’s allowance is enough to feed and clothe and house so many. Why, we were three to a palate and there wasn’t enough paste and bread to go around—we were nearly *starving*.”

“What happened?” Bobbi asked.

“Oh, well Komendant Vizlar told Rep. Zerlix that he had to let some of the girls go,” Keelah explained. “He said there were too many and at least ten must be sent as peace offerings to rival Clans.” She shivered. “Thankfully, I was still new at the time and so Rep. Zerlix hadn’t tired of me yet. I’m not certain what would happen to me if his father ordered him to get rid of some of his Pleasure Girls now.”

“Hopefully that won’t happen,” Bobbi said. But she could see that

eventually it was *bound* to happen. Zerlix was a bastard and a narcissist—he wouldn't be content to keep the same women for a long period of time. He would want new ones—new toys to vent his frustrations on and feed his fantasies. Because to a male like him, women were just playthings to be used until they broke and then discarded.

“Well, it's almost time to add the bones and broth.” Keelah frowned as she looked into the enormous pot, where the *bullah* bulbs were slowly caramelizing. They had cooked down to less than half of their original volume and were turning a pale bluish-purplish-brown color. They smelled really good, Bobbi thought. Not exactly like French onion soup, but not far from it, either.

“Would you like me to go get them? The bones and broth, I mean?” she offered.

“Oh goodness, no! You couldn't carry them—they're *chunga* bones—too big and heavy for a female to life!” Keelah exclaimed. “But if you could please go tell Res. Tizlah that we're ready for them, she'll have two of the guards carry them over on a roasting pan. Do you think you can find her?”

“I'm sure I can,” Bobbi said confidently. “She has to be somewhere in the kitchen, right?”

“Either there or back in the pantry,” Keelah told her and pointed to the far end of the large, crowded room where there was a separate storage room. “If you can't find her out here, she'll most likely be in there.”

“I'll find her,” Bobbi said. “You just keep stirring the bulbs.”

She left her new friend and went looking through the kitchen. Saurian women were everywhere—chopping and stewing and mixing and making. There were clouds of steam coming from boiling pots and pans and many

different cuts of meat dressed in different ways for roasting. It was shaping up to be a true carnivore's feast, Bobbi thought.

In one corner she saw the Ornith eggs lined up neatly in their long packing crates—apparently they would be cooked last. Someone had managed to get a twelfth egg too, so there were an even dozen. Bobbi wondered what hapless Ornith they had taken it from and hoped that she hadn't been hurt, whoever she was.

Though she found the lizard people of Saurous interesting, her heart was still back on Avria Pentaura, with the kind and thoughtful residents of the little village she'd called home for the past six months. That was hardly surprising, though, since she had only been kidnapped yesterday, she thought.

She was just about to give up on finding Res. Tizlah, who she couldn't seem to locate anywhere, when one of the Saurian male guards grabbed her by the shoulder.

“Hey, you're the little mammalian female Rep. Dragon Claimed, right?”

“Yes I am and you'd better take your hands off me if you don't want him to chop them off,” Bobbi said icily.

“Sorry!” He withdrew his black-clawed, six-fingered hand at once. “I was just told that you're wanted in the pantry.”

“By Res. Tizlah?” Bobbi asked hopefully. She remembered Keelah saying that if she couldn't find the Saurian woman anyplace in the kitchen she ought to look there.

“In the pantry,” the guard repeated, jerking his head, his forked tongue flickering. “Go on, you're wanted.”

“Fine,” Bobbi said shortly. She walked past him and then past a wall that held an enormous oven which seemed to be roasting an entire carcass of

some animal that had to be as big as a Bison. Past the oven, which was giving off a sweltering heat that was even too hot for Bobbi in this freezing world, she saw a door that seemed to lead into a storeroom of some kind.

There—that must be the pantry, she thought to herself. *I’m sure I’ll find her there.*

“Res. Tizlah?” she called, as she walked through the door and into a room filled with row upon row of shelves filled with dry and canned ingredients. “I’m here. The *bullah* bulbs are ready for the bones and broth. They—”

But the words died on her lips as a tall, scaly figure stepped out from behind one of the many shelves. It was a Saurian, all right, but it *wasn’t* Res. Tizlah.

“Hello, little female,” hissed Zerlix. “So nice of you to come.”



“Where is he? Where the fuck did he go?” Dragon turned in a circle, heedless of the bodies of the fallen Clan members around him.

There had been a fight—a needless and pointless one, as far as he was concerned. Zerlix had started it by insulting the leader of the main crew of the Poison Daggers—a Clan who the Crimson Blades had previously shared an alliance with. But Dragon sincerely doubted their alliance would last now—in fact, they’d be lucky if they didn’t go to war.

Normally, when the crews of two rival Clans met on the borders of their territories, they simply nodded silently and passed each other. At most, they might exchange a word or two of greeting. But the moment Zerlix had seen the Poison Daggers crew, he had seemed intent on picking a fight.

“Hey, Lavish!” he’d shouted at the head of the crew. “Get off our territory!”

The other male had bristled, of course.

“Old Town is Poison Daggers territory,” he’d replied stiffly. “The last treaty says so.”

“Oh yeah?” Zerlix had crossed the street in question and gotten right up in the other crew leader’s face. “Well *I* say Old Town is Crimson Blades

territory. So get the *fuck* off our *turf*.”

Dragon had been appalled, though of course he had followed his Big Brother. As the second in command, he had to back up the crew leader, even if he was being an asshole. Still, he had tried to stop things before they escalated.

“Zerlix, what are you doing? Come on,” he’d growled, putting a hand on the Saurian’s shoulder to try and pull him back. “Old Town is their territory now and you know it—it was in the last treaty our Sire signed.”

“Yeah? Well maybe I’ve decided to take it *back*.” Zerlix had shaken off his hand and pressed his flat, scaly face into Lavish’s. “Get *off* our *turf*,” he snarled again.

“The *fuck* we will!” the other crew leader had snapped. “Get out of my face, Zerlix!”

“*Make me*,” Zerlix hissed and shoved the other male, so hard that Lavish went flat on his ass.

And then, of course, the fight was on.

Though it was wrong and ridiculous, Dragon couldn’t refuse to fight. The honor of their Clan was at stake and his own life, as well as the lives of his crewmembers, were on the line.

He went into killing mode, as he always did, his vision going red and his body acting on instinct. The Vision Kindred part of his heritage allowed him to see every opponent’s weaknesses in a split second and exploit it ruthlessly.

He favors his left side, a little voice seemed to whisper in his head as he faced off against the rival gang’s leader. *Slip around to the right—he’s too slow to block a blow there. His knife hand is weak. He’ll go for his blaster—keep him from getting to it. Slit his throat and move on to the next.*

And the next and the next and the next...

He wove between his opponents, listening to that little voice in his head and doing a graceful, lethal dance. Killing was almost too easy—it always had been for him. In no time, all but one member of the Poison Daggers crew was dead at his feet.

Dragon had been about to pursue the final member, who was fleeing as fast as he could, when a voice in his head whispered,

Where's Zerlix?

It was a good question. Looking around, he saw that his Saurian brother was gone. He himself was spattered with blood, with a dripping blade clenched in one hand. The rest of the crew were standing back, looking at him in something like awe.

“Damn, Dragon,” one of them whispered hoarsely. “You really fucked their shit up!”

“Yeah—I guess the Crimson Blades can claim Old Town as part of our territory again,” another one agreed. “You shed enough blood to draw a whole new dividing line, Dragon!”

“Never mind about that,” Dragon growled. “Where's Zerlix?”

“Zerlix?” They all looked around, frowns of confusion on their stunned faces.

“Um, I think he left earlier, after you killed Lavish,” one of the crew said.

“You mean he ran away from the fight?” another asked. “The fight that *he* started?”

“I dunno.” The other male shrugged uneasily and lashed his forked tongue. Everyone knew that to retreat was a sign of cowardice but not a

single one of them had the guts to apply the word “coward” to their leader, who was also the only biological son of Komendant Vizlar.

“Maybe...maybe he figured Dragon had it handled and he needed to take care of something else,” one of them offered weakly.

“Something else—right,” Dragon growled and a picture of Bobbi flashed in his mind’s eye. Her petite, curvy figure, her long, wavy, flame-colored hair, her big blue eyes and the smattering of freckles across the bridge of her cute little nose...

Then he saw Zerlix finding her and taking her while he, Dragon, was busy with the fight. The fight that Zerlix had started.

He picked the fight on purpose, he realized suddenly. To distract me so he could go after her.

“Dragon—” one of the crew began tentatively.

But Dragon was already pushing past them. As he got to the end of the street, he broke into a dead run. He had to get to Bobbi before it was too late.

Unless it already was.



“What...what are you doing here?” Bobbi demanded, backing away from the huge, reptilian form. Zerlix might be a head shorter than Dragon, but he was still well over a head taller than her and he probably weighed twice as much as she did. She couldn’t help staring at the long, curving black claws at the ends of his scaly fingers and the long, thin rows of needle-sharp teeth that lined his lipless mouth.

“What am I doing here? Why, waiting for *you*, of course little female,” Zerlix hissed, taking a step forward. “Don’t worry though, I’m not here to Claim you—not yet, anyway.”

“That’s good because I belong to Dragon!” Bobbi said.

Part of her couldn’t believe she was saying that she belonged to a man but another part—a primal part—recognized that, at least on Saurous, belonging to Dragon was her only defense against rape and death.

Her words didn’t seem to perturb Zerlix at all, however.

“Yes, yes—for now, you do,” he said, taking another step towards her. “But not for long, little mammalian. Soon you will be mine.”

“I don’t think so.” Bobbi raised her chin. “Dragon’s never going to give me up. He’s Claimed me as his own—he even told your mom that he was

planning to keep me.”

“That’s what *he* thinks,” Zerlix hissed, his forked tongue slithering out on the last word. “But mark my words, little female, before the end of the feast tonight, he will *give* you to me of his own free will. And what’s more, *you* will be eager to come to me—eager to let me fuck you—*spike* you.”

“In your dreams,” Bobbi scoffed. “You disgust me, Zerlix—I’ll *never* be yours.” The door was right behind her now—she only needed a few more steps to get out of the storeroom. She just didn’t want to turn her back on the big Saurian.

Just a few more steps, she told herself. Just a few more...

And then her back hit something hard and two scaly hands clamped over her shoulders like a vise.

“Got her, boss.” It was the voice of the guard who had directed her to the storeroom earlier, Bobbi realized with a sinking heart. “She’s not goin’ *anywhere*,” he said.

“Good—hold her,” Zerlix commanded. He was still advancing on Bobbi and now he reached down and unfastened the leather trousers he wore. A scaly corkscrew dick with a sharp, pyramid-shaped head at its tip suddenly sprang into sight. It was rather thin—at least compared with the one Bobbi had seen on the Saurian porn station—but extremely long.

At least as long as my entire arm! she thought in dismay. *Oh my God—what am I going to do now?*

“You know, I’ve never been with a mammalian female before, but I’ve heard they have exceptionally soft, wet orifices,” Zerlix remarked, taking another step towards her. “That would be quite a change from a Saurian slit. Our females are as dry as the desert inside—you have to spike them hard to

pierce the egg sac and fertilize their eggs.” Reaching out, he trailed one scaly finger down Bobbi’s cheek. “Tell me, little female, will I have to spike *you* as hard as one of my own kind?”

“You won’t get a chance to...to do that to me at all!” Bobbi kept her chin up and glared defiance at him, though her stomach was churning and it felt like ice water had replaced all the blood in her veins. “Dragon’s going to be here any minute!”

“No he won’t—I left him fighting for his life against a whole crew of Poison Daggers,” Zerlix scoffed. “The big idiot didn’t even realize I’d gone. But don’t worry, little female, I won’t spike your slit—not just yet. Although, I thought I might give you a preview of what’s coming to you.”

“You mean your freakish corkscrew dick?” Bobbi spat. “That skinny thing doesn’t scare me!”

Zerlix’s greenish-yellow eyes narrowed.

“It *should* little female, because you’re about to get a taste of it *right now*.” He gestured to the guard who was still gripping her shoulders. “Put her on her knees. *Now!*”

The scaly hands on Bobbi’s shoulder pressed down mercilessly. Though she tried to stay upright, she was forced to her knees. Now Zerlix was looming over her, a sadistic gleam in his alien eyes.

“You see,” he told Bobbi, waving his disgusting dick in her face. “Saurians aren’t much good at giving oral pleasure. We have such long, sharp teeth, you know and of course, none of those fleshy mouth parts you mammals have to cover them with during the oral act,” he went on.

Lips, he’s talking about lips, Bobbi thought, feeling sick as she winced away from the bobbing head of his dick.

“And you mammals have such blunt little teeth—not sharp at all,” Zerlix remarked. “Which means a male could slip his spike right into that soft little mouth and down that sweet throat of yours, little female.”

Bobbi eyed the pyramid-shaped head of his dick. It was dripping a thin, viscous green fluid that looked like poison, though it was probably just the Saurian version of precum. Though it disgusted her, it wasn't the liquid that worried her the most—it was the needle-sharp tip of his alien cock.

He'll perforate my esophagus if he tries to shove that thing down my throat, she thought, feeling cold all over. I'll choke to death on my own blood!

Part of her wanted to beg and plead, but Bobbi had never been the begging and pleading type. She lifted her hand and swatted the long corkscrew dick away contemptuously.

“Get that thing out of my face. I might not have teeth like a Saurian, but I promise you that anything you shove in my mouth, I'm biting it off,” she snapped.

Zerlix's slitted eyes narrowed and he hissed in displeasure.

“You'll be sorry when you're given to me later tonight, you little bitch. And believe me, you'll be eager to spread your vaginal slit for me when I'm ready to spike you!”

“You wish!” Bobbi spat. “You must be delusional if you think—”

But just then, a deep, familiar voice growled,

“Get the fuck away from my female!”



The guard who was holding Bobbi down suddenly let go of her shoulders and scrambled away.

“Rep. Dragon!” she heard him saying. “Holy shit! I didn’t have anything to do with it, all right? I swear I didn’t!”

The abject fear in the Saurian’s voice made Bobbi turn her head. She looked up...and up and up at the big Kindred. Maybe it was just because she was still on her knees but Dragon seemed to have grown bigger somehow—if that was even possible. He was looming in the storeroom doorway, a long, curving blade clutched in one hand.

Bobbi recognized the knife as the same one he had used to cut his wrist that morning to let her drink from him, but this time the bright silver blade had been obscured by an oily dark green substance that dripped on the floor.

Crap, is that blood? Saurian blood? she thought, feeling sick. *Oh my God—what the Hell has he been doing?*

Then she remembered Zerlix bragging that he had left the big Kindred in a fight for his life against the Poison Daggers, who she assumed must be another Clan. He must have thought the fight would keep Dragon busy long enough that he could do whatever he wanted to her.

He had been wrong. And now, Bobbi had the feeling he was about to pay.

It wasn't just the way Dragon had grown bigger and the possessive anger in his deep voice that made her think so. It was the way his bronze eyes had changed. There were flames in them now—as though his very soul was on fire and burning out of control.

There's fire inside him, she thought numbly. And it's going to come out and burn Zerlix to ashes!

The thought didn't make any sense, but somehow she couldn't shake it. When Dragon spoke again, he had that strange echo in his voice, that deeper, wilder tone that almost sounded like someone or something else was speaking through him.

“How dare you touch my female?” he growled at Zerlix. ***“I'll kill you for even coming near her!”***

The fury in his face was frightening to see, as was the dark green blood spattered on his clothing.

But none of it seemed to faze Zerlix, who simply gave the big Kindred an arrogant grin.

He feels safe because he's the son of the main mob boss—the Komendant or whatever, Bobbi thought. He thinks Dragon won't dare to lay a finger on him, no matter what he does, because of his status as the only biological son.

But looking at Dragon's face, she didn't think Zerlix was *quite* as safe as he thought he was. Zerlix, however, remained unfazed.

“Hello, Little Brother. Hope you don't mind, your little female and I were just getting better acquainted.” He cocked his head to one side and gave Bobbi a wink. “Weren't we, sweetheart?”

A deep, rumbling growl rose in Dragon's chest—a murderous sound that could only precede carnage and death. It was an explosive situation and Bobbi got to her feet slowly and started backing away. She didn't know what kind of violence the big Kindred was about to unleash, but she could tell it was going to be bad.

Something told her this moment of confrontation had been a long time coming. She remembered the awful, sad story Dragon had told her about his adoptive brother biting the head off his pet, right in front of him. And there must have been many other, similar incidents.

Whatever justice Dragon was now about to exact, she had a feeling that Zerlix richly deserved it.

It's about to happen, she thought, hiding behind one of the large wooden shelves and peering out between the canned goods stored there. *Dragon's going to unleash Hell on his brother and then who knows what's going to happen next?*

But the expected confrontation never came. Because at that moment, just before Dragon pounced, a female voice in the doorway said,

“What in the world is going on in here, boys? What are the two of you doing?”



Res. Tizlah pushed her way into the storeroom, glaring at her two sons, who were facing off against each other.

“Dragon, what in the world is wrong with you?” she demanded. “And Zerlix, why do you have your equipment out? Put that away *at once!*”

Dragon turned his glare from Zerlix to his adoptive mother.

“You told me you would keep Bobbi safe and far away from him,” he said, gesturing at Zerlix. “And then I come in here and find him about to rape my female—the female *I* Claimed as my own!”

“Now, surely it’s not like that!” Res. Tizlah protested. “And I *was* keeping Bobbi safe! I put her to work peeling and chopping the *bullah* bulbs.” She shot a glance at Bobbi, who had stepped out from behind the shelves. “I don’t know *how* she got in here to cause all this trouble!”

“I wasn’t trying to cause trouble—I came looking for you, to let you know it’s time to add the bones and broth to the stewpot,” Bobbi said, her voice shaking only a little. She was more glad than she could say that Res. Tizlah had come in to break up the impending violence, but she still didn’t want to be blamed for it. She stepped quickly to the Saurian woman’s side, keeping her distance from both Zerlix and Dragon.

“Well, you shouldn’t have come in here, it’s not safe! I put you with a partner so you wouldn’t be alone!” Res. Tizlah scolded. She scowled at Bobbi and gave a long-suffering sigh. “Never mind though—I suppose there’s no harm done.”

No harm done? I was nearly raped! Bobbi wanted to shout. But before she could open her mouth, Zerlix opened his.

“The female *should* be mine. I saw her first, Mother!” he protested.

“Hush now and stop causing trouble.” Res. Tizlah shook a finger at him. “Your brother has never Claimed a female before, so you let him have her, Zerlix. Don’t be so selfish.”

It’s like she thinks I’m a toy the two of them are fighting over, Bobbi thought, glancing at the Saurian woman. *She doesn’t realize—or won’t **let** herself realize how close these two just came to killing each other!*

Zerlix didn’t seem to realize how close he’d come to death—or at least a very severe beating by the enraged Dragon—either. He crossed his arms over his chest and glared at the big Kindred.

“You can have her—*for now,*” he emphasized. “But we’ll just see what happens at the feast tonight.”

Then he tucked his corkscrew dong back into his trousers and swaggered out, bumping Dragon’s shoulder aggressively with his own as he passed him.

A low growl rose in Dragon’s throat, but Res. Tizlah put a hand on her adopted son’s shoulder.

“I’m sorry, son—I didn’t realize he’d be here,” she said. “I was sure that your little mammalian would be safe in the middle of the crowded kitchen.”

“I should never have let her leave my rooms.” Dragon’s voice was deep

and angry. He turned to Bobbi. “Come—we’re going.”

“But you can’t just drag me around wherever you want!” she protested. “I’m still helping in the kitchen. I mean you can’t—”

But apparently, Dragon was through listening. Leaning down, he swung her up over his shoulder in the exact same way he had when he’d kidnapped her the day before.

“Hey! *Hey!*” Bobbi shouted and beat on his broad shoulders. But there was no way she was getting free of his grip. She had to deal with being carried like a bag of flour through the crowded kitchen with all the Saurian women watching as Dragon took her back to his rooms.



Bobbi had no idea what lay in store for her back in the big Kindred's rooms. Would Dragon be angry with her? Blame her for the situation he'd found her in? Res. Tizlah certainly seemed to blame her—she had scolded Bobbi as though she were a naughty child who had caused the trouble between Zerlix and Dragon in the first place. But then, she had scolded her sons the same way, seemingly ignorant of the imminent violence about to erupt between them.

Whatever goes down between those two, it's been building for years, Bobbi thought, from her upside-down position over Dragon's broad shoulder. It's not my fault—I'm just the catalyst. The spark that lights the fuse that's been growing between them all this time.

But would Dragon understand that? Or would he transfer the rage she'd seen on his face from Zerlix to her? Would he blame her and beat her for nearly getting raped?

It wasn't a sensible or right way to think and behave, but Bobbi knew that many, *many* cultures blamed the woman who was assaulted rather than her attacker. And Saurian society certainly fit the mold for that kind of behavior.

So when Dragon carried her into his room, shut the door behind him, and put her on her feet, she was prepared to run and hide if she had to. She

couldn't get the sight of his blazing eyes out of her head.

Just like the eyes of the man in the dream we both had, she thought. That's what his eyes looked like!

But she was too frightened to concentrate on the strange likeness between Dragon's eyes and the man in her dreams. She was waiting for the reprimand—and possibly the beating that might come with it.

So she was completely surprised and taken aback when Dragon dropped to his knees before her and took her shoulders in his big hands.

“What happened, Bobbi?” he asked. His voice was tight with emotion but it sounded more like anxiety than anger. “What did he do to you? Did he hurt you?” he demanded, scanning her up and down, as though looking for injuries.

“N-no,” Bobbi stuttered, shaking her head rapidly. “No, he just talked at me. I, er, think he was *about* to try something—well, I *know* he was—but you came in just in time. He didn't touch me, Dragon—I swear,” she told him earnestly.

“Thank all the gods that ever were.” Dragon crushed her to him, wrapping his muscular arms around her and pulling her close. “Gods, if he'd hurt you...”

His deep voice was harsh and relieved and he was holding her so tightly, Bobbi could hardly get any air.

“Dragon, please...” she gasped. “Can't...breathe!”

“Sorry.” He pulled back and looked at her. “You're *sure* you're all right?”

Despite the fact that he was on his knees, they were still basically eye-to-

eye and the concern she saw in those bronze depths surprised and touched her.

“Fine—I’m fine,” she promised, putting her arms around his neck, while he kept his wrapped around her waist. She had the urge to soothe him for some reason, though she knew she ought to be mad about the way he had carried her around like a caveman.

Dragon shook his head. “I should never have let you out of my rooms. I should never have underestimated Zerlix’s desire to Claim you.”

“I can’t stay locked up *all* the time,” Bobbi protested. “And I *was* perfectly fine in the kitchen—I met a really nice girl and we got to be friends. I just had no idea that Zerlix was anywhere around there.” She shrugged. “I went looking for your mom and unfortunately, I found *him* instead. I...”

She shook her head as the reality of the situation hit her. She had nearly been assaulted—*would* have been assaulted if Dragon hadn’t come back at just the right time and found her.

“Hey, are you all right?”

He studied her face intently.

“F-fine.” Bobbi tried not to hear the way her voice was shaking. “I’m just fine,” she repeated, not sure if she was trying to convince herself or him.

“You don’t seem fine to me. Come here.” He pulled her close again, enfolding her in his embrace. Bobbi buried her face in his broad shoulder and breathed deeply, trying to quiet her emotions. She *had* to control herself. Breaking down like this would only make him even more certain he should lock her up—how would she ever get out of here if he did that?

But despite telling herself she had to calm down, a few tears still slipped down her cheeks.

“Sorry...I’m sorry,” she whispered, though she didn’t know what she was apologizing for. “I was looking for your mom and then the guard said she was in the storeroom and *he* was there instead and he was saying all these awful things...”

“Like what? What did he say to you?” Dragon’s voice rumbled in her ear as he stroked her back soothingly.

“He...he said you would *give* me to him,” Bobbi whispered. “And that... that I would...would...” But she couldn’t go on. Couldn’t repeat the crude things Zerlix had said about how ready she would be to have him and how she would beg for him to fuck her—to “spike” her as the Saurians said.

Just the thought made her stomach fist into a knot and she found she was crying harder. God, what was wrong with her? How could she be so calm and defiant while Zerlix was threatening her and break down completely now?

“I would never give you to anyone, little *feela*—least of all my brother,” Dragon rumbled in her ear. “You’re mine and I take care of what’s mine. I’m just sorry I failed you today.”

“You *didn’t* though,” Bobbi protested. “You...you got there in time.”

“Barely.” There was a possessive growl in his throat. “But I swear it won’t happen again.”

Bobbi wanted to point out that it wouldn’t have happened in the first place if he hadn’t kidnapped her off of Avria Pentaura, but she was beginning to wonder if that was true. Zerlix had shown a determination to get to her that went beyond mere lust—the Saurian bastard was like a psychotic stalker. She was more than halfway convinced that he would, indeed, have come after her if Dragon had left her on the other planet. Maybe keeping close to the big Kindred really *was* the only way to avoid the unwanted attentions of his

adoptive brother.

But what's going to happen to Dragon when the other Kindred come after me and he refuses to let me go? she wondered. *There's going to be a bloodbath—I have to get away before that.*

Well, good luck with that plan, since she was apparently going to be locked up in Dragon's rooms for the foreseeable future, she thought grimly. So she was surprised when he pulled away from her and looked into her eyes again, which were blurry with tears.

“Here,” he rumbled. Reaching into a pocket of his leather trousers, he pulled out a crumpled but clean piece of fabric and wiped her cheeks with it. “Can't have you crying—we need to get ready for the feast tonight,” he told her.

“So...I'm coming too?” Bobbi asked in surprise. “I mean, you're not going to leave me locked up in your rooms?”

He shook his head.

“You're my female—I must have you beside me at the head table. But don't worry, little *feela*,” he added. “I'll be with you every moment. Zerlix won't get anywhere *near* you—I swear it.”

Bobbi couldn't help remembering how the sadistic Saurian had promised her that Dragon would hand her over and that she would be eager to let him “spike” her. But that must have been a lot of talk on his part, she decided. There was no way Dragon was letting her go. And no way she would ever want that scaly, corkscrew dong with its spiked tip anywhere *near* her.

Going to the feast would be a good thing, she told herself. It would be a great way to observe the Saurian holiday traditions and food—and it would make a great addition to her article comparing the lizard people of Saurous to

the inhabitants of Avria Pentaura.

She just hoped she would get back to Earth at some point to write it.



“Oh Bobbi, there you are! Are you all right?” Keelah looked at her anxiously, her lizard face showing concern in the slightly crinkled area between her scaly eyebrow ridges.

“I’m just fine—though I can see why you’d wonder after Dragon threw me over his shoulder and carried me off,” she said dryly.

She was in a huge dining area lined with black and white tiles, standing behind the chair she would be occupying at the head table. Dragon was a few feet away, speaking to a Saurian male she thought might be his adoptive father. Though he had his back turned to her, he glanced over his shoulder every so often, obviously keeping tabs on her.

“Did...did he beat you *very* hard?” Keelah whispered, her yellow eyes going wide. She scanned Bobbi’s body, as though looking for bruises or cuts or other signs of a beating.

They would certainly be visible if she had any, Bobbi thought. She was wearing another wrap dress, though this one was considerably skimpier than the one she’d put on this morning. It was a deep red which clashed with her hair, but Dragon had pronounced it to be “fucking gorgeous” when she’d put it on and so she’d decided to wear it anyway.

The dress had spaghetti straps and was made of a thin, silky material

which clearly showed her braless breasts under it. It tied in such a way that there was a slit in it that went almost all the way up her right thigh. And of course, she had no panties on under it. The Saurians didn't seem to wear undergarments of any kind.

The slinky red dress was like something she might wear in her home state of Florida where it was warm all the time, which was definitely *not* the case on Saurous, Bobbi thought. She was glad that Dragon's blood was still keeping her from getting too cold, although she had an idea it might wear off eventually and she would need more. But for now she was comfortable—well, as comfortable as she could be wearing such a revealing dress in public, anyway.

“Did he *beat* me?” she said frowning, since Keelah was still waiting for an answer to her anxious question. “No, of course not. He hugged me and asked if everything was all right.”

“He *did*?” Keelah's yellow eyes widened in shock—she looked like she couldn't have been more surprised if Bobbi had told her the big Kindred had grown wings and flown up into the sky.

“Uh-huh.” Bobbi nodded and then decided to change the subject. “You look beautiful tonight,” she told her new friend, motioning to the silky yellow dress Keelah was wearing. “That color really brings out your eyes and, uh, compliments your scales.”

“Oh, do you really think so?” Keelah's flat cheeks turned bright green with a blush and she smiled prettily. “Thank you. I couldn't believe it when Rep. Zerlix said I was to be his dining partner tonight! Just think—he chose *me* over twenty other girls. They were all so *jealous*.”

“And now you get to try the delicious *bullah* bulb soup we made

together,” Bobbi remarked, smiling at her new friend’s excitement.

“Yes, I can’t wait!” Keelah exclaimed. “And guess what else—oh, you’ll never guess so I’ll tell you,” she went on excitedly. “Rep. Zerlix and I are to sit at the very end of the head table and *I* am to have the honor of pouring everyone’s cups!”

“Wow, that’s quite an honor,” Bobbi said, though she really didn’t know anything about this particular Saurian custom. But she *was* glad that Zerlix would be sitting so far away from her and Dragon. They were going to be seated in the middle of the large, U-shaped head table, right by Dragon’s adoptive father.

“I have to be careful not to spill a drop, of course.” Keelah fluttered nervously. “That would be very bad luck. But just think—I’ll be pouring *panta’lion* wine for the Komendant himself! This *must* mean that Rep. Zerlix is going to keep me!”

“It must,” Bobbi agreed neutrally.

She didn’t like to say that she hoped her friend was right—living as the sadistic Saurian’s sexual plaything must be a horrible life. But of course, being given to another Clan where she would be passed from man to man would surely be worse. There were just no good choices for her new friend. Poor Keelah!

“I’m sure you’ll do fine,” she said, patting the Saurian girl’s arm. “You’ve got a steady hand—I saw the way you peeled and chopped those *bullah* bulbs—every chunk the same size. It was really impressive.”

“Oh, really?” Keelah blushed again and Bobbi got the idea that the Saurian girl hadn’t been given many compliments in her life.

“Yes, really,” she said firmly, hoping to bolster her friend’s confidence.

“You’ve got this, Keelah—you’re going to do great, I *know* it.”

“Thank you, Bobbi.” The Saurian girl smiled gratefully. “You’re so kind.”

“Hey you—what’s your name again? Keely? Feely? Whatever it is, get the hell over here!” a voice snapped.

Looking up, Bobbi saw that it was Zerlix. He was at the far end of the table, snapping his scaly fingers for Keelah, as though she was a dog he was calling.

“Oh, I must go!” Keelah squeezed her hand quickly and whispered, “Wish me luck!” And then she hurried to the end of the table and seated herself at Zerlix’s side.

He doesn’t even know her name—arrogant bastard! Bobbi thought, watching them with disgust. Zerlix saw her looking and ran out his long, forked tongue, licking his lipless mouth in a leering salute that made her sick to her stomach.

“Don’t look at him,” a low voice in her ear commanded. “It only makes him act worse.”

Looking up, she saw that Dragon was closer to her now. He put a heavy arm around her shoulders and drew her to his side, shooting a brief warning glance at his Saurian brother.

“Let me introduce you to my Sire,” he said to her. “This is Komendant Vizlar—the male who adopted me after my biological family was killed by another Clan,” he added, pointing to the distinguished looking Saurian he’d been talking to earlier. His scales were going gray—maybe with age—and he had a look of wisdom in his yellow-green eyes.

“Oh, hello—it’s nice to meet you.” Bobbi held out her hand and then

wondered if she should have. Did the Saurians shake hands? She didn't know their formal greeting customs yet.

“My dear, it's very nice to meet you. Welcome to our lovely planet.”

Komendant Vizlar was charming and soft spoken in a *Godfather* kind of way, Bobbi thought. He took her hand in his and wrapped his long, scaly thumb around her wrist before bowing low and flickering his forked tongue over the backs of her fingers.

Bobbi had to fight grimly not to jerk her hand away as the slimy tongue flickered over her skin. She was used to meeting other species and cultures by now and almost nothing disgusted her, but the feeling of that forked tongue sliding over her fingers caused an instant, intense loathing she could neither explain nor deny.

It's just my survival instincts kicking in, she told herself uneasily. Back on Earth, anything with a long, forked tongue like that is probably poisonous or dangerous—of course my instinct is to want to jerk away.

But though she tried to tell herself it was only an instinctive reaction, she couldn't help the gut feeling that Komendant Vizlar gave her. She didn't trust the leader of the Crimson Blades Clan—not one bit. He made her skin crawl.

She did her best to hide her instinctive feelings for the older Saurian, however. Smiling brightly, she bowed her head to him.

“Thank you so much for your kind welcome, Komendant. I hope to see more of your planet and learn more about your culture while I'm here.”

“While you're here? Are you thinking of going somewhere, my dear?” The Saurian Mob boss—because that was essentially what he was, Bobbi thought—raised his scaly eye ridges in apparent surprise.

“Oh, uh...” Bobbi wasn't sure how to answer him, but Dragon apparently

was.

“She’s not going anywhere, Sire,” he cut in smoothly. “I have Claimed Bobbi for my female and I intend to make her my wife.”

“Your *wife*?” Bobbi choked out. “Are you asking me to marry you?” she demanded, looking up at the big Kindred. “This is the first I’m hearing of this!”

“Of course it is,” Dragon said mildly. “I must declare my intentions to my Sire first.”

“Well, well and you certainly *have*.” Komendant Vizlar looked up at his adopted son with an appraising look in his greenish-yellow eyes. “So you wish to marry this little female? Not just use her for your pleasure and pass her on, Son?”

“I will never pass her on or give her to *anyone*.” Dragon’s bronze eyes blazed. “She is *mine* and I will keep her always, Sire. She will bear my sons.”

“Now wait just a minute!” Bobbi exclaimed. “Bear your sons? Don’t I get a say in this at all?”

“Of course not,” Dragon frowned down at her. “I have Claimed you and I will wed you, little *feela*. That’s all there is to it.”

Bobbi opened her mouth to protest again, but her words were drowned out by a huge, booming *GOOOONNNG!*



“Oh!” Bobbi gasped, putting her hands to her ears and looking around as the sound reverberated from the black and white tiles that covered the walls and floor of the banquet hall. “What in the *world?*”

“That’s the feasting gong,” Dragon explained. “It means we must sit—the feast is about to begin.” As he spoke, he drew out her chair and motioned for her to sit down. “I added a cushion for you,” he murmured in her ear. “So that you’ll be tall enough to reach the feasting table, little one.”

Bobbi saw that he had, in fact, produced a plump blue cushion with a round button in the middle. When she sat on it, she was high enough to reach the table—which was quite tall.

Dragon settled himself beside her and his Sire, the Komendant, settled on the other side of him. Res. Tizlah was seated on the other side of her husband. She gave Bobbi a little wave as they all settled themselves and Bobbi waved back, polite as always.

But inside, her mind was churning. She had known that Dragon wouldn’t want to give her up, but now he was planning to *marry* her?

And without my consent either—I mean, I barely know him and even if I did, there’s no way I would marry my kidnapper! Bobbi thought indignantly.

But apparently, what she wanted hadn't entered the big Kindred's head! He had decided he was going to marry her and that was that.

*I have **got** to get away from here before that happens!* Bobbi told herself. *What if he marries me and then wants to have Bonding Sex with me? Then I'll never get free of him!*

She didn't know a lot about Kindred biology, but she knew enough. Kat had explained about Bonding Sex and how it was different for each kind of Kindred.

"But once you do the deed, doll, that's it—it's for life," she'd told Bobbi. *"You form a mental bond with your guy—or guys, in my case—that can only be broken by death."*

Of course, Bobbi didn't know exactly what kind of Kindred Dragon was—she didn't know the other half of his heritage—so she had no idea what Bonding Sex with him might entail. He might have some kind of special equipment that came out when it was time to do the deed, or it might be as simple as letting him come inside her without protection.

But wait...another thing that Kat had told her suddenly came back to her. Dragon was a Hybrid and hadn't Kat said that Hybrid Kindred had a much harder time bonding with a woman?

Bobbi wracked her brain, trying to remember, but she couldn't be sure if she was right or not. Either way, she didn't want to take a risk.

I'm not letting him anywhere near me, she told herself, looking up at the big Kindred. *No matter how handsome he is or how good he smells or how kind and gentle he is when I least expect it.*

Dragon was her kidnapper and she had to keep that firmly in mind and not succumb to any form of Stockholm Syndrome, Bobbi decided. He was

also an enforcer for the Mob—well, the Saurian version of the Mob, anyway—and there was no way she wanted to get involved with organized crime. Even lizard people organized crime.

I'm just going to have to keep him at arm's length, Bobbi thought. Absolutely no hanky-panky of any kind!

She had no idea how soon she would have to break the promise she had made to herself.



Bobbi was so busy thinking about the implications of her impending engagement and marriage to the big Kindred, that she barely tasted what she was eating. There was a variety of exotic dishes ranging from tiny pastries filled with ground meat paste to the *bullah* bulb and roasted bone stew which she had made with Keelah, to a kind of fondue.

For this dish, a pot of bubbling broth was placed between Dragon and herself. They had a tray of raw meat slices to share too, as well as long utensils that looked like fishing hooks to go with it.

The idea was to hook a piece of meat, then dangle it in the boiling blue broth until it was as cooked as you wanted it before sliding it off the hook and onto your plate. The meat was served with a condiment that looked like grape jelly but tasted like strong mustard mixed with horseradish.

The meat fondue was kind of fun—Bobbi knew she would have enjoyed it more if she hadn't been so preoccupied by Dragon's stated intention to marry her. The slices of meat were rich and flavorful and the broth was tasty, as was the *bullah* bulb stew she and Keelah had made.

She *did* notice enough to make mental notes for her paper—if she ever got to write it. One thing that was very noticeable was the fact that every single course had some kind of meat in it. There was no salad of any kind.

Any vegetables or fruits were clearly meant only for garnish.

All of the lovely dark red *geezer* rosettes, which Keelah had so painstakingly made, were mostly ignored by the diners. Bobbi tasted hers and found it delicious, though—a mixture of roasted apple and fresh mango with notes of cinnamon and cloves. She noticed that Dragon ate his as well. In fact, he was eating all of the vegetable and fruit garnishes that came on the sides of the plate with each course, which was rather surprising. When she asked him about it, he nodded gravely.

“I’ve always eaten all the fruit and vegetable sides, even though most are just for decoration,” he told Bobbi. “When my mother was reading about how to raise mammalians, she learned that it’s important for us to eat more than just meat. The way she raised me, I had to eat vegetables and fruits first before I was allowed any meat at mealtime.”

“That’s *really* interesting,” Bobbi said, meaning it. She had to admit that Res. Tizlah had been a good mom to the foundling Kindred she and her husband had adopted. Too bad she couldn’t see the explosive tension between Dragon and Zerlix now.

Speaking of Zerlix, the sadistic Saurian mostly kept his eyes on his plate, though he did speak a little to Keelah, who was sitting beside him, looking radiantly happy. Bobbi also noticed his yellow eyes resting speculatively on the form of Komendant Vizlar, as though he was trying to gauge his father’s mood. The main thing was, he didn’t look at Bobbi too much, which suited her just fine.

Maybe he’ll forget about me now that his mom scolded him in the storeroom, she thought hopefully. Maybe he’ll realize how serious Dragon is about keeping me and just give up.

It didn't seem likely that she could lose her Saurian stalker that easily, but a girl could hope, right?

After the fondue course was cleared away, they were each served a pink scoop of what looked like sorbet in a little dish.

Oh—must be a pallet cleanser, Bobbi thought. She picked up the little golden spoon the Saurian server had placed by her dish and took a big bite of the pink icy stuff.

She had been expecting a fruit flavor—maybe something like strawberry or lemon or some exotic fruit she had never tried before. Instead, a sharp, coppery taste spread over her tongue.

Like sucking on a mouthful of cold pennies, she thought. *Ugh!*

“Do you like the blood ice?” Dragon asked her as she stared down at the pink stuff, wondering what was in it.

“Excuse me? Blood ice? Is *that* what this is?” Bobbi poked the sorbet-looking stuff with her little golden spoon.

He nodded.

“It's shaved ice infused with *meetha* blood. It's supposed to be refreshing after all the heavy dishes we had before the main dish.”

“What's the main dish then?” Bobbi asked, putting down her spoon. There was no way she was eating any more of the awful “blood ice.”

“Here it comes now.” He nodded as the Saurian servers—who were all dressed in orange uniforms that clashed horribly with their greenish scales—came forward to the head table again. They were each holding enormous platters with tall golden domes on them. One of the platters was put down in front of every male guest at the head table.

There was a silent pause as everyone in the room seemed to hold their breath. Then, with a flourish, the servers all whisked the golden domes off at the same time, revealing the enormous Ornith eggs.

Each egg was sitting upright on one end and their tops had been removed so that the insides were clearly visible. It looked to Bobbi like they had been soft boiled. The whites were opaque but the dark purple yolks were still runny. Fragrant steam rose from each one, tickling her nose.

They smelled delicious, but the sight of the broken egg suddenly made Bobbi want to cry. She remembered Therena clucking in fear and plucking out her own breast feathers in alarm when Zerlix had snatched her egg. And she could almost *hear* the sounds of the Ornith village as they all called to her while Dragon slung her over his broad shoulder and carried her away.

God, had that only been *yesterday*? It felt like she'd lived a lifetime since then, Bobbi thought as she stared at the egg. She'd learned so much about the Saurian culture already, but she missed the gentle Orniths with their soft cooing voices and warm feathery bodies. She remembered sitting in the laying hut, nestled between two friends all warm and cozy or having dinners with Therena to celebrate the small victories of her friend's simple life.

It was a more simplistic way of living, but much less frightening and violent, she thought. Back on Avria Pentaura with the Orniths, she hadn't had to worry about being stalked by a sadistic male or getting married to another who she hardly knew! Her research had been going so well, too—she'd had copious notes. She hoped her friends had saved them, but even if they did, who knew if Bobbi would ever get to make use of them?

Who knew if she would ever see her friends or anyone she loved ever again?

“Bobbi?” a low concerned voice murmured in her ear. “Are you well?”

“What?” She was so lost in her own misery that for a moment she wasn’t sure what Dragon was asking.

“I said are you well? You’re, uh, shedding tears again,” he murmured.

“Sorry.” Lifting the richly embroidered golden napkin from her lap, Bobbi dabbed at her eyes. “I just...the egg reminded me so much of my friends on Avria Pentaura. My lost research and my home...” She sniffed and dabbed at her eyes some more. “I’m sorry—I can’t eat this,” she said, looking at the egg. “It would almost be like eating a friend. I just...can’t.”

She expected the big Kindred to get mad at her—clearly the Ornith eggs were a great delicacy. But he only looked at her thoughtfully for a moment before nodding.

“All right. If you’re not going to eat any, I won’t either.”

“Really?” Bobbi looked at him in surprise. “But I thought this was the main course. I mean, won’t your, uh, Sire get mad?”

“He may.” Dragon shrugged.

He was wearing the Saurian idea of evening clothes which was tight black trousers and a kind of evening jacket with a wide V neck that showed his broad, bare chest beneath it. The jacket had long sleeves that came down to his wrists, covering the tattoos on his muscular arms. Bobbi thought it made him look like a businessman who has gone rogue and decided to ditch his dress shirt and tie.

“You don’t have to abstain just because I am,” she pointed out. “The Orniths aren’t your friends. I just...” She sniffed. “I just miss them.”

“I’m sorry I had to take you away,” Dragon said unexpectedly. “But it

was the only way to keep you safe.”

“And is *marrying* me supposed to keep me safe, too?” she demanded. “You know on *my* planet the guy has to *ask* the girl if she’d like to marry him—he doesn’t just *assume* that she wants to get married.”

“What I *assumed* was that you’d want to be kept safe,” Dragon growled, frowning. “If you’re my wife, Zerlix can never touch you under any circumstances. Even when he takes over as Komendant after our Sire steps down, he can’t have you. Wives are sacred.”

“Well I don’t—” Bobbi began, but just then a loud *GOOOONNNNGGGG* rang through the tiled room again, making her gasp and put a hand to her heart. “Oh my God, that’s so *loud!*” she muttered to Dragon. “Why do they have to keep on ringing it?”

“It’s the gong that signals the beginning of the end of the feast,” he explained. “Now is the time for speeches and toasts. Look—the *panta’lion* wine is being passed even now.”

Bobbi looked to where he was pointing and saw that Keelah was being handed carved glass goblets by a Saurian server who was standing by her side at the end of the table. As she was handed each glass, she poured it two-thirds full of a deep blue wine from a carved glass pitcher she held with both hands.

After filling each glass, she passed it to Zerlix, who passed it to the Saurian woman sitting to his left, who in turn passed it to her husband—or the male who owned her anyway, Bobbi thought—and he passed it on to the person beside him.

In this way, the wine cups were passed along the table from diner to diner until the first cup that Keelah had poured reached the other end of the long, U-shaped head table.

“Don’t drink until after the first speech,” Dragon murmured in her ear as Bobbi stopped passing glasses and finally held the one that was meant for her. “It’s considered very rude not to wait for the first speaker.”

“Oh, okay.” She put the carved glass goblet down beside her plate, looking more closely at the wine as she did so. The surface of the deep blue liquid seemed to be bubbling and fizzing a little—was it some kind of champagne? But as she watched, the bubbling stopped.

Must have been from the motion of being passed by so many people down the length of this huge table, Bobbi thought. She wasn’t much of a drinker at all, having never much cared for the taste of alcohol, so she didn’t know much about it. At any rate, she didn’t mind waiting to drink it—she doubted if she would like it very much.

At that point, Komendant Vizlar rose with the scraping of a chair and began to address the room.

“My fellow Crimson Blades Clansmen,” he began and then went on for some time about how he had inherited the Clan from his Sire and had built it up into the great organization it was today.

He thanked his enforcers and his Advisor, Rep. Yariz, who was also—as it turned out—his “Little Brother” who had been adopted into his family from a rival Clan, just as Dragon had been adopted into the Crimson Blades. He talked about the future of the Clan and how they would soon be annexing more territory and how everyone would have to be ready to go to war when he gave the word.

Gotta get ready to go to the mattresses, Bobbi thought, remembering an old phrase from *The Godfather*. She *really* didn’t want to be here when the Crimson Blades went to war with another Clan—it would make it that much

harder to escape, she thought. But even if she did escape, where could she hide for an entire month until the Kindred of the Mother Ship came looking for her?

She was so preoccupied with this question, that she almost missed the part where she was supposed to drink.

“Raise your glass.” Dragon nudged her with one elbow. “We must all drink to my Sire’s speech.”

“Oh, sorry!” Bobbi lifted her goblet which was still sloshing with the deep blue wine and raised it in salute like everyone else was doing. Then, when Dragon took a deep drink from his goblet, she also took a sip from hers.

To her surprise, she actually *liked* it. It didn’t taste like wine at all—which had always kind of tasted like rotten fruit to Bobbi. Instead, the liquor was rich and fruity with a flavor a little bit like peach and plum juice mixed together with just a hint of some kind of spice.

“Wow—that’s *good*,” she murmured, taking a deeper sip.

Dragon shot her an amused look.

“Save some of that—you’ll need to take a sip after every speech. And my father’s Council members have a *lot* to say.”

Sure enough, he was right. Saurian after Saurian got up and made speeches—some of them quite long-winded. And after every speech, they had to raise their glasses in salute and take a sip.

Soon the novelty of the tasty wine wore off and Bobbi began to feel restless. She shifted in her seat, glad for the soft cushion Dragon had found for her. If she was sitting on the hard wooden chair with nothing under her, she was certain her bottom would be aching by now.

“Be still, *feela*, it’s almost over,” Dragon leaned down to murmur in her ear. “The old ones always have a lot to say. But after Rep. Kerzil has finished his speech, my Sire will open the room to announcements and petitions and those are much shorter.”

“I certainly hope so—I’m running out of wine,” Bobbi whispered back.

At that point, the older Saurian whose name was apparently Rep. Kerzil finished his speech and everyone drank to him. Then Rep. Vizlar spoke again.

“And now I will open the floor for any announcements or requests. Please keep them brief,” he said loudly.

To Bobbi’s surprise, Dragon rose from his chair. The buzz of conversation which had been growing in the background was silenced at once and everyone looked at him expectantly—Bobbi included.

“I never have much to say at these events,” he began in that deep, rumbling voice of his. “But today I have glad news to impart. I wish to announce that I have found my future wife. This is ‘Bobbi’,” he continued, gesturing to her. “She comes to us from a planet beyond Night’s Curtain.”

Every yellow, slitted eye in the room turned to look at her and Bobbi felt a cold chill run down her spine. Suddenly, she felt like a tiny, delicate bunny rabbit in a room full of snakes or some other reptilian predators.

“Er...hi,” she murmured and gave them all a little wave, feeling both incredibly frightened and incredibly foolish at the same time.

“I never thought I would meet a female I would want to keep forever,” Dragon went on, apparently oblivious to her embarrassment at being the sudden center of attention. “But when I saw Bobbi, I knew she was the one female I wanted to bear my sons. Thank you all for bearing witness to our

joy.”

He put a heavy hand on Bobbi’s shoulder and she tried to smile again, though to be honest, she wasn’t sure *what* her face was doing at this moment. She was still frozen in place, feeling incredibly awkward as everyone stared at her, and wishing she could sink through the floor so this weird situation would just be *over*. She didn’t mind giving speeches or lectures in front of crowds, but she *hated* being put on the spot.

In a way, it was like the big Kindred had asked her to marry him in a stadium on the Jumbotron or in some other very public place, she thought. Only he hadn’t actually *asked* at all—he had just told everyone in his life that he was marrying her and she had no say in the matter! God, what a mess!

“Son, thank you for sharing your news,” Komendant Vizlar said from his spot in the middle of the head table. “It’s true, none of us thought you would ever find a female to your liking.” He shot his Advisor, Rep Yariz, an intense look as he spoke before turning back to Dragon. “But of course, we all share in your joy that you have finally found the right female to take as a wife and carry your sons.”

“Thank you, Sire.” Dragon nodded his head respectfully and finally sat down.

At that point, everyone raised their glasses and drank. Bobbi drank too, draining her glass in her nervousness. The sweet wine had a bitter aftertaste she didn’t like very much but she was so overwhelmed that she drank it all, even the gritty dregs at the bottom, hoping it would calm her nerves. However, it almost seemed to have the opposite effect. After finishing it, she felt more jittery than ever.

When she sat her glass down, she saw that someone else had risen to

make a speech or an announcement.

And that someone was Zerlix.



“Sire,” Zerlix said formally to Komendant Vizlar, “I wish to make a request.”

“Of course, Son and Heir. Speak on.” The Clan leader nodded and there was clear pride in his voice as he spoke to his biological son.

He has no idea what a sadistic dick Zerlix is, Bobbi thought, frowning to herself. Or else he won't let himself know.

Zerlix tilted his head arrogantly and looked at her and Dragon.

“Many of you know that my Little Brother, Dragon, found his new female on Avria Pentaura when we went to get the eggs for tonight's feast,” he drawled.

Of course, this made everyone look at Dragon and Bobbi again, which made her incredibly uncomfortable. But worse things were to come.

“What many of you *don't* know is that *I* saw her *first*,” Zerlix went on. “I was reaching for her—was just about to Claim her—when Dragon snatched her from me and took her before I could formally stake my claim.”

There was a low murmur in the banquet hall and Komendant Vizlar spoke up.

“Son, what are you trying to say?”

“That the mammalian female should be *mine*.” Zerlix’s forked tongue lashed as he spat the words. “I was reaching for her with a clear intent to Claim her when my own brother *stole* her from me!” He turned to Komendant Vizlar. “Sire, I formally request that you take the mammalian female from Dragon and give her to me. It is my right to have her since I was reaching for her first and since I am your heir and will soon be leader of the Crimson Blades.”

The murmuring in the room grew louder and Bobbi felt as though someone had just dumped a bucket of ice cubes into the pit of her stomach. She couldn’t *believe* this was happening—couldn’t believe that Zerlix was asking his father to take her away from Dragon and give her to him instead! It was ten times, no, a *hundred* times worse than the big Kindred saying he would marry her.

Beside her, she could see that Dragon’s face was white with fury. Though he was perfectly still, she thought she could hear a faint rustling sound and there was a feeling as though something enormous had displaced the air around the two of them.

Almost like two invisible wings spreading, she thought and then realized she must be imagining it. Probably it was all the wine she had drunk—she was normally a teetotaler so even one glass was enough to make her tipsy.

But I don’t feel tipsy—I feel scared to death, she thought. Her heart was hammering in her chest as she waited to hear what the head of the Clan would say. She had an awful feeling that he would agree with his sadistic son and give her to Zerlix without hesitation. Would Dragon defend her against his own father? Would he go against his entire family to keep her?

He only met me yesterday, she thought. *We haven’t even known each*

other forty-eight hours yet. Why would he risk his entire future for me? Oh God, what is Komendant Vizlar going to say?

It seemed they were about to find out, because at that moment the leader of the Clan rose in his place and looked at his Saurian son.

“Zerlix,” he said heavily. “I am surprised at you. For years your Little Brother has gone without finding a female he deems worthy to be his wife. While you have had dozens, if not *hundreds* of Pleasure Girls in and out of your rooms. Now, when Dragon has finally found the one female he wants to bear his sons, you wish to take her away from him.”

“He doesn’t *deserve* her!” Zerlix exclaimed, sounding like a little boy pouting because he didn’t get the toy he wanted. “And anyway, *I* saw her *first!* You can ask any of the men on my crew—they’ll tell you it’s true.”

“I *Claimed* her first,” Dragon growled. He had yet to move and was still sitting quietly at the table but Bobbi could see the way his jaw was clenched and the tension in his broad shoulders. The hand resting on the table beside her was squeezed so tightly into a fist, his knuckles were white.

“I was just *about* to Claim her! In fact, I told her that I was going to take her back to Saurus and spike her!” Zerlix complained.

At this, the murmuring in the room rose almost to a roar and Dragon shot out of his seat, moving faster than Bobbi could see.

“How *dare* you use that word when you speak of my future wife?” His voice was low and dangerous and it had that strange deep echo to it as though someone or something else was speaking through him. It cut through the other noise in the room and everyone fell silent. “How dare you speak of her at *all?*” he growled. “Keep her name off your filthy forked tongue!”

Zerlix’s slitted yellow eyes widened, then narrowed.

“Give her to me *now* or you’ll be sorry, Little Brother,” he hissed at Dragon. “I’ll *make* you sorry!”

“That’s enough!” Komendant Vizlar’s voice cracked like a bolt of lightning in the large room. “I will *not* have the two of you fighting over a mere *female!*” he exclaimed. He looked at Zerlix. “Son, can you not see that sometimes a wise leader must yield his own desires for the good of the Clan? Dragon is your Little Brother—he may one day be your Advisor. You must keep him close—what harm is there in letting him have this one female when you yourself already have so many? Why, you could not even fertilize her eggs—you know Saurians aren’t sexually compatible with mammalians.” He pointed at Bobbi, who was still frozen in her seat. “This girl matches with your brother much better than she would with you.”

“I don’t *care.*” Zerlix crossed his arms over his chest, looking even more like a petulant little boy, Bobbi thought. “I saw her first and she ought to be *mine!* Make Dragon give her to me, Sire—she is my right and my due as the next leader of the Crimson Blades. Why, only just today I annexed a piece of land for you! I pushed back the Poison Daggers and now we can claim Old Town in the Northern district as our territory once more.”

The corners of Komendant Vizlar’s lipless mouth turned down.

“Old Town? But we worked out a treaty with the Poison Daggers only last solar month. We ceded Old Town to them and in return, they agreed that we would take the marketplace—a much more lucrative piece of property. It took Rep. Yariz and myself *weeks* to hammer out that deal!”

“Well now we have *both* Old Town *and* the marketplace.” Zerlix lifted his chin arrogantly. “And all thanks to *me.* The girl should be mine as a prize for my success.”

“This is not success!” Komendant Vizlar snarled. “Don’t you see what you’ve done? You voided our treaty! Now there will be open war between our Clans unless Rep. Yariz and I can salvage the situation!”

He shot a look at his Advisor who was already getting up from the table.

“I’ll arrange a meeting,” Bobbi heard him murmur. “We’ll explain it was all a mistake.”

Komendant Vizlar nodded stiffly and then glared at his biological son.

Zerlix looked taken aback. Clearly he had thought that his actions would be met with approval and he was surprised that his father was upset rather than proud.

“Sire—” he began but Komendant Vizlar cut him off.

“No more of this!” he barked. “I will not hear another word! You are not ready to lead if you don’t understand what a mess you’ve made of the delicate relations between us and the Poison Daggers Clan.”

“But it wasn’t my fault!” Zerlix whined. “It was Dragon—*he* was the one who killed the Poison Daggers crew!”

“Only because you picked the fight and then left me to kill them while you came back here to try and take my female,” Dragon growled, his bronze eyes flashing.

This seemed to make matters even worse.

“You *ran* from a *fight*?” Komendant Vizlar exclaimed, his eyes going wide as he looked at his son. “One that you started yourself? You left your crew and your brother to do your fighting because you were excited over a mere *female*?”

Gee, thanks, Bobbi thought wryly. As the “mere female” all this was

about, she wished she could stand up and tell them all off. She wanted to say that she wasn't a piece of property to be bartered and owned—that she was her own person and she had been kidnapped and was being held against her will.

But a little voice inside her warned that this was *not* the time or the place for feminism. Saurous was a dangerous world for women and the only protection she had at the moment was to sit very still and pray she ended up with Dragon, who at least wouldn't beat or rape her—she hoped.

But Komendant Vizlar wasn't through speaking yet. He pointed one scaly, black-clawed finger at his biological son and said,

“At this moment, I am *ashamed* to have you as my son. Until you learn better, you will never be the leader of the Crimson Blades.”

“But Sire!” Zerlix protested. “I thought—”

“You thought with your spike, *not* your head!” his father roared. “And as for the mammalian female...”

He turned to face Bobbi, who felt as though her heart had stopped in her chest. For a long, breathless moment, the Clan leader's reptilian eyes glared into her own before he turned back to his son.

“As for her, it's clear that she clouds your head too much for you to think clearly,” Komendant Vizlar said at last. “She belongs to Dragon, now and forever and I don't want to hear any more about it.”

“But Sire, that's not *fair!*” Zerlix whined. “She ought to be *mine!*”

“Did you not hear me? She is going to be Dragon's wife!” The Komendant took a deep breath and rubbed his scaly forehead with one hand, clearly trying to calm down. “It is beneath you, my son, to be so fixated on a female,” he told Zerlix. “They are below us and beneath our notice—you

cannot let yourself be so consumed by—”

“Fuck this shit!” Zerlix shouted. Picking up a half-empty wine goblet, he threw it on the tiled floor where it shattered like a bomb. Glass shards flew everywhere and wine splattered all over the black and white tiled floor. People gasped and jerked back instinctively, Bobbi included. Only Dragon remained in place, glaring daggers at his adoptive brother.

“That is conduct unbecoming in a child—let alone a grown male who is next in line to be leader.” Komendant Vizlar’s voice shook with anger. “You will leave the banquet hall now and I don’t want to see you again until I’ve straightened out the mess you made with the Poison Daggers.”

“*Fine—I’m leaving,*” Zerlix snarled. He pointed one clawed finger at Dragon and Bobbi. “But this isn’t over. She’s going to be *mine!*”

Then he turned and stormed out of the banquet hall, leaving everyone in the room to stare after him in shocked silence.



The quiet didn't last for long. After a moment of stunned silence, the room was suddenly buzzing with conversation. Everywhere she looked, Bobbi saw forked tongues flickering as the Saurians around her discussed the display Zerlix had just put on. She heard words like “disturbing” and “disgraceful” being used and she could tell that everyone in the room felt like the oldest son had done something shameful—and worse, he had done it in public in front of his entire Clan!

And it was all because of me, she thought nervously. Oh boy, I think I'd better get out of here. Komendant Vizlar isn't going to like me very much now that his oldest son has made a fool of himself over a “mere female.”

Dragon seemed to think the same thing because he rose and turned to her.

“Come, we need to be going,” he murmured. “It's time we were getting back to our rooms.”

Bobbi noticed distantly that he had said “our” rooms instead of “my” rooms, but the thought didn't make much of an impression on her. She was beginning to feel decidedly strange, though she couldn't quite define what exactly was going on with her yet. All she knew was that she kept tasting that bitter aftertaste from the sweet *pante'lion* wine on the back of her tongue and her fingertips were tingling.

“All right,” she said, nodding. She took Dragon’s offered hand and let him help her up, trying not to see the disapproving look in Res. Tizlah’s eyes or the angry look in Komendant Vizlar’s.

They’re ashamed of their son, she thought. And it might be their fault for spoiling him for so long, but if I’m not careful, the blame is going to land on me.

Luckily, she didn’t have to see the disappointed Saurian parents for long. Dragon hurried her away, out of the banquet hall and down the long, tiled corridor that led to his rooms. The moment they got inside, he closed the door and locked it. Then he turned to face Bobbi.

“Are you okay?” she asked tensely, taking a step back. She was waiting to see if he would blame this on her—waiting to see if he would be angry because his adoptive parents were angry. “Are...are you mad at me?” she asked.

He frowned, but not in an angry way—more as though he was confused.

“Mad at you? Why would I be mad at you?”

“Be...because of what just happened. I mean, I know it wasn’t my fault, exactly, but that mess with Zerlix was all about me and your parents looked so upset and I just thought maybe...” She made herself stop and take a deep breath. Her words seemed to be coming too fast and the tingling in her fingertips had spread to her palms. “I just thought you might be upset too,” she finished at last, striving to make her voice slower and calmer.

Dragon shook his head.

“I’m not upset at all. In fact, this is the best possible thing that could have happened.”

“*What?*” Bobbi stared at him in amazement. “You must be joking! How

could your adoptive brother causing a big scene at a public feast and throwing a tantrum over not getting to ‘own’ me and upsetting your parents, be the best possible thing that could happen?”

“I’ll admit, the scene he made was embarrassing for our entire family,” Dragon rumbled. “But my Sire gave you to me unequivocally and forever. That means that Zerlix can never lay Claim to you—he can *never* have you. My Sire’s word, given in public at a Clan feast, makes you safe. The only way you could be safer is if I was following you around with a drawn blaster all day long.” He scowled. “And believe me, I was considering it, little *feela*. Especially after what I saw in the storeroom.”

“So because your father—er, Sire—*gave* me to you, you get to keep me, is that it?” Bobbi demanded, her fear turning suddenly to irritation and anger. “May I remind you that I am not his to give—I’m not really *yours*, either. You *stole* me away from my life as an independent woman and a scientist doing important research and you just...just... Oh, God!”

Her last words were a strangled cry as the strange, tingling feeling that had started in her fingertips and hands suddenly spread to other parts of her body—much more *sensitive* parts. Only the tingling was more like a buzzing sensation.

It’s almost like I’m using a vibrator! Bobbi thought wildly. She had the insane urge to rip open her sexy red wrap dress and look between her legs to see if some invisible sex toy was at work there. But that was impossible, wasn’t it?

I don’t know, but I have to see what’s going on!

Whirling, she turned suddenly and headed for the bathroom.

“Bobbi? What’s wrong?” There was genuine concern in the big Kindred’s

deep voice but Bobbi wasn't about to tell him that she suddenly had the sensation of a phantom dildo molesting her.

“Be right back,” she managed to get out. “Gotta get to the bathroom. Sorry!”



Rushing into the large bathroom, which was tiled all in black with a few red tiles for accents, Bobbi closed the door firmly behind her. There was no lock that she could see, so she hoped Dragon would take the hint and leave her alone.

There was a full-length mirror in one corner of the room though the big Kindred appeared to be using it for some kind of a clothes rack—several of his shirts were draped over it. Bobbi ripped them down and tossed them carelessly over the side of the tub. Then she unfastened the red wrap dress and spread it open, looking anxiously at herself in the silvery, reflective surface.

What she saw made her bite her lip in concern. Her pussy was swollen and pink. It felt like it was throbbing in time to her heartbeat and that buzzing sensation was still going on, as though something was teasing her clit, getting her all heated up but never quite letting her reach a release.

“What’s going *on* down there?” Bobbi muttered to herself. She reached carefully between her legs to spread her outer pussy lips...and nearly screamed as her fingers made contact with her skin.

“Ow! What the hell?”

It felt as though she’d *burned* her pussy by touching it with her own

fingers. But that couldn't be right—could it? What was going on here?

Maybe it was some kind of static electricity thing—I shocked myself or something, Bobbi thought desperately. *Yeah, that must have been it. Don't they say that static builds up a lot more in cold, dry climates?* Yes, they did—and Saurus was both cold and dry in the extreme.

Tentatively, she tried touching herself again—with the same result. The moment her seeking fingers found her pussy lips, she got a horrible burning sensation.

“Ow! Goddamnit!” Bobbi snarled. *It's like I tried to masturbate with a damn curling iron or something! What the Hell is wrong with me?*

Suddenly there was a heavy knocking on the door.

“Bobbi? Are you all right in there?” Dragon rumbled.

“Uh, fine—just fine,” she said hastily. “I...I'll be out in a minute.

Except she wasn't fine—not fine at all. The buzzing sensation around her clit had grown stronger—it was as though an invisible vibrator was stimulating her—teasing her unbearably but not letting her come.

And God, she *really* needed to come! The teasing sensation was getting to be more than she could bear and she was feeling so damn horny she thought she would die if she couldn't do something about it!

“But what can I do?” Bobbi muttered to herself. “Why does it feel like I'm burning myself every time I try to get some relief?”

She looked down at her hands and saw that her fingertips had turned red. Not just pink but *bright red* as though she'd dipped her fingers in paint.

“What the *Hell?*” Bobbi asked herself in a low voice. “What in the world is going on with me? Am I having a reaction to something I ate?”

But weren't anaphylactic reactions caused by food allergies pretty immediate? She'd had an uncle once—Uncle Al—who was allergic to shrimp. The whole family went out to eat one night and he'd accidentally bitten into a shrimp egg roll. Within seconds of swallowing the first bite, his face had started turning red and he'd begun grabbing at his throat, which was swelling shut. He had also broken out in hives, all over his body.

They'd had to call the paramedics and poor Uncle Al had taken a trip to the ER and had been dosed with an Epi pen. He had made a full recovery but it had been a really scary experience—one that Bobbi still remembered vividly even though she'd only been nine when it happened.

And anyway, there was no food reaction that she knew of that made you incredibly horny, caused you to feel a phantom vibrator buzzing your clit, and made your fingers turn literally red-hot when you tried to touch yourself to ease the tension. The very idea was just crazy.

So the question remained—what the Hell was going on?

“Bobbi?” Dragon called again.

“Uh, just a minute,” she called back. “Give me just a minute, okay?”

“Are you all right? You sound upset.”

“I'm fine—I *said* I'm fine, Goddamnit!” she shouted. Then she made herself take a deep breath and calm down. Pissing him off was only going to make him burst into the bathroom. “Sorry—I just need a minute to myself,” she called, trying to sound normal. “Really, I'll be out soon.” She hoped.

“All right...” He sounded doubtful but at last she heard his footsteps retreating. Good, now maybe she could figure out what was going on.

But before she could find the source of the problem, she really had to do something about the symptoms. She was going to go crazy from horniness if

she didn't come!

I can't touch myself though, Bobbi thought. She felt a surge of determination. *Well, there's more than one way to skin a cat!*

Or in this case, more than one way to get off.

She looked wildly around the bathroom for something to rub against. She kept feeling like if she just had a *little* bit of pressure and stimulation, she would be able to reach the orgasm she was so desperately craving.

She settled on the rounded corner of the free-standing tub. It might not be a traditional sex toy, but in a pinch it would do. Also, it was at just the right height.

Walking over to it, she whipped open her dress again and pressed her hot, swollen pussy against the cool, smooth surface...only to jump back with a yell a moment later. That burned too! But how could contact with the cool, smooth, tub feel like an open flame to her poor pussy? What was *wrong* with her?

Experimentally, she pressed her red fingertips to the tub—it felt icy cold to her touch. But why would it feel cold to her fingers and hot to her pussy? Why did it—?

“That’s it—what’s going on in here?”

The door opened and Dragon came in, scowling in apparent concern.

“Oh!” Bobbi jumped guiltily back from the tub and whipped her dress closed, pulling it tight around her. She put her red-fingered hands behind her back and tried to look innocent.

“Bobbi?” His voice was a soft, deep growl as he approached her. “What’s wrong with you? And don’t say nothing—I can hear you gasping and making

pain noises all the way from the other room!”

“I...I don’t know what’s wrong, okay?” Bobbi flared at him. She wished he would take a step back, away from her. His warm, spicy, masculine scent was making her horniness worse—she was sure of it.

“You must have *some* idea,” Dragon protested. “Why are you hiding your hands behind your back?”

“I’m not hiding them. I...I’m just not showing them,” Bobbi protested weakly. God, he smelled good! And the buzzing feeling around her clit was still growing, making her feel like an invisible vibrator was masturbating her, while she was trying to talk to him like nothing was happening. It was *torture!* But somehow she had to keep a straight face. “I’m just fine—I stand like this all the time,” she said, trying to sound nonchalant.

Dragon frowned and loomed over her.

“Let me see your hands,” he ordered. “*Now*, Bobbi—I mean it.”

She wanted to run away, but there was no place to run. There were no windows and the big Kindred was between her and the door. Finally, unwillingly, she drew her hands out from behind her back and held them out for his inspection.

“I think I must be having some kind of allergic reaction to the food we ate tonight,” she explained as he took her hands in his much larger ones and examined her red fingertips closely. “Or maybe it was the wine—it had such a *bitter* aftertaste!”

Dragon’s head jerked up sharply and he frowned at her.

“*Panta’lion* wine has no bitterness at all. It’s known for its sweet, smooth finish.”

“Well then maybe I got some from a bad batch,” Bobbi said. “Because the last drink I had was bitter—gritty, too.” She made a face. “I can still taste it on the back of my tongue.”

“Fuck.” Dragon released her and ran a hand over his hair. “Fuck, fuck, *fuck!*” he growled.

“What? What is it? What’s wrong?” Bobbi demanded.

His reaction frightened her almost more than the initial problem. The big Kindred almost never got ruffled when they were alone together but this seemed to make him really upset. A dark suspicion began growing in her mind.

“Is it poison? Have I been given poison?” she demanded, staring at him. “Tell me, Dragon—I need to know!”

“No, it’s not poison but you’ve certainly been given *something*,” he muttered. He looked at her sharply. “Tell me, how are you feeling right now?”

“Oh, um...” Bobbi shifted from foot to foot, pressing her thighs together nervously. She couldn’t actually tell him what was wrong with her—couldn’t explain about the invisible vibrator that was teasing her pussy unmercifully, could she? “I’m f—” she began.

“*Don’t* say you’re fine,” Dragon growled warningly. “Because you’re not fine—especially if you’ve been given what I *think* you’ve been given.”

“And what do you think I’ve been given?” Bobbi demanded, putting her hands on her hips.

Dragon sighed and ran a hand over his thick, black hair.

“Come out into the sleeping chamber and I’ll tell you.”

He turned and headed for the door. Bobbi paused for a moment but really, what choice did she have? With no other option, she took a deep breath and followed him.



Dragon paced back and forth, cursing to himself. This was all Zerlix’s doing—it *had* to be. He remembered now, that he’d felt a twinge of suspicion when his Big Brother had offered to take the seat at the far end of the head table and allow his female to take on the wine-pouring duties.

Pouring the wine for everyone was something of an honor...but it was also a humbling experience. By pouring wine for the entire table, you were serving everyone there—even those with a lower rank than yourself. Dragon had never known his adoptive brother to humble himself in any way.

“I should have known,” he muttered to himself. “Should have figured out that he was up to no good.”

“That who was up to no good? What happened? What was I given?” Bobbi demanded. “Was it in the wine?”

Dragon sighed and stopped pacing long enough to look at her.

“Yes, it was in the wine,” he said heavily. “I’m pretty sure I know what it is, but I need you to tell me your symptoms—*all* your symptoms,” he added, warningly, when she looked away and got that look on her face that told him she was about to dissemble.

“Well, I...my fingertips have turned red, as you see,” she said slowly,

turning her little hands palm-out, to show the red-tipped fingers again.

“Yes, and...?” Dragon made a “go on” motion with one hand.

“And...and they burn me when I try to...when I make, uh, contact with myself,” she said hesitantly.

Dragon frowned at her warningly.

“When you try to make contact with what *part* of yourself?” he asked.

“With...between my legs, all right?” she flared defensively. “Because it feels like something is...is buzzing me down there and it’s driving me freaking *crazy!* I mean, I can’t *stand* it anymore, but every time I try to...to help myself, it feels like I just stuck a red-hot poker down my panties!”

Her cheeks were glowing pink with embarrassment and her little hands were curled into fists at her sides. Her hair was a wild, flame-colored halo around her head and she was breathing hard, her full breasts heaving under the bright red dress. Dragon could see the hard little tips of her ripe nipples poking out from under the thin material and he could see the defensiveness and worry in her big, blue eyes.

He thought she had never looked so beautiful.

A rush of emotions washed over him—intense wonder at her wild beauty, admiration for her courageous defiance, desire for her beautiful body... But all of these were tempered with a deep reluctance for what he must do next.

I wanted to bring her along slowly...wanted to give her time to feel for me as I feel for her, Dragon thought. He was well aware that the little *feela* did not yet have the deep yearning for him that he felt for her. She was still angry—still didn’t understand that males owning females was the natural order of things. It was for their safety and protection, of course—an unowned female was a female that was in danger every minute of her solitary existence. And

more than anything, Dragon longed to keep the curvy little *feela* safe.

But just because he had Claimed her and now owned her didn't mean he wanted to force her into anything she wasn't ready for. He had always felt that the Saurian way of taking females sexually when they were unwilling was deeply wrong—he didn't want to do that to Bobbi.

Now, though, what choice did he have? It was the only way to ease her ache—the only antidote for what she had been given.

Besides, it's not like she's completely unwilling—I can smell her heat, he thought. Her wild, feminine fragrance filled his nose, making his shaft ache with desire for her.

But he knew that just because her body was ready, it didn't mean that her mind was. Her body might yearn for his, but when he took her, she would still see it as a violation.

“What is it? What are you thinking?” she demanded, looking up at him with those big, blue eyes of hers. Gods, if only she weren't so bewitchingly lovely! All his life, Dragon had been seeing only flat, scaly Saurian faces. He had even covered the top of his mirror to avoid looking at his own, non-Saurian face which seemed strange to him.

Bobbi's cute little nose, big eyes, and soft, lush lips should have looked wrong and alien after years of seeing only the faces of his adoptive people, but they didn't. It was as though her face was the sight he'd been searching for all his life—a piece in the puzzle of his life that brought everything together. She was beautiful and tiny and defiant and *perfect*.

*And now I have to ruin it, ruin **everything**,* Dragon thought remorsefully. Gods, he didn't want to hurt her!

There is no other way and you know it, he told himself. And then, from

deep inside himself he heard that wild voice saying, ***She is Mine—ours—
and we must take her! We must bond her to us!***

Dragon didn't understand what the voice meant by "bond her to us" but he agreed with this strange new voice that was speaking from inside him, like a forgotten part of him that was starting to awaken. Somehow he knew that if he did what must be done, Bobbi would be tied to him—to them?—forever.

He just hoped she would forgive him afterwards.

"Dragon, *what* are you thinking? What was I given—I know that you know—now tell me!" she demanded, putting her tiny hands on her full, curving hips and glaring defiantly up at him.

"Bobbi..." He sighed and leaned down to put his forehead against hers and looked into her eyes. It was a gesture of intimacy among the Saurians—one reserved for lovers. "Bobbi," he said again, stroking her soft, warm cheek. "I know what you've been given and I'm afraid there's only one antidote for it."

"An antidote? There's an antidote?" she whispered, searching his eyes with hers. "What is it? Can you give it to me?"

"I can, but I'm afraid you won't like it," Dragon murmured. "Little one, I'm going to have to breed you."



“What?” Bobbi jerked away from his hands, breaking the almost hypnotic gaze of his bronze eyes that had held her in thrall. “You want to *breed* me? No, huh-uh. I don’t *think* so!”

“Just listen to me...” There was pleading in his deep voice and he didn’t try to chase her when she backed away. “I believe you’ve been given a dose of Lust Induction—sometimes called ‘red hand potion’ by the Saurians.”

“Red hand potion?” Bobbi repeated wildly. Where had she heard that before? She was certain it sounded familiar...

Then she remembered her conversation with Keelah earlier that day, when the two of them were chopping the *bullah* bulbs. Keelah had said something about how servicing Zerlix wasn’t so bad because he gave his girls the red hand potion that made them eager for sex, rather than dreading it. Was *that* what she had been given?

“Was...was that the bitter taste in my wine?” she asked.

“I’m afraid so.” Dragon nodded.

“Zerlix must have slipped it to me,” Bobbi muttered. “I know Keelah wouldn’t do it to me, but every wine glass she poured passed through his scaly hands!” She rubbed a hand over her forehead. “Oh God, now all that

crap he was spouting at me in the storeroom makes sense!”

“What ‘crap’ are you talking about?” Dragon’s eyes were hard with fury at his Saurian brother.

“He was saying how he was going to...to rape me tonight after you gave me to him.” Bobbi swallowed hard. “And...and he was saying that I would love it—that I would beg him for it—crap like that. At the time, I thought it was just his huge ego talking. Guys like that always think they’re God’s gift to women and nobody can resist them. But now I think...” She rubbed her forehead again. “I think he must have been planning this all along. He knew he was going to slip that drug into my drink—only he was thinking that your father would give me to him, so he’d be reaping the benefits of my overwhelming horniness right about now.”

The thought made her shiver. Just because she felt like an invisible vibrator was teasing her and she was desperate to orgasm, did *not* mean she was dying to have sex. It just meant that she was incredibly horny—though she didn’t think any amount of the red-hand aphrodisiac could make her horny enough to want a Saurian dick diddling her private parts—especially not one attached to that bastard, Zerlix.

“That *asshole*,” she muttered, clenching her hands into fists again. “God, I wish I could *punch* him! I’d like to break his nose for what he did to me!”

“I’m afraid you’d only break your hand,” Dragon told her. “Saurians have incredibly dense, heavy bones. And they have no noses to break—just nostril slits.”

“Goddamnit!” Bobbi swore. Then she took a deep breath, trying to calm down. Getting upset wasn’t going to help this situation—the damage was done. Now she had to figure out how to deal with it. “Okay...okay,” she said,

running both hands through her hair distractedly. “So you’re *sure* what he gave me was this, uh, red hand potion stuff?”

“I’m afraid it was—you have all the symptoms,” Dragon rumbled. “The red hands—well, red fingertips, anyway—a burning sensation when you try to, er, help yourself, the unbearable urge to be bred—”

“Whoa now, hold on there, cowboy!” Bobbi held up both hands to stop him. “Nobody said I wanted to be bred. And in case you’re in doubt, let me make it clear—I *don’t*.”

Dragon frowned.

“But it’s the only cure for the red-hand potion—the only way to ease your ache and bring you to a release that will stop the yearning.”

Bobbi put a hand on her hip.

“So you’re under the impression that all I need to get over this freaking drug I’ve been given is a serious session of deep fucking?”

His frown deepened.

“You speak the Saurian language very well, but sometimes you lose me. What is a ‘cowboy?’ And what do you mean by ‘deep fucking?’”

“I mean that most women don’t *come* just from penetration,” Bobbi burst out. “It’s a proven, scientific fact! What most women need to come—what *I* need to come—is *clitoral stimulation*, which is exactly what I *can’t* give myself because every time my pussy comes in contact with my fingers or anything else, it feels like I’m rubbing against hot coals or something!”

“That’s because only the touch of male flesh against your own can bring you relief,” Dragon said patiently. He gave her a regretful look. “I don’t want to do this, Bobbi, but I’ll hold you down if I have to.”

“You’re saying you’ll *rape* me, is that it?” she demanded and she didn’t like the way her voice was shaking. He was so much bigger than her and there was nowhere to hide in here—they were locked in!

Dragon frowned and rubbed his temples.

“I don’t *want* to hurt you! I wanted to wait until you felt for me the same way I feel for you, little *feela!* But allowing a female who has ingested the red hand potion to remain un-bred is as good as murder! You can literally *die* from the effects if they’re left untreated.”

“I...I don’t believe you,” Bobbi said, backing away from him. “You’re just saying that to get in my pants. Er...under my dress,” she amended, since she didn’t have any pants on to speak of.

Dragon shook his head. He still wasn’t pursuing her. In fact, he sat down on the couch and just looked at her intently.

“The red-hand potion works by causing your body to dump more and more lust hormones into your bloodstream,” he said. “It also causes increased heart rate and breathing. If you don’t get some relief soon, your heart could actually explode, Bobbi.” He shook his head. “Surely you can see I can’t let that happen to you. I Claimed you, which makes me responsible for your wellbeing.”

“So first you kidnap me to keep me safe and now you’re going to fuck me to save my life?” Bobbi demanded sarcastically. “I don’t think so, Dragon! I’m not letting you anywhere *near* me!”

He raised his hands in a gesture of truce.

“Do I look like I’m following you? Chasing you?”

“No,” Bobbi admitted unwillingly. “But you’re sitting there talking about...about *breeding* me!”

“I have to—it’s the only way to cure you,” he said patiently.

“But I don’t feel the need to be, er, *bred*,” Bobbi protested. “Mostly what I feel is just the need to *come*.” And oh God, did she need to come! The tingling in her clit kept getting worse—it was driving her *crazy*. But there was no way she was letting the big Kindred scratch this particular itch with his dick.

If I let him “breed” me, we’ll end up having Bonding Sex and I’ll never get free of him! she thought wildly.

Huh-uh, no way—wasn’t happening.

However, the thought *did* give her an idea.

“Let’s think about this a minute,” she said to Dragon, who was still sitting there, as though he was waiting for her to decide to let him “breed” her because she was going to die if she didn’t get his dick. “This formula was originally made for Saurians, right?”

He frowned.

“As far as I know. I have never used it on a female before.” His face got dark. “It would be dishonorable.”

“Okay, but if it was made *for* Saurians, *by* Saurians, it must take Saurian anatomy into mind,” Bobbi said. Her thoughts were racing almost as fast as her heart. She took a deep, calming breath, trying to slow both of them down. “Tell me about Saurian female sexual anatomy,” she said to Dragon. “Have you been with one of them? I mean, I saw the outside when I accidentally flipped onto that porn channel but what are they like up *inside*?”

He frowned, clearly confused by her question.

“I have tried intercourse with Saurian females twice.” His mouth twisted.

“It was...not to my liking. And I don’t think the females achieved much pleasure either—which was shameful for me.”

“Not really,” Bobbi said, though she wasn’t sure why she was defending him. “I mean, the males have those weird corkscrew dongs with the sharp tips, so I’m assuming the females have compatible anatomy inside. How could you expect to please a Saurian female when the two of you had mismatched parts?”

His face cleared.

“I never thought of it like that. A Saurian female’s vaginal slit is a twisted, convoluted channel inside.” He frowned. “It’s also dry and slightly sandy—not very pleasurable to penetrate at all.”

“No wonder you only tried twice—I’m amazed you even tried *once*,” Bobbi told him. “It must have been like screwing sandpaper.”

“Sandpaper?” Dragon raised an eyebrow at her.

“Never mind.” She waved a hand. “The point is, what makes a female Saurian orgasm? I mean, do they have a clit to stimulate? Or is the only way to make them come through penetration?”

“A ‘clit’?” He shook his head.

“A clitoris. A love button. The little man in the boat. Kindred from the Mother Ship call it a ‘Goddess pearl’,” Bobbi elaborated rapidly. She was aware that she was talking fast again and her heart was pounding. She took several deep breaths to slow herself down. “It’s kind of like a very delicate nerve center,” she explained. “It’s the only organ on the female body whose only purpose is to give pleasure.”

“Really?” Dragon leaned forward eagerly. “That sounds...most intriguing.”

“Yes, so what I’m asking is, do Saurian women have them? Do they have clits?” Bobbi asked. “Is that how they come or do they only come from penetration?”

“As far as I’m aware, Saurian females don’t have these...Goddess pearls you’re talking about,” Dragon said thoughtfully. “The only way a male can bring a Saurian female to orgasm is to spike her forcefully until his shaft finds the end of her channel and he pierces her egg sac with his tip. Then he releases his seed inside her to fertilize her eggs. Only then is she able to reach orgasm.”

“Okay, see? This makes sense...” Bobbi nodded rapidly. “In order to overcome the effects of the red-hand potion, a female has to come. But the only way a female Saurian can come is through penetration and uh, spiking her egg sac. *Ugh.*” She shivered at the thought and went on. “But that is *not* the case with human women like me.”

Dragon’s brow wrinkled.

“You can orgasm without penetration?”

“All day long and twice on Saturdays,” Bobbi said promptly. God, she had to calm down! Her thoughts and her heart were both galloping along at sixty-miles-a minute.

She remembered what the big Kindred had said about her heart exploding if she didn’t do something about the symptoms of the damn potion she’d ingested and promptly pushed the thought to the back of her mind. She was going to do this *her* way, damn it! Nobody was going to force her into anything!

Dragon was shaking his head in apparent confusion.

“I don’t understand—what are you saying?”

“I’m saying I can come *without* your giant schlong invading me,” she snapped. “You said that one of the effects of the potion is that I’ll only be able to stand the feeling of a male’s skin touching me? That anything else will feel red-hot?”

“I don’t think that’s exactly how I put it but essentially yes, that’s true.” He nodded.

“All right—let’s try it.”

Boldly, Bobbi marched up to where the big Kindred was still sitting on the couch. She opened her wrap dress, grabbed one of his big hands, and shoved it between her thighs.

She nearly winced away from his touch at first, afraid she would get burned again. But then she became aware—much to her relief—that there was no burning going on. It was just the feeling of his big, warm hand cupping her throbbing pussy and it didn’t hurt at all.

In fact, it felt pretty damn *good*. She had the almost insurmountable urge to rub against him, to let those long fingers slip into her hot, swollen folds and caress her aching, tingling clit. Somehow, she resisted...but it wasn’t easy.

“Ahhh,” she half whispered/half moaned. “It...it doesn’t burn. Good... that’s good.” And she couldn’t help rubbing against him, just a tiny bit. She could feel her pussy lips parting and the palm of his hand just barely grazed her throbbing button.

Dragon was staring at her with a surprised look in his bronze eyes. Clearly he had never been with a woman who acted like she did—who was so forward sexually. Well that was just too damn bad, Bobbi thought to herself. He was going to have to get used to it.

“Gods,” he murmured, his voice deep and his eyes half-lidded. “It’s so different from a Saurian female. You’re so soft and wet, Bobbi.”

“Being drugged with an aphrodisiac will do that to a girl, I guess,” she said, rather breathlessly. “All right...” She took a step back from him, removing his hand from between her legs. She missed his warmth and the gentle friction immediately but she had to do this right. “If we’re going to do this, we’re going to do it on *my* terms,” she told the big Kindred firmly. “I *refuse* to be acted upon—I’m going to be in charge here and what I say goes, got it?”

Dragon’s eyes widened and for a moment Bobbi thought that anyone watching them would think she looked like an angry kitten facing down a Great Dane. But he didn’t object—he just nodded.

“If that’s what makes you comfortable.”

“*None* of this makes me comfortable but I’m too damn horny to care right now,” Bobbi told him recklessly. Now listen up, here are the rules. First, you keep your dick in your pants. Second, no penetration.”

“How can I penetrate you if my shaft is in my trousers?” he asked reasonably.

“You know what I mean,” Bobbi snapped. “Third, you touch me *when* and *how* I tell you to. And the minute I come, you stop. Got it?”

Dragon nodded again.

“All right, we’ll do this your way, little *feela*.” Then his voice dropped to a growl and she seemed to see flames in his eyes for just a second. “But I warn you, if making you come doesn’t help—if the red doesn’t fade from your fingertips—then I’ll do whatever is necessary to keep you alive. Do you understand?”

Translation: he'll fuck me if he has to—whether I want him to or not, Bobbi thought wildly.

An image shot across her mind, as bright as a comet—the big Kindred with his hands around her hips, lowering her slowly onto his cock while she moaned and tried to fight...tried not to want what he was giving her even though she needed it so desperately...

No! she told herself, pushing the image away fiercely. *No, I'm **not** going to need that from him—I refuse to need it! All I need is to come—that's it and that's all.*

“I understand,” she said gravely. Then, heart pounding, she pulled her dress off completely and climbed into his lap.

Let the games begin.



Gods, she was *perfect*—so fierce and tiny and gorgeous as she straddled him, completely naked in his lap. Dragon loved the fullness of her curves—the lushness of her body. She was full to overflowing and soft and warm everywhere—completely unlike the cold, scaly, reptilian Saurian females he had been with in the past. Bobbi was the most beautiful female he had ever seen—he felt almost bewitched by her.

Her thighs were open, clearly showing the soft, wet pussy he'd been cupping in his hand earlier. Dragon loved the little patch of red curls at the top of her mound, but even more, he loved the pouting outer lips and the brief, tantalizing feeling of her inner wetness pressing against his palm he'd felt when she was rubbing against him.

His cock throbbed in his trousers and that deep voice inside him urged him to take it out and fill the little *feela* with it.

If you don't take her, we cannot bond with her, it growled in his head. We must make her ours to keep her safe!

Dragon tried to ignore this new part of himself—to push down the urges it brought out in him. He wanted to try things Bobbi's way first—wanted to let her take the lead. That way, he hoped, she wouldn't feel violated by what they were doing—wouldn't hate him afterwards.

Besides, he was intrigued by what she'd told him about mammalian female anatomy. He had never been with a female of his own kind before and he wanted to learn all about her—to learn how to pleasure her properly.

I want to make her come, he thought. Gods, how he wanted that! Wanted to hear her moaning for him and feel her soft, wet pussy rubbing against him again...

He didn't have to wait long to get his wish. Bobbi was already taking his large hand in her two small ones and putting it between her thighs again.

“Slowly...” she told him. She was panting a little and her eyes were dilated, the black of her pupils widening until only a small ring of blue was left around them. Dragon could hear her heartbeat too—it was as rapid as a small animal's running from a predator. He frowned—these were bad signs—signs the drug was working on her quickly. How big a dose had that bastard Zerlix slipped into her cup?

Need to make her come, he thought with renewed urgency. And he needed to do it fairly quickly. Because if having an orgasm didn't make the red fade from her fingertips, he would know that he needed to breed her after all and he wouldn't have much time to do it before her heart gave out.

But she was telling him to take things slowly and Dragon was well aware that she knew her own body much better than he did. So he tried to comply with her instructions.

“Slowly and gently,” she said again. “I'm going to tell you what to do and I want you to do it *slowly and gently*.”

Dragon nodded.

“I'll do my best, little *feela*.”

“Good.” She settled herself more fully in his hand and he could feel her

outer lips opening just a bit to let him feel the warm wetness inside.

“Tell me what to do then,” Dragon urged her. Her warm, feminine scent was overpowering—almost maddening—but he had to hold himself back. “Tell me how to touch you...how to make you come,” he growled softly, looking into her eyes.

She bit her lip, as though suddenly shy. But then she lifted her chin defiantly.

“I want you...*need* you to...to part my outer pussy lips with your fingers,” she told him. “And then slip just your middle finger inside.”

“Like this?” Carefully, with his index and ring finger, Dragon parted the soft outer lips. He slipped his middle finger into her warm, wet depths, feeling his cock surge as he did so. “Gods, *feela*,” he muttered hoarsely. “You’re so hot and wet.” Her soft little pussy was completely different from the dry, cool, abrasive interior of a Saurian’s vaginal slit.

“I...I can’t help getting wet,” she whispered breathlessly. “That damn drug...” She shook her head. “Never mind. Just do what I tell you. I want you to feel for a little bump, right in the center of my—*ohhhh!*”

“Is this it?” Dragon murmured. He was circling the firm little button of flesh with the tip of his middle finger slowly—taking care to be gentle with this delicate area. From the way the little *feela* reacted, he was certain this was the spot she was talking about.

“*Ohhh!*” she moaned again and threw back her head, her long, flame-colored hair trailing down her back as she pressed against him. She was panting and there was a sexual flush across the tops of her full breasts. Her cheeks were pink too and her eyes were half-closed in apparent ecstasy.

Dragon was fascinated and incredibly aroused. He had never dreamed

that he could bring a female so much pleasure by doing so little. Why, he was *barely* touching her! He just kept up the light, gentle caress around that tiny, delicate button, circling it over and over. But this one, small motion was making her gasp and moan and buck against his hand. Gods, she was beautiful!

As he stroked her, the scent of her feminine desire increased, filling his senses. Dragon had the sudden urge to flip her over onto the couch and caress her little pleasure pearl with his tongue instead of his fingers. What would her juices taste like, he wondered? Would she be salty or sweet or both? And how would she react if he licked her soft little pussy? Would she moan for him and beg him to do more? To press his tongue deep inside her, tasting her to the core?

“Oh God, I’m getting so *close*,” Bobbi moaned, breaking into his erotic train of thought. “But I need...need more. Suck me.”

“What?” Dragon’s voice came out sounding low and hoarse. “What do you mean?” Was she asking him to suck and lap her little pussy? Because he was *more* than ready to do that.

But instead, she thrust her full breasts into his face.

“Suck my nipples,” she moaned breathlessly. “It...it helps me come sometimes when I play with my nipples. Here.”

She rubbed one ripe tip against his lips and Dragon opened his mouth eagerly. Gods, she was pushy and demanding for such a tiny female, but he found that he liked it. No, he *loved* it, he decided.

He sucked her firm peak into his mouth and began to circle her nipple with his tongue the way he was still circling her clit with his finger.

The combination seemed to drive Bobbi wild.

“Oh! Oh, *yes!*” she gasped, writhing in his lap. “Suck me harder! More!”

Dragon did as she asked, taking as much of her full breast into his mouth as he could and sucking hard. His shaft was throbbing against the tight confines of his leather trousers and he felt ready to burst. Gods, she was so soft and full and warm and lush and beautiful! She was everything he’d ever wanted in a female—even though he hadn’t known he wanted it because he had only Saurians around him.

He switched to her other nipple, noting as he did that his intense suction had made her first peak a dark red. It looked like a ripe fruit—luscious and full—and in the meantime he could feel her pussy getting even wetter and hotter.

“Close!” she was moaning. “Oh God, I’m so close now! Don’t stop—keep touching me—keep sucking my nipples!”

Dragon wanted to promise her that he wouldn’t stop until she came but his mouth was busy lapping and sucking her tight peaks. Gods, her skin tasted so good—sweet and salty and fresh and hot. He loved the way she was writhing against him, giving herself without reservation to the way he was stroking her soft, wet little pussy.

And then she was stiffening against him, gasping as her small hands tightened on his shoulders. At first Dragon was afraid that her heart was giving out but then he realized that she was, in fact, coming—coming all over his fingers as he stroked her wet depths, orgasming so hard her entire body was tense with pleasure.

“Ahhhh! *God!*” she gasped and suddenly she gripped his wrist, holding his hand in place with surprise strength for one so small. She ground against him, rubbing almost desperately as though she needed more contact than he

had been giving her.

“Bobbi? *Feela?*” Dragon looked at her anxiously. “Are you all right? Wasn’t it enough?”

“Need...more,” she panted, still grinding against him. “Need you inside me. *Not your cock,*” she went on quickly. “Your *fingers.*”

Dragon slid his fingers down from her throbbing little button and found the soft, wet, warm entrance to her pussy. He pressed his first and second fingers inside her and felt as though he had entered paradise.

There was nothing dry or cold or abrasive about her inner channel—her pussy was wet and hot and slick with her juices—he could feel her gripping him tightly and for a moment he had an almost overwhelming desire to withdraw his fingers and fill her with his cock instead. He could imagine how her warm wetness would feel around his aching shaft, could see his thickness filling her...stretching her open as she moaned for him...

“Oh God, *fuck me!*” she cried, gripping his shoulders even tighter. “Fill me up—please, I *need* you to!”

Dragon let her nipple slip from between his lips. Using his free hand, he tangled his fingers in her long, silky hair and pulled her down so that her forehead was against his.

“Say my name while I do it, then,” he growled, looking into her eyes. “Say my name while I fuck your soft little pussy with my fingers, Bobbi!”

Her eyes widened for a moment, but then she complied.

“*Dragon,*” she moaned for him as he thrust inside her, loving the feeling of her clenching all around him. Loving the way they held eye contact, lost in each other’s gazes as he fucked her. “Oh God, Dragon—that feels so good! Don’t stop! I think...think I’m going to come *again,*” she panted.

Instinctively, he slipped his thumb up to caress the firm bud of her clit even as he kept thrusting inside her with his fingers. He began to slide the pad of his thumb back and forth over the tender little button, his eyes never leaving hers as he touched her.

“Come for me,” he growled hoarsely. “Come for me while I fuck your soft little pussy with my fingers, Bobbi. Come while I stroke your Goddess pearl!”

Her eyes widened and then squeezed shut and he felt her inner walls contract around his fingers. Then she was coming, just as he had commanded, coming just for him as he stroked her to orgasm and gave her exactly what she needed to push her over the edge and beyond.

“Dragon! Oh, God—yes, *yes!*” Throwing back her head, she moaned his name like a prayer and for a brief, blinding instant he imagined having his cock in her instead, feeling her inner pussy squeezing his shaft as he shot his seed deep inside her and made her his forever...

If he had ever had a doubt about keeping her, it was erased from his mind in that instant. He was *never* letting her go, Dragon told himself as he watched her moaning and writhing on his lap, her red hair wild and silky around her shoulders and her eyes squeezed shut with a passion so deep it was almost pain.

He was never going to release the little *feela*—she was going to be his
forever.



Bobbi didn't think she'd ever had such a passionate sexual experience in her life. Looking into the big Kindred's eyes and moaning his name while he made her come was almost too much—too intense for her. It was next-level pleasure, especially compared with her ex, who had wanted to do everything in the dark and then had rolled over and gone to sleep directly afterwards.

The orgasms that ripped through her were likewise incredibly strong and intense. Was it because she was so damn attracted to him? Because yes, she really was, even though she'd been trying to ignore it, she admitted to herself. Yes, he was her kidnapper and yes, she had only let him touch her out of necessity. But the feelings between them when they got intimate were electric and she didn't think it was just because of the drug she'd been given.

His hands on my body feel so good...so right, she thought, as she rubbed against him desperately. And for someone who had never touched a mammalian female before, Dragon was certainly a quick learner. Kat had told her that Kindred seemed to have some kind of sixth sense about how to bring a woman pleasure, but Bobbi hadn't credited it much. Now, she believed whole heartedly that her friend had been right.

Her ex-fiancé hadn't been able to find her clit with two hands and map, as

the saying went. And when he did find it, he was too rough and seemed to touch her the wrong way at least ninety percent of the time.

Dragon, on the other hand, had found his way to the magic spot on his very first try with no trouble at all. And once there, he seemed to know just how to touch her to bring her the maximum amount of pleasure. His fingertips against her heated flesh weren't too rough—he seemed to understand how sensitive she was there, how little it took to get her where she needed to go.

Bobbi appreciated that immensely. It meant she was free to just sit back and enjoy herself without having to keep directing him or trying to help him get it right. He just seemed to know exactly what to do to make her come—and come she had—so hard she'd seen stars and fireworks exploding in front of her eyes.

And now, as the pleasure faded and her heart—which had been galloping in her chest—began to slow, she let herself collapse against him.

“Oh, God,” she moaned, slumping forward and laying her head on his broad shoulder. “That was...so *intense*.”

“Was it enough?” His deep, rumbling voice still sounded worried. “Did the orgasm help you?”

“That wasn't so much an...an orgasm as a whole-body meltdown,” Bobbi panted. She was aware that his long fingers were still inside her, but she couldn't move at the moment—she was too spent. Also, he smelled really good and she always had the urge to cuddle after sex. She snuggled closer. “For a beginner, you're *really* good at that,” she murmured, rubbing her cheek against his chest.

“I only did what you told me to,” he pointed out.

“Yeah, but you did it so *well*,” Bobbi sighed happily. “Mmm, and you’re so big and warm...” She turned her face up to see that he was looking down at her. “Sorry—do you mind me doing this?” she asked. “I, uh, tend to get cuddly after sex.”

“Do I mind? Of course not.”

As though to prove it, he put his free arm around her and drew her close to his chest, which felt amazing.

Bobbi sighed happily and snuggled even closer. She was aware that she probably shouldn’t be doing this—snuggling with her kidnapper, that was—but she couldn’t seem to help it. Didn’t *want* to help it, if she was honest with herself. It felt wonderful to be held in his big, muscular arms and cuddle with him after he’d just given her two such intense orgasms.

“I suppose you should, uh, take your fingers out of me,” she murmured, shifting around in his lap a little bit. She was aware that under other circumstances she would be embarrassed right now, but the post-sex haze was still fogging her brain and she just felt too good to let herself get upset. She just wanted to melt against his big, warm, hard body and let her brain simmer in the feel-good chemicals the orgasms had released.

“Suppose I should,” Dragon murmured. Slowly, he withdrew his long fingers. They were glistening with her juices and he surprised her by popping them into his mouth.

“Why did you do that?” she asked, frowning a little.

He finished licking his fingers clean and she saw that his eyes were half-lidded again.

“Wanted to taste you,” he said hoarsely. “Gods your juices are sweet, little one.”

Bobbi felt her cheeks heating in a blush and she remembered what Kat had told her about how Kindred males loved going down. *They crave it like us curvy girls crave chocolate cake!* she'd said, giggling. Could it be that she was right?

"Thank you," Bobbi murmured, trying to push the thought out of her mind. She'd never had very good results with that particular sex act. "Um... and thanks for helping me, er, come too," she added.

"Did it work?" Dragon looked at her intently. "Show me your hands."

Bobbi lifted a hand—her left one—to let him see it. To her relief, the red stain of the aphrodisiac drug had faded from her fingers, leaving them looking normal again.

"Looks good—don't you think?" she asked, looking up at him. "I don't see any more red anywhere."

"It *does* look good," he agreed, but he didn't sound completely convinced, Bobbi thought.

She frowned.

"What's wrong?"

"Well...it's just that sometimes it takes a while for the drug to work its way out of your system," he told her. "So if you start feeling the need to come again..."

"I know where to find you," Bobbi murmured drowsily. She shivered a little and pressed closer to him. "Is it getting colder in here?"

"Not yet but it will be soon, when the room chills for the night." He looked at her anxiously. "I think I'd better give you some more of my blood before we go to sleep."

“Mmm-hmm.” Bobbi yawned. It had been a long, fraught day and the two intense orgasms had relaxed her completely. She thought she would have agreed to almost anything at this point.

“Come on.” Dragon rose, holding her against him.

“Kay.” Bobbi wrapped her legs around his trim waist and her arms around his neck. She pressed her face to the side of his throat, breathing in his warm, spicy aroma.

She dimly remembered telling herself at the beginning of all this that she would let him help her come and then get away from him as quickly as possible. But she couldn't seem to summon the strength to do that now. It felt too good to be held in his arms—too right to be close to him—to try to escape now.

I probably wouldn't even put up much of a fight if he actually tried to breed me, she thought sleepily. In fact, she could imagine herself opening her thighs for the big Kindred and welcoming his thick shaft into her slippery pussy. The pleasure he'd given her had gotten her all warmed up and ready for him. And think how delicious it would feel to have that big, thick shaft inside her...

Then she realized what she was thinking.

Don't forget about Bonding Sex, whispered a warning little voice in her head. *Don't forget about being stuck here forever if you let him do that to you!*

All right, she'd be careful, Bobbi promised herself. But she still didn't want to move away from the warmth of his big body. She thought the dose of blood he'd given her that morning must be wearing off and she didn't object when he climbed into the sleeping pit with her and covered both of them with

the fur blanket.

“I need to give you more of my blood,” he rumbled.

“Mmm-hmm,” Bobbi agreed. “But why don’t you take off your trousers first—it’s not comfortable sleeping beside you with them on,” she complained sleepily.

“I don’t know if I trust myself to be completely naked with you after watching you come like that,” Dragon growled. “I’m still fucking hard and you feel so warm and soft.” He shifted restlessly beside her. “In fact, I think I’m going to have to go stroke myself off in the bathing chamber before I can get to sleep with you beside me.”

“No, wait—don’t go,” Bobbi protested, when he sat up, as though to lift himself out of the sleeping pit.

“Sorry, little one, but I have to,” he rumbled regretfully. “I don’t trust myself around you otherwise. You’re too fucking tempting.”

“Well, if you really feel like you *have* to jerk off, then stay here and let me help,” Bobbi told him.

He frowned.

“How do you mean?”

“I mean...let me help.” She let her hand drift to the crotch of his leather trousers, where a thick bulge was in evidence. “You made me come, let me return the favor,” she murmured.

Part of her was saying this was a bad idea—that she would only be leading the big Kindred on and giving him the wrong idea. But she had always hated selfish lovers—the kind of person who just lays there and lets their partner do all the work without stirring a finger to reciprocate. Her ex

had been like that—it was one reason she'd left him.

Besides, it's only once, she told herself. Once can't hurt.

Dragon seemed to think a little more intimacy between them couldn't hurt either because, with a low groan, he lay back down and opened his trousers for her. Shucking them down, he lay naked beside her with his thick shaft throbbing with need against his belly.

“Mmm...you're so *big*,” Bobbi murmured, taking him in her hand as she cuddled against his side. She couldn't even wrap her fingers all the way around him but she liked trying—liked the contrast of soft skin over his rock-hard erection, like rose pedals over warm steel—and the way she felt so powerful and in charge holding him like this.

He was huge—a mountain of muscle—he could easily break her in half if he wanted to. But while Bobbi was holding him like this, *she* had the power. It made things feel more *even* between them somehow.

“I always heard that Kindred were on the larger side but you're definitely on the far end of the scale,” she remarked. But a look at his face showed that he wasn't enjoying her compliment. In fact, Bobbi thought, he looked almost...ashamed. But why?

“I...know it's the wrong shape.” His voice was low and hesitant. “You can stop touching me if you want to. But gods, your little hand feels so good on me!”

“You think it's the wrong *shape*?” Bobbi looked up at him quizzically. “Why? Because it's not shaped like a scaly corkscrew?”

“Well...” He shifted uncomfortably. “Actually, I don't know *what* shape a mammalian's shaft is supposed to be—I don't have any frame of reference. I only know that when we were children, Zerlix and his friends used to make

fun of me.”

Bobbi felt a surge of pity for the big Kindred. What a hard childhood he must have had, growing up with a sadistic asshole like Zerlix for a brother! The Saurian had made him doubt everything about himself—even his manhood, which she knew from experience, was no small thing when it came to a guy’s self-confidence and identity.

“Believe me, you’re just fine,” Bobbi reassured him. “*More* than fine. They’d ask you to star in porn down on Earth if they saw your equipment.”

On impulse, she leaned over and planted a soft kiss on the head of his cock, just where the flaring crown met the thick shaft. *Mmm*, he smelled good too. His spicy, masculine scent was stronger here—wilder somehow. She had only meant to reassure him but that spicy scent of his made her feel hot and wet and swollen between her legs all over again.

“What...what are you doing?” Dragon’s deep voice sounded slightly strangled.

“Just kissing you. Why? Don’t you like it?” Bobbi looked up to see a confused look on his face.

“Kissing?” he asked. “What’s that?”

“Why...it’s when you press your lips to something—or in this case, *someone*,” she explained. Then she remembered that Saurians had no lips. “Oh, but I guess you’ve probably never heard of it before.”

He shook his head.

“No but...it feels nice.”

“It can feel even *nicer*,” Bobbi purred, giving him a naughty little smile. “Do you want me to kiss it again?” She had only been planning to give the

big Kindred a handjob but now the game plan had changed. Remembering the lipless Saurian mouth and their needle-sharp teeth, she realized he must never have had any kind of blowjob before.

I could be his first, she thought, and liked the idea a lot.

“If you want to,” Dragon rumbled. He still sounded doubtful.

“Oh, I *want* to,” Bobbi assured him. She had always been assertive in bed—she knew what she liked and she wasn’t afraid to ask for it. Likewise, she wasn’t afraid to take charge when the situation called for it. And it certainly seemed to call for it now.

Leaning over him, she brushed her hair to one side, knowing that he would probably want to watch. Indeed, Dragon’s bronze eyes were fixed on her as she bent down to kiss his cock again—this time on the very tip.

His precum tasted very much like his blood had, when he fed it to her—sweet and spicy like the red-hot cinnamon candy she’d loved when she was younger. Bobbi found that she liked it. Using the flat of her tongue, she lapped it up eagerly, then slipped the entire head into her mouth and sucked, hoping for more.

She couldn’t get much more than the head and a bit of the shaft into her mouth—he was too big—but she took her time stroking up and down his thick length, occasionally stopping to give him long, slow licks with her tongue, starting at the very base and licking upwards to the crown.

“Oh, *gods!*” Dragon groaned low in his throat as he watched her work on him. “Bobbi, I’ve never felt anything like this before—*never*. Your little mouth on me is so hot and sweet!”

“Mmm, I’m glad you like it.” She was feeling sexy and naughty and hot all over. Her sleepiness seemed to have faded and she was more interested in

sucking him off and putting on a show than going to bed at the moment.

His big hand found her head but he didn't try to push her down, which was something Bobbi detested. Instead he just stroked her hair, watching with half-lidded pleasure as she took him in her mouth and sucked him and licked him slowly and thoroughly.

At last she felt him tensing and knew he was getting close.

"Bobbi," he groaned. "*Feela*, I think...think I'm going to shoot."

"Mmm-hmm," she hummed and then stopped sucking him for a moment in order to say, "That's the idea, baby. Just let go and let yourself come."

"But, well..." He frowned. "I tend to produce a lot of seed. And I don't know how you feel about me shooting it in your mouth."

"Spoken like a true gentleman," Bobbi said, smiling approvingly.

It was clearly Nature over Nurture in the bedroom, at least. She couldn't imagine any of the Saurian males she'd seen being considerate enough to ask if she would rather not swallow.

"I'll be honest," she told Dragon. "Swallowing hasn't been my favorite thing in the past. But I think for you, I think I'll make an exception."

His eyes widened.

"Then...you want me to shoot in your mouth?"

"I might pull off if I don't like it," Bobbi warned. She gave him a naughty smile. "But if your cum tastes anything like your precum, it shouldn't be a problem."

Then she went back to sucking and stroking him, feeling her pussy throb as he groaned and caressed her hair again.

"Gods, little one," he said hoarsely, as she increased her tempo. "I never

dreamed of a female doing this for me! Your mouth is so soft and sweet and it feels so good when you lick me like that!”

It's going to feel even better when you come, Bobbi thought to herself. And just at that moment, the big Kindred let out a low groan and stiffened against her. She felt his thickness ripple in her hand and the first hot spurt hit her tongue.

It tasted just like the cinnamon red-hot candy she loved and Bobbi swallowed eagerly. If all guys had cum that tasted like candy, going down would be a lot more fun, she couldn't help thinking. But then again, she'd already had fun going down on the big Kindred.

She liked giving him his first blowjob—loved giving him pleasure when he was so appreciative about receiving it. His hands in her hair had tightened but he still wasn't pushing her down.

Likewise, his big body had gone tense but he wasn't thrusting up or trying to shove his shaft down her throat. He was just letting her suck him—letting her take him as far as she wanted and no further. It was a nice change from her ex, Bobbi thought. *He* had been so pushy she'd stopped giving him blowjobs entirely.

At last the tension left Dragon's big body and he went limp against the mattress. His broad chest was heaving like a bellows as he caught his breath. When he looked up, there was an expression of amazement on his face.

“Gods...that was...” He shook his head. “I can't describe it.”

“Well, some things defy description,” Bobbi said, smiling. She licked her lips. “Mmm, you really *do* taste delicious, you know?”

“Do I?” He sounded surprised.

“Mmm-hmm.” She lay down beside him and snuggled close again. Of

course it was a bad idea—he was still her kidnapper, she reminded herself—but she couldn't help feeling close to him after everything they'd shared that night.

“Tell me, Bobbi,” he rumbled. “Do all mammals show affection in the way you just showed it to me?”

“What? By giving each other blowjobs?” she asked, amused. But when she looked up, she saw his face was serious. “Usually only if they're lovers—I mean, it's a very intimate act.” She cleared her throat and went on quickly. “Obviously, you and I aren't actually *lovers* but we're in kind of...unusual circumstances right now.”

“I didn't mean what you called a ‘blowjob’ exactly,” he remarked. “I meant what you called a ‘kiss’—pressing your lips to someone else. Do mammals do that a lot?”

“Well...sure.” Bobbi smiled at him. “But *where* you press your lips varies depending on your relationship. For instance, you might kiss a friend or a relative on the cheek. Like this.”

Lifting herself on one elbow, she leaned over him and kissed his rough cheek gently. When she pulled back, Dragon raised a hand and touched the place where she'd kissed him with his fingertips, an unreadable look on his face.

“I think I like that,” he murmured. “Where do lovers kiss each other, then? Also on the cheek?”

“Or the lips,” Bobbi murmured. He had a lush mouth but she wasn't sure he'd want her to kiss him there after she'd just swallowed his seed. Some guys, her ex included, wouldn't like that—which Bobbi thought was silly but what could you do?

But Dragon surprised her by asking,

“Could we try that? Kissing on the lips? I mean, could you show me how it’s done?”

“Well...I guess it couldn’t hurt just to *show* you,” Bobbi murmured.

She leaned over him, letting her hair fall in a curtain around them both, and pressed her lips to his.

At first Dragon just lay there, as though he was unsure how to respond. But then he began to get into it, kissing her back slowly, as though he was feeling his way.

Bobbi was really beginning to enjoy herself. It seemed amazing to think that such a big, tough Mob enforcer didn’t know the first thing about kissing. Once again, she found she liked being his first. Daringly, she opened her mouth and licked gently at the seam of his lips, asking him to let her in.

Dragon opened for her obligingly and she darted her tongue inside, teasing him, tasting him, deepening the kiss in a way she knew she probably shouldn’t. But Hell, she’d already done all kinds of things she shouldn’t do with the big Kindred that night, she reasoned with herself. What harm could a little kissing do after she’d already gone down on him and let him make her come not once but twice?

But the deep kissing seemed to do something to Dragon. With a low growl, he suddenly rolled her over on her back. Taking her in his arms, he kissed her passionately and with surprising skill, considering he had only just learned.

Bobbi’s heart started pounding and she kissed him back just as eagerly, even though she was a little afraid things were getting out of hand. His mouth tasted delicious—hot and spicy—and his hands were roaming over her bare

back and bottom, stroking and squeezing, pulling her closer to him as though he couldn't get enough of her.

When she felt his rock-hard shaft branding her belly, Bobbi knew she had to stop. If she let this go on much longer, they were definitely going to end up making love and probably having Bonding Sex and she could *not* do that, no matter how attracted she was to him.

“Hey, hold on—let's slow it down,” she gasped, breaking the kiss and looking into his bronze eyes, which were burning with lust again.

“Forgive me,” Dragon rumbled, though she noticed he didn't let her go. “I had no idea that ‘kissing’ could wake such needs inside me. I never dreamed of pressing my mouth to another's before tonight.”

Thinking of the lipless Saurian mouth filled with razor sharp teeth, Bobbi could believe it.

“You're amazingly good at it, considering I just taught you,” she remarked, panting a little. Her heart was drumming in her chest again and she felt both aroused and a little frightened to have him looming over her in such an intimate position.

“Tell me,” Dragon asked, looking down at her intently. “I know that mammals press their lips to each others' cheeks and lips and that the females might kiss a male's shaft. But do mammalian males ever ‘return the favor’ as you put it, earlier?”

Bobbi's heart started beating even faster.

“What do you mean?” she asked innocently.

“I mean, does a mammalian male ever kiss his female's inner thighs or pussy?” His burning bronze eyes were half-lidded again and his voice had dropped to a sensuous rumble. “Does he ever spread her open and kiss her

clit and put his tongue deep inside her to taste her sweet juices?”

“I...um...”

Bobbi felt her face getting hot, which meant she was probably blushing like crazy. She kept thinking about how Kat had said that Kindred warriors *needed* to go down on their women—that it was part of their biology. It was apparently a significant enough part that Dragon was interested in it, even though he’d been raised in a society where oral sex wasn’t even a thing.

Score another one for Nature over Nurture, Bobbi, whispered a little voice in her head. *You better think of something quick if you want to keep him from taking the first bus downtown to tastyville.* (Which was the euphemism she and her first college roommate had used, usually with a lot of giggling thrown in.)

It wasn’t that Bobbi objected to letting a guy go down on her—it just had never been a really great experience, to be honest. The few guys—including her ex—she’d let try it, didn’t know what they were doing or didn’t do it for long enough to get her anywhere near coming. Also, she was now remembering something else that Kat had told her.

She’d said that once a Kindred warrior went down on you, his urge to bond you to him got that much stronger. And she needed to avoid bonding with Dragon at all costs. If they bonded, how would she be able to leave him once the Kindred of the Mother Ship came for her? After all, she *certainly* didn’t want to stay here on Saurous the rest of her natural life. So they needed to avoid a trip to “tastyville” if at all possible.

“Ummm...” she said, since Dragon was still staring at her intently.

“Well, do they?” he growled softly. “Do mammalian males taste their females the way you tasted me? Do they spread open their soft little pussies

with their tongues and lap and suck to taste their juices, right from the source?”

Clearly, he was *really* getting into the idea.

“I mean, *sometimes* they do, I guess,” Bobbi said carefully. Then she had an inspiration. “But that’s usually one of the things they save until *after* they get properly married,” she said. “And sex too—mammalians don’t have sex until *after* they’re married.”

Which was *technically* true—*some* cultures and religions still thought it was very important to wait until after marriage to be sexually intimate. Bobbi herself had been raised by strict Southern parents, who wanted her to settle down and get married and have kids—in that order. Her mother in particular had been disappointed when she decided to pursue a PhD instead of a husband and she had nearly cried when Bobbi admitted to her that she and her fiancée had broken up.

“*But when am I ever going to get grandbabies from you, sweetheart?*” she’d asked, when Bobbi had announced the breakup and her intention to go study the Orniths on Avria Pentaura in the same breath. “*How are you ever going to meet a nice man and settle down if you’re on a planet where there aren’t even any human men?*”

“*You still have Savvi and she’s already given you two grandbabies,*” Bobbi had pointed out. Her older sister, Savanna, had settled down after getting a bachelors degree and had dutifully started having kids. She and her husband—a very respectable but extremely dull man named Harold—had even moved to be in the same neighborhood as her parents. So Bobbi really thought that her mom shouldn’t complain—after all, Savvi was having enough grandbabies to keep any grandma happy. She already had a boy and a

girl and another on the way.

*“I just want you to be **happy**, sweetheart!”* her mother had said. *“How can you be happy gallivanting around the universe living with people who aren’t even human?”*

*“Gallivanting around the universe is **exactly** what makes me happy,”* Bobbi had told her. *“Honestly, Mom—I’ll settle down when I’m good and ready and not before.”*

Of course, she’d never dreamed that she would be put in a position like this, she told herself, looking up into Dragon’s blazing eyes. She’d never planned on being kidnapped and then having to get intimate with her kidnapper to save her own life after being drugged with a dangerous aphrodisiac.

*Admit it, Bobbi, whispered a little voice in her head. Letting him make you come the first time was to save your life. But everything else after that has been just for fun and you know it. You’re **enjoying** yourself, and you know you really shouldn’t be.*

No, she shouldn’t, but she couldn’t help wanting to get close to the big Kindred. He smelled so good and he was so big and warm—his body just seemed to draw hers like a magnet.

She looked up at him, wondering if he’d go for her explanation that mammalian females didn’t allow males to go down on them or have sex until *after* marriage. She certainly hoped so, or she was shortly going to be in a lot of trouble.

At last, Dragon nodded.

“All right,” he rumbled. “I understand that you do not want to let me kiss you between your legs or take you until we are married. I can wait for that.”

“Oh, good...” Bobbi felt a rush of relief.

“But I want to kiss your lips again,” Dragon growled. He stroked her cheek and looked into her eyes. “I want to touch you and make you come again, Bobbi. And I want to kiss and suck your nipples some more—I loved the way they feel in my mouth and the way you moan when I suck them and stroke your soft little pussy.”

His hot, dirty words and the intense way he was looking at her when he said them sent a shiver of lust right through her. She knew she ought to say no, but she was suddenly feeling hot and bothered all over again.

“Well...” She nibbled her lower lip. “I guess maybe...I mean, I know you said sometimes the, uh, effects of the red-hand potion take a while to wear off.”

“They do,” he murmured. Leaning down, he brushed her hair aside and placed a slow, hot kiss on the vulnerable side of her neck, which sent a rush of tingles down her spine. “I want to kiss you *everywhere*,” he growled.

“All...all right,” she heard herself saying breathlessly. “You can...can kiss my nipples some more if you want to, I guess.”

Dragon raised an eyebrow at her.

“And stroke your pussy? I want to explore you, my little *feela*. I want to know your body as I know my own.” As he spoke, one big hand slid down her body, over her trembling belly to cup her mound. “I want to make you come again,” he murmured, looking into her eyes. “Come *hard*.”

“God...” Bobbi moaned and felt her legs parting for him, almost of their own volition. “All...all right,” she whispered, nearly panting with need. “You can...can touch me again, Dragon. But only to help me get over the last of the potion,” she added, trying to justify it to herself.

Her only answer was another soft kiss on the neck and then he was trailing his tongue down her chest to the swells of her breasts.

“So beautiful,” Bobbi heard him murmur. “So full and ripe and *perfect*.”

And then he sucked one of her nipples into his hot mouth and she felt his long fingers sliding into her slippery depths.

With another moan, she arched her back and gave herself up to pleasure. She would do better tomorrow, she promised herself. But just for tonight, she would give in and let the big Kindred do what he wanted...



“Why do you wear your hair that way?”

“Hmm?” Dragon looked up at her sleepily. He’d been halfway drowsing, waking slowly from another dream of the mammalian couple, Lalish and Taurex, he’d dreamed of the night before. This time he had seen their little one—the son they had mentioned in the previous dream. He had black hair, like his father and bronze eyes, like his mother. In Dragon’s dream, he had been no more than four or five cycles old—the same age he himself had been when the rival Clan killed his family.

Tolor. That was his name, he thought and again, he felt like he’d heard the name before, felt like it should mean something to him...

“Your hair,” Bobbi said. She sat up on one elbow and leaned over him, stroking a hand over his slicked-back hair, which Dragon kept tied tightly at the back of his neck.

This position put her beautiful breasts right in his face, which made it difficult to concentrate on what she was saying. Dragon had never cared for breasts before—female Saurians didn’t have much in the way of breasts to speak of and their nipples were inverted. They had never attracted him—not like Bobbi’s did.

He had kissed and licked and sucked her full mounds for a long time the

night before, feeling like he couldn't get enough of them—or of her—as he stroked and fingered her soft little pussy. She had come for him several times, moaning his name and making those soft, helpless sounds that made his shaft so hard when he remembered them...

“Dragon?” she asked, and he realized his mind had gone off on a tangent. With an effort, he pulled his eyes from her full breasts and looked into her lovely face instead.

“Hmm?” he asked.

“I said, why do you wear your hair all slicked back and tied up so tightly?” she asked, running a hand over his hair again. “Is it because you're living with Saurians and they don't even *have* any hair, so you're trying to be like them?”

“Hmm...something like that, I guess,” Dragon said thoughtfully. “But also, it gets in my face when it's loose—damn pain in the ass. Makes it hard to see when I'm fighting.”

She frowned. “What if I showed you a way to wear it so it stayed out of your face but without slicking it back like this? Would you like that?”

At this point, Dragon probably would have agreed to anything, as long as she kept touching him. He loved the feel of her soft, small hands on him—not to mention her luscious breasts in his face.

“We could try it,” he said, shrugging. “But it might be difficult to get all of the shellac out of my hair.”

“I'll help you,” Bobbi promised. “Come on, we can take a shower together and I'll wash it out for you.” She tugged on his arm. “Get up, lazybones! And help me get out of this damn sleeping pit.”

She stood and reached up to grasp the lip of the pit, but it was clear she

was too short to get good enough leverage to lift herself out. However, the position did put her full, curvy body on display and Dragon couldn't help admiring the view.

“Well—what are you waiting for?” Bobbi looked down at him, a frown playing around her lush lips—lips he had kissed over and over the night before, Dragon reminded himself. In fact, he had kissed most of her body—though not between her legs, which was apparently off-limits until after their wedding ceremony.

Dragon didn't mind waiting to breed her until after they were married—that was the rule with well-bred Saurian females of good families as well. But he wished she would let him kiss her—let him spread her legs and taste her soft little pussy and lap her with his tongue. He didn't know why he wanted to do that so badly, but he *did*.

Be patient, he told himself sternly, getting up at last. *At least she seems much less resistant to the idea of getting married now.*

Indeed, Zerlix seemed to have done him a favor—though he would certainly gnash his teeth if he knew it. Without the dose of red-hand potion, Dragon was certain that Bobbi would never have come to him so willingly. And now it seemed the initial barrier had been broken down between them. Why else would she willingly be naked in front of him and offer to take a shower with him?

“Here, let me help you, little one,” he murmured, smiling as he put his hands around her waist and lifted her clear of the sleeping pit.

“Oh!” Bobbi exclaimed breathlessly, as he sat her on the edge of the pit. “I still say you should be careful lifting me like that.”

“Don't be silly,” Dragon remarked, lifting himself out of the sleeping pit

with one smooth, practiced motion. “You’re so tiny I could lift you all day long.”

She nibbled her lower lip, which seemed to be something she did when she was thinking about something.

“Maybe I should try to lose some weight if you’re going to be always lifting me, though,” she suggested hesitantly.

“But then you’d lose your curves—I wouldn’t want that,” Dragon protested. Taking her hand, he pulled her to her feet. He loved the way she was so much shorter than him—so petite the top of her head barely came up to his biceps. Gods, she was adorable!

“You wouldn’t?” She looked up at him uncertainly and he saw vulnerability in her lovely blue eyes.

“Absolutely *not*,” he assured her.

“You might think differently if you met other mammalian girls though—ones that are taller and thinner than me,” she protested.

“You mean girls that look like Saurian females?” Dragon asked flatly. “I think I can promise you that all I would think if I met them, was that I had no interest in them.” He let his eyes rove down her big breasts and full hips to her rounded behind and plump thighs. “I *love* the way you’re built, Bobbi—the way you’re curved in all the right places.”

Her cheeks got red and she blushed, which always made her even prettier, in his opinion.

“Enough silliness—let’s get a shower and do something about your hair,” she said briskly.

“As you wish.” Dragon shrugged and led the way to the bathing chamber.

He was willing to do just about anything she asked, including wearing his hair in a different way. He had never felt this way about a female before and there was no word in the Saurian dialect he could think of to describe it.

He only knew that he wanted to be with Bobbi always and never let her go.



The shower turned out to be an interesting experience—mainly because of the position they wound up in, Bobbi thought. Dragon was so tall that she had to have him kneel on the tiled floor of the shower stall so that she could reach his hair. This put her breasts in his face and he kept teasing her nipples with his tongue, kissing and sucking them as she scrubbed the shellac—which turned out to be a cross between really thick gel and some kind of extra-stiff hairspray—out of his long, black strands.

Bobbi, for her part, pretended that she didn't notice at first, when he started nuzzling between her breasts. She simply kept scrubbing as the warm water fell down around them from the ceiling above, while Dragon rubbed his rough cheeks against her naked slopes. But she couldn't help moaning when he took one ripe bud between his lips and started sucking on it, swirling the tip of his tongue around and around her sensitive peak until she could feel herself getting wet and hot and ready between her legs.

She had told herself the night before that she wouldn't let him do this anymore—that she would keep to herself from now on. But she found it impossible to keep the promise she'd made when she was so attracted to the big Kindred and he was obviously just as attracted to her. The physical pull between them was undeniable and now that the barriers between them had

been broken down, it was difficult to keep her hands off him—or protest when he put his hands (and mouth) on her.

Still, she *tried*.

“Dragon...” she murmured warningly, as he switched to the other nipple—God, he had gotten so good at that in such a short time! “I shouldn’t let you do that, you know. We...we ought to wait to do anything else until...until our wedding night,” she told him breathlessly.

Of course, she had no intention of being here for said wedding night—a thought which gave her a tiny twinge of guilt. But she reminded herself that he had *kidnapped* her and she had no real obligation to marry him, no matter how attractive she found him. This time on Saurous was just an interlude—she had to get back to her real life.

“Mmm, just can’t resist your beautiful body, my little *feela*,” Dragon rumbled, and then promptly began sucking her other nipple, which made her moan and shift from foot to foot, pressing her thighs together to try and ease the pressure growing there.

The next thing she knew, he was slipping a hand between her thighs to cup her swollen pussy.

“Dragon...” she moaned again, but she made no protest when she felt his long fingers invading her, sliding deep into her slick folds to stroke her aching clit. God, how had he gotten so good at touching her so quickly? She’d been engaged to her ex for three years and he had *never* gotten the hang of it, but to Dragon, pleasuring her just seemed to come naturally.

“Just wanted to see how creamy and wet your soft little pussy is this morning, *feela*,” he murmured, letting her tight nipple slip from his lips and looking up at her for a moment. “Just want to stroke your clit for you while

you help me with my hair.”

His black eyelashes—surprisingly long for a man—were wet and spiky from the shower, which made his bronze eyes look even more intense, Bobbi thought. She could feel herself melting as she looked at him, reading the lust in those bronze depths.

“We...we shouldn’t,” she whispered breathlessly. But even as she spoke, she was spreading her thighs for him. And when he slipped two long fingers deep inside her tight channel, she didn’t protest at all. She only opened wider for him and let him fuck deeply into her while his thumb slid over her aching clit. Gripping his broad shoulders, she moaned his name as she came for him.

Afterwards—a long time afterwards, because Bobbi had decided to “return the favor” again, with another blowjob—they got out of the shower and toweled off and she showed him how to wrap a towel around his hair—which was surprisingly long now that it was unbound—to dry it.

She couldn’t help smiling at the sight he made, with one towel-sheet wrapped around his waist and another on his head, while in between his thick muscles, decorated with the colorful, moving tattoos, were showing.

He looks like a Mafia thug who decided to have a spa day, she thought, grinning to herself.

“Why are you smiling, *feela?*” Dragon murmured, looking down at her. “Are you feeling happy?”

To Bobbi’s surprise, she found she was. Which was completely wrong, she knew. She had been kidnapped and taken away from her research, she reminded herself for the thousandth time. She ought to be miserable—ought to be plotting a way out of here—not fooling around and falling in love with her kidnapper and captor.

Wait a minute, falling in love? What are you talking about? she asked herself. *Are you crazy?*

She pushed the thought away and looked up at the big Kindred.

“I was just thinking I can’t wait to see your hair once it’s dry,” she remarked. “It’s a lot longer than I thought it would be.”

He shrugged, his broad, bare shoulders rolling with the motion.

“It’s almost time for me to chop it off with a knife again.”

“No, don’t do that!” Bobbi protested. “Remember, I promised to show you a way to keep it out of your eyes?”

Dragon frowned.

“Yes, but I don’t think—”

“Please?” Bobbi begged. “I’ve always loved men with long hair. And with all those tattoos, you’ll look like a rock star if you leave it loose around your shoulders.”

“Well, all right. But only because you asked me to,” he murmured.

“Good!” Bobbi clapped her hands. “Come on, let me show you.”

The towel-sheets they used here were very absorbent and seemed to wick away water almost immediately. So when she convinced him to sit on the edge of the couch and pulled the towel off his head, his long, black hair was barely damp.

“Okay good—this is good.” Bobbi ran her hands through his thick, black hair, enjoying the feeling of the silky strands sliding through her fingers.

Dragon shivered and looked up at her.

“That feels...nice. I *think*,” he said doubtfully. “It gives me a cold chill—but in a good way. What are you doing?”

“Just playing with your hair—seeing how it looks now that we’ve gotten all that goop out of it,” Bobbi said “Hair can be very sensitive—that’s why you’re getting the shivers.”

Dragon looked interested.

“Do mammals often play with each other’s hair?” he asked.

“Sometimes.” Bobbi kept running her fingers through his hair—once again she had that feeling of power. She enjoyed giving such a big, strong, fearless warrior the shivers. And she liked how the harsh planes of his face were softened when they were framed by the long, black hair. He really was very handsome, she decided, in a “dangerous bad boy your mom wouldn’t want you to date” kind of way.

“Speaking of shivers,” Dragon remarked, breaking into her musings. “I haven’t seen *you* shivering at all, even though I forgot to give you any more of my blood last night.”

“Hmmm, you’re right,” Bobbi murmured. “Maybe…” She stopped, biting her lip as a thought came to her.

“Maybe what?” Dragon asked, looking up at her.

“Well…maybe your, er, seed, has the same heating compounds in it that your blood does,” Bobbi said. She could feel her cheeks warming a bit as she spoke the words—she couldn’t believe she’d given him *another* blowjob this morning after she’d promised herself she would leave him strictly alone after last night. But she loved the feeling of power it gave her to pleasure him with her mouth—not to mention the look of ecstasy that came over his normally stern features and the way he groaned her name when he came.

“What makes you say that?” Dragon raised an eyebrow at her.

“Just that they taste a lot alike,” Bobbi told him. “Like melted cinnamon

candy. Which is weird, but really good, actually.” She licked her lips guiltily.

Dragon’s eyes went half-lidded.

“Mmm, I like the taste of your juices too, little one,” he murmured. “Just wish you’d let me taste them right from the source instead of only licking them off my fingers after I stroke your soft little pussy.”

His deep, rumbling voice and the way he was looking at her gave Bobbi some shivers of her own.

See? whispered a little voice in her head. *This is what you get for doing things you shouldn’t do! You know what letting him go down on you would lead to—Bonding Sex! So you’d better keep it in your pants from now on, Bobbi.*

“Let me show you how to fix your hair,” she said to Dragon, hoping to change the subject. “You can pull just the top of it back and let the rest flow free, you know. That way it stays out of your eyes when you’re fighting...”

“As you wish, *feela*,” he murmured, but his eyes were hot as he looked at her and Bobbi knew she was going to have to be careful from now on—*extremely* careful until she found a way out of here.



She didn't find any way out—not right away—but the next few weeks were surprisingly peaceful. Their days and nights fell into a kind of pattern which felt strangely normal to Bobbi.

Every morning they got up and showered together before getting dressed and going to the main dining area for breakfast. Sometimes Zerlix was there, with one or more of his females, and Bobbi often saw him glaring at her. However, he would glance away when Dragon caught him looking and would usually leave shortly thereafter, much to her relief.

After breakfast—or First Meal as they called it—which usually consisted of some kind of meat porridge and hot meat tea, she and Dragon would part for the day. While the big Kindred did his duties—which seemed to consist of patrolling the boundaries of his Clan's borders and enforcing the law of the Crimson Blades—Bobbi usually worked in the kitchen or the sandy-soiled garden with the Saurian women.

She had always been good at integrating herself into groups of new people and she made friends easily. So it was no surprise that she got along well with almost everyone—though Res. Tizlah had cooled towards her markedly after the scene in the banquet hall with Zerlix.

Bobbi was sorry about that, since she genuinely liked Dragon's adoptive

mother, but she made other friends as well—though she wasn't as close to any of them as she was to Keelah.

Bobbi had been worried that Zerlix would take his rage out on the hapless Saurian girl that night after the banquet, and she'd been right to worry. The next day one of Keelah's yellow eyes had been nearly swollen shut and there were dark green bruises on her scaly skin. But she'd only shaken her head when Bobbi exclaimed over it.

"Please, don't blame yourself," she'd said softly. "I have borne such marks before and I will bear them again. Males hit when they are angry—it's simply the way of things."

"Not all males hit when they're angry!" Bobbi had exclaimed indignantly. "Dragon has never hit me once! No man has—I wouldn't put up with it!"

"But what choice do I have?" Keelah asked. "I'm just lucky he didn't decide to send me back to my old owner or to another Clan to get rid of me!" She shook her head again. "I still don't know why he chose to keep me with him when I witnessed his disgrace."

Bobbi didn't know either, but she was glad that Keelah was still here in the Crimson Blades compound. Her heart went out to the Saurian girl and she was more and more determined that when she left, she was going to take Keelah with her. Though how she was ever going to get out of the compound while she was being watched every moment by Res. Tizlah and the other women, she didn't know.

What she *didn't* know was that someone else was watching...and not liking what he saw.



“That mammalian girl has had a bad effect on Dragon.” Komendant Vizlar frowned as he watched the girl in question and his adopted son sitting at the First Meal table together.

Dragon was leaning down to listen to something she was saying and she was playing with those long fibers that grew from his head that mammals called “hair.” His adopted son had used to keep the offensive stuff slicked back and out of the way but now—apparently at her urging—he was wearing it loose around his shoulders. It made a most unseemly display, as far as Komendant Vizlar was concerned. Most *un-Saurian*.

“He’s just a young male infatuated with a female for the first time,” his Advisor, Rep. Yariz said indulgently. “Remember, he has never seen a female of his own kind before. Well, except for his mother, but of course he doesn’t remember her, because of the memory block.”

“Are you *sure* the block can’t be breached?” Komendant Vizlar muttered, frowning. “If he remembers that *we* are the ones responsible for the deaths of his kin...if he dredges up the memory of me shooting his parents with my blaster—”

“Then all Hell would break loose,” Rep. Yariz said mildly. “But don’t worry—he won’t remember any of that. The memory block was the best

money can buy and it's held this long, hasn't it?"

"I suppose," the Komendant said, frowning. He was thinking of how large his adopted son had gotten—Dragon stood a good head taller than any other man in the Clan. Also, he was incredibly fast and strong—he could beat any rival who came against him. He just seemed to see their weaknesses instinctively and know how to exploit them, which made him an unparalleled fighter...and a deadly killer.

Up until now, all of these physical attributes had been strengths for the Crimson Blades Clan. But if Dragon should ever remember his past and his strength was turned against them...

"I don't like the way she's changed him," he said, gesturing at the mammalian female with her absurdly pointed face and the mass of orange and red fibers all around her head. "He smiles too much now—I've even seen him laughing in public on occasion. It's not seemly for an enforcer!"

"He'll get over it once they've been married for a while," Rep. Yariz said, shrugging. "You know yourself that a female is much more enticing *before* she becomes your wife. After that, we can send a pretty Pleasure Girl his way and he'll forget about her soon enough."

"I don't think so," Komendant Vizlar said, shaking his head. "He's never shown much interest in Pleasure Girls—or any female—before now. I had assumed that maybe he was sexless, because of the fact that he's a Hybrid Kindred." He frowned at his Advisor. "Speaking of that, I thought you said that Hybrid Kindred weren't *able* to form a bond with a female? That was what you told me when you advised me to take Dragon as the Little Brother to Zerlix."

"Well, I *have* been known to be wrong from time to time," Rep. Yariz

said mildly. “But why should it matter, even if Dragon *is* able to bond with a female? He’s still loyal to the Clan, isn’t he? You even gave him his own crew to run not long ago.”

“Only because he and Zerlix can’t get along anymore—and all because of that *female*,” the Komendant growled. “She has caused a rift between my sons—a rift that grows wider every day. And now Zerlix has no trusted Little Brother to look after him and to...to temper his decisions.”

He didn’t like to say—even to his Advisor—that his biological son was a complete fuck-up when it came to making judgment calls. He hadn’t realized how much Dragon had been reining Zerlix in and curbing his worst impulses until the two were no longer working together on the same crew.

Now that Zerlix was on his own, he was constantly causing trouble. Customers were complaining that he was trying to collect their tributes to the Clan early or even that he was collecting two or three times a month—basically robbing them by extorting extra payments. Also, the borders of the Crimson Blades Clan were constantly in dispute now, since Zerlix kept picking fights with crews from other Clans that used to be their allies. Vizlar had so many complaints from rival Komendants that he didn’t know what to do!

It was all a fucking mess and all because of the mammalian girl, he thought grimly. Everything had been fine until she came into the picture. Now the peace of his home *and* his Clan had been disrupted by a mere female.

“I should have given the girl to Zerlix after all,” he growled, shooting the female in question a glare.

“I don’t know about that,” Rep. Yariz said cautiously. “And anyway, it’s

too late now. You gave her to Dragon publicly during the feast—you can't go back on your word—it wouldn't look good."

"I know that—you think I don't know?" the Komendant snarled. "But she's ruining *everything*. If she was gone, I could put Dragon and Zerlix back on the same crew and things would go back to normal."

Rep. Yariz frowned.

"I know what you're thinking, Komendant, but if you try to get rid of her now, you'll have Dragon to deal with. And he has become...quite formidable."

His Advisor's words mirrored his own uneasy thoughts in a way that made Vizlar wince.

"True," he said, frowning. "But I don't think we can allow her to stay and actually marry Dragon. The longer she's here, the worse things get. We must get rid of her somehow—in some way that Dragon doesn't suspect. In fact..." He knit his brow ridges together. "We need to find a way to make it look like her disappearance is another Clan's fault—a rival we don't mind going to war with."

"Hmm...let me think about it," Rep. Yariz said, wrinkling his brow. "I'm sure I can come up with something."

"Just make sure it happens before Dragon actually marries her," the Komendant ordered. "We can't do anything after they are wed—wives are sacred."

"I know, I know." Rep. Yariz nodded. "Just give me a little time and I promise I'll have a solution for you soon."



Bobbi's dreams of running away and hiding until the Kindred of the Mother Ship could find her were growing dim. Partly because she was watched day and night like a hawk and had no chance to get out of the Clan's family compound. But also partly, she had to reluctantly admit, because she was growing more and more fond of her captor.

Dragon was kind and sweet and—aside from his patriarchal views about males owning females—surprisingly emotionally intelligent, she found. After the day was done and they were alone in his rooms, they had a wonderful time together—mostly just talking.

Sometimes the big Kindred told her about his day, but he seemed reluctant to go into too much detail. From the way his clothing was often spattered with droplets of dark green Saurian blood, Bobbi guessed that was because a lot of his “work” involved fighting and killing.

Maybe because of the violence of his job, he was much more likely to ask her about herself. The big Kindred was fascinated to hear about life on Earth—her home and upbringing and family. And he was especially interested in life aboard the Mother Ship.

He seemed hungry to learn about others of his own kind and Bobbi told him as much as she could, especially emphasizing the way that Kindred

males viewed females as their equals. She kept hoping that the message would sink in and overcome the years of his Saurian upbringing, though so far he hadn't offered to let her go.

She told herself she ought to keep her distance, but due to the enduring cold of Saurus and the fact that she needed a nightly dose of either his blood or his seed to keep from freezing, that was an impossibility. And—(she was embarrassed to admit this, even to herself)—she preferred getting the necessary compounds that kept her warm in the frigid temperatures by sucking him rather than taking his blood.

For one thing, she hated it when he had to cut himself to feed her. It made her wince every time he drew out that long, silver blade he always kept under his pillow. And for another thing, when she was taking him in her hands and mouth was the only time she felt powerful and in charge of the situation.

Why don't you just admit you like sucking him instead of making all these excuses? whispered a snarky little voice in her head. *Admit you like the way he feels in your mouth, the way he moans your name and strokes your hair and looks at you with those burning bronze eyes when he shoots down your throat...*

Bobbi tried to push the guilty thoughts away, but the fact was, she was getting more and more physically addicted to Dragon's big body. Not just because he kept her warm at night and gave her the means to regulate her own body temperature, but because it just felt *right* to be held in his arms. He was so much bigger than her that she could practically lie right on top of him—and often did—as they cuddled. And he was so tender and sweet, stroking her hair and telling her how he loved her curves and that she was the most beautiful, special female he had ever seen. It was really quite touching.

Despite the fact that he was her kidnapper and captor, he was more considerate and caring than any man she'd ever been with. And even Bobbi wasn't immune to that—especially after getting out of a bad relationship only half a year before.

Still, she tried to stay strong and told herself that if the opportunity to get away presented itself, she would take it. She *had* to get away before the Kindred of the Mother Ship came. She cared about Dragon now—she didn't want to see him die in a bloody fight to keep her because he refused to let her go back home. However, her determination was a moot point while she was stuck in the compound.

Then, about two weeks after Dragon had first kidnapped her, she finally got her chance. That was the day that Res. Tizlah announced that it was Market Day and that Bobbi would be allowed to go with Keelah and some of the other Saurian females to buy the necessary groceries for the compound.

“I'm only letting you out because Komendant Vizlar ordered it. He says you need to learn how to bargain and get the best prices,” she told Bobbi sternly. “After all, you and Dragon are to be married very soon, and we want you to be a proper wife for our son—and a proper wife knows how to get the best bargains at the Market.”

“I understand.” Bobbi ducked her head respectfully. “Thank you, Res. Tizlah, I'll do my best. Maybe Keelah can show me how it's done.”

Res. Tizlah gave her an unreadable look.

“Child, don't get too attached to Keelah. She won't be here forever, you know. It would be better if you'd make friends with the wives of the other Clan members. Those would be more permanent friendships for you.”

“Do you mean that your son might get tired of Keelah at any minute and

get rid of her?” Bobbi asked.

She knew she ought to hold her tongue—this was the first kind word Res. Tizlah had said to her since Zerlix had thrown his public tantrum at the feast two weeks before. But she couldn’t stand the way women were treated here on Saurous and it struck her that it wasn’t just men who were allowing it to happen—Res. Tizlah had power here too, even if she wasn’t male.

Dragon’s adoptive mother glared at her.

“Yes, that is *exactly* what I mean,” she said coolly. “Men have changeable appetites, as everyone knows. You shouldn’t make a friend out of someone who might be moved along soon.”

“Moved along to another Clan where any male who wants her can use her, do you mean?” Bobbi demanded. “Or moved along back to her pimp, who can sell her to customers until she wears out or dies of some awful venereal disease?”

But Res. Tizlah was not so easily shamed—she refused to drop her eyes as she spoke.

“That’s the way of life with these low-class girls,” she said stiffly. “It’s nobody’s fault—it’s just their lot.”

“Nobody’s fault?” Bobbi cried. “Of *course* it’s somebody’s fault! What about the slaver who kidnapped Keelah from her loving family in the Northern Continent when she was only fifteen and brought her down here to pimp her out? What about the customers who bought her services while she was held in sexual slavery for years until your son came along and decided to buy her for his harem?”

She wanted to add, “*And while we’re talking about it, what about your son, who beats and abuses and uses Keelah and women like her on a daily*

basis?”

But she was smart enough to bite her tongue on *that* particular statement. Res. Tizlah might be a good mom, but she had a definite blind spot when it came to her biological son and there was no way she would be willing to hear anything bad about him.

“I’m sorry the girl has had a hard life,” the Saurian matriarch said, frowning at Bobbi. “But I can’t do anything about it. She belongs to my son and her destiny is in his hands.”

“But you have a *lot* of influence over your sons,” Bobbi protested. “They love and respect you so much! What if you told Zerlix to keep Keelah indefinitely—even to marry her? Or what if, instead of sending her to another Clan or back to her pimp, he sent her back to her family on the Northern Continent?”

Res. Tizlah stiffened.

“Zerlix is a grown male, I don’t *tell* him anything. And anyway, a trip to the Northern Continent takes a lot of fuel—it can get very expensive. If he had to take every cheap Pleasure Girl that caught his fancy back home when he was tired of her, it would bankrupt our Clan!”

Bobbi very much doubted that was true—the Crimson Blades seemed to be doing all right to her. She thought it was much more likely that Res. Tizlah just didn’t like to think about the plight of the Pleasure Girls her son used so freely. If she examined what was actually going on under her nose, she’d have to admit what a sadist Zerlix was and also that the society she’d been raised in was horribly unjust towards women. Still, she tried one more time. Softening her tone, she looked into Res. Tizlah’s eyes.

“Please, Res. Tizlah, just try to put yourself in Keelah’s shoes...er, in her

place for a moment,” she amended quickly, remembering that the Saurians didn’t wear shoes. “Imagine if you were a young girl—just barely entering womanhood—and someone snatched you from your home and forced you to go to the docks and—”

But Res. Tizlah was shaking her head.

“I have no more time for this—I have a household and a compound to run,” she said curtly. “Do you want to go to the Market or not?”

Seeing she was getting nowhere, Bobbi decided to drop the subject—for now.

“Yes, Res. Tizlah,” she said submissively. “I’d like to go, thank you.”

“Then hurry up and get ready if you want to go with the other girls,” the Saurian woman snapped. She gave Bobbi a curt nod and stalked off to another part of the kitchen to supervise something that was cooking for dinner that night.

Bobbi watched her go with mixed feelings. On one hand, she still thought that Res. Tizlah had done a wonderful job mothering Dragon after he had lost his parents. The fact that she had been able to reach outside herself and her narrow worldview and care for an orphaned boy who was not even of her own species, said a lot for her.

On the other hand, she seemed determined not to notice what was going on in her household—or at the very least, to take it lightly and as a matter of course. What did it matter if Zerlix used a lot of Pleasure Girls and beat them whenever he felt like it? He was a man, after all, and males enjoyed certain privileges in Saurian society. Privileges that Res. Tizlah was not about to question—especially if questioning them meant she had to admit that she’d raised a petulant, narcissistic, sadistic monster as one of her sons.

Shaking her head, Bobbi went to get the warm cloak that Dragon had gotten for her to wear on the days it was her turn to work in the gardens. She needed to be well bundled up if she was going out into the Saurian weather, which was desert-dry and bone-achingly cold.

Well, at least this will give me a chance to observe more of Saurian society, she told herself. I'll get to see how their economy works—at least on a small scale.

She hoped she would get to do a bit of bartering herself—she'd gotten pretty good at it while living with the Orniths and she wouldn't mind using her skills. Also, she intended to keep her eyes open for ways of escape.

No matter how fond she was getting of Dragon, she had a life and a career back home. And she couldn't spend the rest of her life on this frozen, misogynistic hellhole of a planet where women were treated like dirt under the men's feet and she was constantly surrounded by blatant cruelty she could do nothing about.

She was just glad at the moment that she would be getting away from her prospective future Mother-in-Law and out to get some fresh air. It would be really good to leave the compound, even if it was only for a little while.

She had no idea how quickly her simple trip to the Market would turn deadly.



“It’s nice to be out in the warm weather,” Keelah remarked as they strolled, arm-in-arm, out of the big family house, past the rows of smaller, single-story dwellings that belonged to the enforcers and their wives, and through the gates of the Crimson Blades compound.

Bobbi shot her a look.

“You call this ‘warm’?” She couldn’t keep the incredulity out of her voice as she wrapped the thick cloak Dragon had bought just for her more tightly around herself.

The cloak was deep red and had a hood that covered her ears and shielded her face from the biting wind. The big Kindred had also given her a matching scarf which she had pulled up over her mouth, so her voice sounded rather muffled. Her hands were jammed deep in the pockets, which were lined with soft *heechee* fur, like the blanket they slept under at night. And *still*, she was cold.

But Keelah only shrugged.

“It’s summer on the Southern Continent—of course it’s warm.” She made a stifled noise and pulled the collar of her own thin dress away from her scaly throat. “A bit *too* warm for my taste—but then, it’s been an unseasonably hot summer and I grew up in the North where it’s much cooler, as you know.”

Her words made Bobbi think again about how she had to get off this godforsaken planet. If this was summer—and a hot summer at that—how was she going to survive in the winter? How low did the temperatures drop? Would it be akin to living in some northern country back on Earth or did they plummet to levels where ordinary humans couldn't survive?

The cloak and hood that Dragon had given her was warm, and he had given her another dose of his blood just that morning, but neither one of those measures would keep her from turning into a human popsicle if the mercury dropped to below freezing temperatures for extended periods of time.

“Well, don't worry about getting *too* cold,” Keelah said, breaking into her train of thought. “The Market isn't far from the compound. Look—there it is, up ahead.”

She pointed down the narrow street, lined with houses on either side, and Bobbi saw rows of stalls with vendors tending them just up ahead.

“Oh, it really *isn't* far from the compound,” she said, somewhat surprised. “We've barely been walking five minutes!”

“Exactly—so we can get home quickly if you feel like you're getting frozen.” Keelah looked at her anxiously. “I know mammals are delicate creatures—so if you want to go back right now—”

“No, no!” Bobbi said quickly. “I want to see the Market and watch how your people barter. Give me a tour, okay?”

“Well, if you're *sure*,” Keelah said. “Please promise you'll tell me if you start getting too cold.”

“I promise.” Bobbi smiled at her and hooked an arm through her friend's. “Let's go—I haven't been away from the compound since Dragon first took me from Avria Pentaura. I need some time away and I'm *not* going to let a

little bit of cold weather stop me.”

“All right.” Keelah gave her a smile. “Come on then—let’s start at one end and we’ll go to the other. I’ll show you everything.”

Feeling glad to have a friend, Bobbi nodded and they started strolling, arm-in-arm, passing the different stalls as they went.

There were, predictably enough, Bobbi thought, lots and lots of stalls selling raw meat. But there were also vendors selling flowers and vegetables and fruits. The Saurians were mostly carnivorous but they ate other things besides meat occasionally.

There were also Saurian women selling hand-made items of clothing—cloaks and hoods and, in one case, even hand coverings that looked a little bit like mittens with slits cut in them for a Saurian wearer’s long, triple-jointed thumbs to stick out.

Bobbi looked long and hard at these. Her hands were cold and she had a little pocket money that Res. Tizlah had handed her before she left for the Market. She thought the hand coverings—which were black and red—would have been in her price range with a little haggling. But in the end, she decided to keep looking. She could always come back to the stall selling the Saurian mittens, she told herself. But first she wanted to see everything the Market had to offer.

She and Keelah continued to stroll and to observe. They were getting near to the far end of the Market when the Saurian girl pointed excitedly.

“Oh look! Meaties! I remember those from when I was a little girl!”

Bobbi looked where she was pointing and saw that the stall in question was selling what appeared to be dried, candied meat strips.

“Why don’t you get yourself one?” she asked, smiling.

Keelah clicked her claws together indecisively.

“I don’t know if I should. We’re really supposed to be shopping for the compound, not ourselves.”

“Oh, go on,” Bobbi told her. “You’re supposed to be teaching me how to barter, right? Buy yourself a, uh, *meatie* and show me how it’s done.”

“Well...all right.” Keelah grinned at her, exposing a mouthful of needle-sharp teeth that would have been truly frightening if Bobbi hadn’t known her friend’s gentle nature.

“Go on,” she urged again, and gave Keelah a little push towards the stall.

Lifting her chin, the Saurian girl approached the stall and Bobbi watched with interest, waiting to see how her friend would bargain with the stall owner for one of the crunchy, chewy strips.

“How much?” she asked, pointing one curving claw at the meat strips, which were hanging from hooks that lined the stall’s canopy ceiling.

“Fiver piece,” the owner—an older Saurian woman with graying scales—replied.

Keelah shook her head and made a noise at the back of her throat which sounded like, “*Ah-hmmm. Ah-hmmm.*”

“We had these up North when I was a little girl, and they never cost more than two pieces,” she remarked, shaking her head again.

“Well, it’s a long time since you was little, isn’t it, Missy?” the stall keeper replied. Then, she also shook her head and made the, “*Ah-hmmm, Ah-hmmm*” sound in her throat that Keelah had made. “I’ll let you have one for four pieces,” she said, frowning at Keelah.

“*Ah-hmmm, Ah-hmmm*, still too high,” Keelah proclaimed. “Three pieces

is as high as I can go.”

The stall keeper shook her head thoughtfully and made that strange sound in her throat again. But at last, she nodded.

“Ah-*hmmm*, three pieces it is,” she said at last. She unhooked one of the candied strips of meat—which looked to Bobbi like a very large piece of glazed beef jerky—and held it out on its long, pointed stick.

“Many thanks, many thanks.” Keelah bowed her head and got out a Saurian coin. It was about as big as a silver dollar and it had been stamped in such a way that the coin had long, shallow grooves in its surface that divided the dull gray metal into five triangles, like pieces of a pie. This, as she had explained to Bobbi, was a “fiver piece”.

Bobbi wasn’t sure what kind of metal the coin was made out of, but whatever it was, it was extremely malleable. Keelah wiggled it for a minute, working it along the grooves, until she had broken the coin into five equal sized triangles. She gave three of these to the stall owner and took the candied meat strip with a nod of thanks.

The whole display had been fascinating, Bobbi thought. Especially the way both of the women had made that odd “Ah-*hmm*” noise in their throats.

“What was that noise you were both making while you bargained?” she asked, as they continued walking and Keelah munched on her candied meat. “That ‘Ah-*hmm*’ sound?”

“Oh, that?” Keelah shrugged. “I don’t know—I guess it’s just the noise someone makes when they’re ready to bargain. If a seller *doesn’t* make that sound, you know they don’t want to sell to you.”

“So I guess I’d better learn to make it myself if I want to make deals in the Market,” Bobbi said thoughtfully. She deepened her voice and tried to

speaking from the back of her throat. “Ah-hmm. Ah-hmmm.”

Keelah giggled.

“You sound like you’re just clearing your throat. You have to be louder than that if you want people to believe you’re serious about bargaining! Here—want some?” She offered Bobbi some of the meat strip.

“I’ll try a little, thanks.” Bobbi broke off a shard and popped it in her mouth. It tasted like sweet, crispy bacon, but a bit gamier she decided. Not awful but not her favorite thing either.

“You like it?” Keelah asked.

“It’s very nice.” Bobbi smiled, not wanting to hurt her friend’s feelings.

“I remember getting it at the summer fair when I was little.” Keelah’s eyes turned suddenly sad with longing. “My Sire would buy us all a meatie to eat and then my brothers and sisters and I would run around all the booths, laughing and playing catch-me...” She shook her head and Bobbi thought that if Saurians could cry, there would have been tears in her yellow eyes. “It reminds me so much of home,” she whispered, looking at the remains of the meat strip. “I wonder if I’ll ever get back again?”

“You will,” Bobbi said strongly, trying to comfort her. “I’m sure you will, Keelah!” She wanted to tell the other girl about the Kindred of the Mother Ship and how they would hopefully be looking for her soon...but she didn’t want to get Keelah’s hopes up when things were so uncertain.

There were still a little less than two weeks before the Kindred were supposed to send a scout ship to look in on her on Avria Pentaura and after that, they still had to search for her on Saurous. And unfortunately, a lot could happen in that amount of time. They both knew that Zerlix could decide he was tired of Keelah and send her to another Clan or sell her back to

her original pimp any time he wanted.

But if she's still here when they come for me, I'm taking her with me, Bobbi vowed to herself. And if she's not, I'll go looking for her! I won't give up until I see her safely home with her family.

She was determined to do right by her friend and somehow get Keelah back to her family on the Northern Continent...though she wasn't exactly sure how she would manage it. But something would come to her, she was certain.

She had thought about asking Dragon to take the other girl home—he was genuinely fond of Bobbi and would probably have done anything for her—except set her free, Bobbi thought, a bit grimly. But he couldn't do anything for Keelah as long as she belonged to Zerlix—that was very clearly the Saurian way. Now, if Zerlix would decide to get rid of Keelah and then Dragon bought her, that might solve the problem...

She was so deep in thought that she almost walked right through the end of the Market.

“Bobbi, stop!” Keelah put a hand on her arm, just as she was about to pass the last stall. Beyond it was a long, narrow street closely lined on either side with sagging houses that seemed to lean on each other like drunks at a bar.

“Oh, is this the end of the Market?” Bobbi looked up, frowning. “Sorry, I didn't realize. Isn't it safe to go any further?”

“It's *probably* safe in the daylight,” Keelah murmured. “But you wouldn't want to go at night—not unless you want to get snatched up by a whoremaster or a pimp and sold.”

“They can do that? Just *grab* unaccompanied women?” Bobbi demanded.

“Unless you’re wearing your husband or fiancé’s mark on you, they can, Keelah told her. “This is the blue light district,” she added, nodding at the narrow, sagging houses, which all seemed to be made of gray, peeling boards. “It doesn’t look like much right now, but as soon as it gets dark, all the windows will light up blue—that’s how you know there are girls for sale inside,” she added and shivered.

“That’s awful that just anybody can be grabbed like that,” Bobbi said indignantly. “But how do you know about this, uh, part of town? I thought Zerlix found you at the spaceport?”

“Oh, he did, but my pimp owns one of the houses here. That one.” Keelah pointed to the third gray house in the row to their right. “He brought me here pretty often,” she said, ducking her head. “His name was Rep. Wheezler—he said he liked the blue light district better than the spaceport because more customers pay in jewelry there.”

“They do?” Bobbi frowned. “I haven’t noticed the Saurians wearing a lot of jewelry. Some of the wives have some but—”

“That’s because when a Saurian male gets married, he gives his bride some bangles and something that marks her as his,” Keelah explained. “When he wants to go play in the blue light district, he takes some of it back again. He might give her twelve gold bangles to start with and then take back ten of them, over time, to go pay for Pleasure Girls.”

“What?” Bobbi exclaimed. “So the men don’t even *try* to hide it when they go to cheat on their wives?”

“No—why should they?” Keelah looked confused. “Men do as they please—that’s just the way it is.”

“Not in my culture,” Bobbi said indignantly. “And I’ve never heard of

any culture where the men were brave enough to take back the jewelry they'd given their wives as a gift to go buy themselves some side action!"

"Well, that's how it is here." Keelah shrugged. "And since most men like to play, not many wives have much jewelry. Of course, they might buy them some more if they hatch a lot of sons," she went on speculatively. "But they can always take it back again. The only piece of jewelry they almost never take back is the Claiming jewelry they give when they get married."

"The Claiming jewelry? What's that?" Bobbi asked.

"Usually a golden chain with the man's initial or Clan sign worked on it," Keelah explained. "It's like a mark of possession—it shows other males they have to steer clear. It might be a necklace or sometimes you see a head piece."

"Oh, I see." Bobbi nodded and remembered the thick golden chain she'd seen around Res. Tizlah's scaly neck. It had a stylized letter V in the Saurian alphabet dangling from it. She had never much thought of it before, but she supposed that the V must stand for "Vizlar" as in Komendant Vizlar, Res. Tizlah's husband.

"If a husband ever takes back the Claiming jewelry, it's a sign that he intends to sell not only it, but his wife also," Keelah went on. "And if she's not careful, she'll end up at the blue light district just like any other Pleasure Girl."

"What?" This was getting worse and worse, Bobbi thought. "Husbands are allowed to *sell* their wives here? But I thought wives were..." How had Dragon put it? "I thought wives were *sacred*," she said, finding the word at last.

"Oh, they are. Once you're properly married, no other man can touch you

or hurt you,” Keelah said. “But if your husband decides to divorce you, he takes away your Claiming jewelry and with it goes all of the protection you had.” She shook her head and sighed. “I wish a good man would give me some Claiming jewelry, but I doubt it will ever happen. Though I *have* heard of men falling in love with Pleasure Girls and keeping them forever, from time to time. As I hope Zerlix will keep me.”

Bobbi only shook her head. The more she learned about Saurian culture, the more misogynistic and chauvinistic it seemed. How could anyone stand to live on this horrible planet?

“Well, I guess we’d better be getting back,” Keelah said, interrupting her thoughts. “We’re not supposed to stay out too long and aren’t you getting cold?”

Bobbi had to admit she was. Even with her hands stuffed in her fur-lined pockets, her hood pulled forward, and the thick scarf pulled up high, she was still really chilly.

“I guess you’re right,” she said with a reluctant sigh. “Still, I hate to go so soon. It’s really nice being out of the compound.”

“I’m kind of surprised Res. Tizlah let you go,” Keelah said, as they turned away from the end of the Market and the blue light district. “Usually new girls aren’t allowed out for a full solar month, for fear they’ll run away.”

“Really?” Bobbi raised her eyebrows in surprise. “I guess they don’t consider me a flight risk since Dragon declared his intention to marry me.”

It still sounded strange to say those words. Bobbi couldn’t believe she was engaged to be married to the big Kindred. *Engaged against your will!* whispered a little voice in her head. *With the wedding planned for the end of this month!*

Which was right when the Kindred of the Mother Ship ought to be searching for her. Bobbi thought distractedly that at least she would get to see the Saurian wedding rituals up close. Unless she could get away before the marriage took place.

It was too bad, really—she was beginning to be extremely fond of Dragon. She might even be falling a little in love with him—though she tried very hard not to let herself think about that. If they had met on the Kindred Mother Ship, Bobbi was certain she would have been attracted to him and more than willing to date him. But since their “meet cute” had consisted of him throwing her over his shoulder like some kind of caveman and carting her off to his own planet where he had declared they were going to get married whether she liked it or not, well...

That kind of puts a damper on the relationship, she told herself. So stay strong, Bobbi—being crazy-attracted to a guy isn't a good enough reason to spend your life in a frozen hellhole where they treat women like dirt!

“What are you thinking, Bobbi?” Keelah asked, breaking into her train of thought. “Are you imagining your wedding?”

“As a matter of fact, I am,” Bobbi said, a bit grimly. She turned to her friend. “Tell me, do they have a ‘maid of honor’ type position here on Saurous? I mean, does the bride have a friend stand with her during the wedding ceremony?”

“There *is* sometimes an attendant who stands with the bride,” Keelah told her. “Usually it is a sister from the same brood clutch or a very dear friend.”

“Well, I want *you* to be my attendant,” Bobbi told her. On the off chance that she couldn't get out of this wedding, she wanted a friend standing with her for moral support during the ceremony.

“You *do*? You want *me*?” Keelah put a scaly, six-fingered hand to her chest. “But, Bobbi—I’m just a Pleasure Girl! And you’re marrying into the head family of one of the strongest Clans in the entire Southern Continent! You’ll be second only to whoever Rep. Zerlix takes as a wife—if he ever settles down,” she added.

“I don’t care about that!” Bobbi said, putting her arm around Keelah and giving her a squeeze. “You’re my best friend here, Keelah and I want you standing by my side.”

“I would be honored.” Keelah’s voice was hushed. “You’re too kind, Bobbi.”

“Not any kinder than you have been to me,” Bobbi told her. “I’m the outsider here—a mammalian on a planet full of Saurians. But you’ve been sweet and wonderful right from the start. You’ve taught me so much about Saurian culture—I really appreciate that.”

“You’ve been a friend to me, too,” Keelah told her. “Despite the fact that our peoples are two different species, it feels as though we connected right from the moment I met you.”

“That’s what we call ‘finding a kindred spirit’,” Bobbi told her, smiling. “And I think it’s obvious that you don’t have to be the same species to be kindred spirits.”

“I think you’re right,” Keelah said softly. “And I’m so excited to stand up with you and be your attendant.” Her face fell a little. “As long as Zerlix doesn’t tire of me before then.”

Bobbi didn’t know how to answer that but just at that moment, a voice nearby shouted,

“Pretty ladies! Pretty ladies! Care to see my wares?”



“That will be twenty thousand, Rep. Dragon, and I thank you for your business.”

The jeweler, an obsequious little Saurian with a squint and graying scales, ducked his head as he passed the flat packet across the shiny glass case.

Dragon pulled out his wallet and paid without a wince. The price was high, but what he was getting was more than worth it.

“I appreciate you doing a rush job, Rep. Gasser,” he told the jeweler. “I know I didn’t give you much time.”

“Of course, of course—your Clan members have always been valued customers.” The jeweler ducked his head, his forked tongue flickering. “We are always pleased to serve the Crimson Blades.”

Dragon nodded his thanks again. He was just tucking the flat packet into the inside pocket of his shirt, when the door alert chattered and someone new entered the shop. It was a Saurian Dragon knew—Rep. Hexler of the Diamond Death Clan.

“Ah, good morrow to you, fine sir. And what can I do for you today?” the jeweler asked, bobbing his graying head.

“Nothing,” Hexler said shortly. “I’m here to talk to him.” He jerked his

head at Dragon. “A little privacy, please?” he added, looking at the jeweler.

“Of course, of course.” Rep. Gasser nodded and ducked quickly into his back room.

Dragon was instantly on the alert. The jeweler’s shop was located at the nexus of four different Clan territories. It was considered neutral ground, since so many males from all four Clans used it and, as such, it sometimes served as a meeting place between members of different Clans.

Whole peace treaties had been negotiated here in front of the glass cases filled with golden bangles and showy Claiming pieces, but they were usually arranged in advance. Dragon wasn’t expecting to meet with anyone from an opposing Clan today—what could Rep. Hexler want?

“What is it?” he asked abruptly, frowning down at the Saurian. “You have a message for my Sire?”

Rep. Hexler shook his head, his forked tongue flickering.

“No. Gotta message for *you*.” He poked his long, triple-jointed thumb at Dragon.

Dragon braced himself—he was pretty sure he knew what this was about. Ever since he had left Zerlix’s crew and taken on a crew of his own, his Big Brother had been causing all kinds of trouble all over town. He’d been picking fights with rival Clans—even those that were supposedly allies—and extorting the people they were supposed to be protecting for extra gambling and whoring money. Probably Rep. Hexler had come with a warning that Zerlix had better straighten up or there would be trouble.

“All right,” he said to the other male. “What can I do for you?”

“It’s more like what *I* can do for *you*,” the Saurian said. “You were always decent to me, Rep. Dragon. You kept your Big Brother from carving

my eye out that time—remember that?”

Dragon did remember—it had been during an altercation with a crew from the Diamond Deaths Clan—an altercation Zerlix had started, of course. The Crimson Blades crew had prevailed and Zerlix had wanted to maim every member of the opposing Clan to “teach them a lesson” as he put it. His suggestion that they chop off the losers’ thumbs or carve out one of their eyes had struck Dragon as needlessly brutal and also likely to bring drastic retaliation.

“They’ve lost, Zerlix,” he had reasoned with his Big Brother. *“You don’t need to rub it in—think what they’ll do the next time they beat one of our crews.”*

Zerlix hadn’t wanted to give up the “fun” of the causal maiming, but Dragon had managed to distract him by mentioning that a new gambling house had opened in town. His Saurian brother, ever changeable and easily distracted, had allowed the beaten Diamond Deaths crew to go in favor of being first to the tables at the new house and nobody had been maimed.

“I remember,” Dragon said now, nodding at Rep. Hexler. “So what?”

“So I felt like I owed you one,” the Saurian male said, his forked tongue flickering. “I wanted to repay the debt.”

“That’s kind,” Dragon said neutrally. “But I don’t need any money or—”

“It’s not money I’m talking about,” Rep. Hexler hissed. “It’s your woman—the little mammalian female you’re all set to marry.”

Dragon stiffened and a low, protective growl rose in his throat at the mention of Bobbi.

“What about her?” he asked, frowning at the other male menacingly.

Rep. Hexler's slitted yellow eyes grew wide at the sight of Dragon's anger, but he kept talking.

"She's in danger—somebody put a hit out on her. Heard it on the street this morning," he said quickly. "Supposed to happen at the Market, today."

Dragon shook his head.

"Bobbi—my bride—hasn't been with us a whole solar month yet. She won't be allowed out of the compound to go to the Market."

"Then you should be fine." Rep. Hexler shrugged. "Just thought I'd tell you."

"Thank you," Dragon said formally. "I appreciate the warning. Do you know who placed the hit?" he asked as an afterthought, though he was pretty certain he knew. It must be a rival Clan—probably one that had been stirred up by Zerlix, gods-damn his slitted yellow-green eyes. They were probably going after Bobbi because Zerlix himself had no wife or favorite female he had declared would be his bride to put a hit on.

But Rep. Hexler's next words surprised him.

"Dunno who it was exactly," he told Dragon. "But from what I heard, the hit's coming from inside your own Clan. Watch your back."

And then he left, the door alert chattering behind him.



“*P*retty ladies, come and see my wares,” the Saurian merchant cried.

Clearly, he was talking to herself and Keelah, Bobbi thought, since they were the only ones there. He was standing just at the end of the Market, where it led into the blue light district, and she wondered where he’d come from—they hadn’t seen him there just a moment ago when Keelah had been pointing out the place where her old pimp lived.

“Thanks but we’re not interested,” she said, shaking her head.

“But you don’t even know what I’ve got to sell!” the merchant protested. “Look!”

He was pushing a dusty, two-wheeled cart with a dark blue cloth over the top of it. Now that he had their attention, he whisked off the cloth, revealing a wire cage with several small, furry animals inside. As soon as the cloth was removed, they started squeaking in high-pitched voices and scrambling to poke their pointed little noses through the wires.

“Oh! Are those *heechees*?” Bobbi exclaimed, taking a step closer. “I’ve never seen a live one before!”

Though she had seen several, already dead and skinned in the compound’s kitchen, thankfully she had never been asked to participate in killing or skinning the small, fluffy animals herself.

“Indeed they are, my fine lady!” the merchant proclaimed. “Freshest and best *heechees* in the whole city! Young and plump and tasty they are! Been force-feeding ‘em *goola* grain for a whole solar month, I have!”

“They should make good eating then,” Keelah remarked, as the two girls came closer, to get a better look. “Maybe we should buy some for the compound if they’re a good price. I know Res. Tizlah would be pleased.”

“Oh, I don’t want to buy any to *eat*,” Bobbi said, feeling horrified at the idea. “I couldn’t eat these little guys.”

Indeed, the little *heechees* looked very much like guinea pigs, but with the long ears and fluffy tails of bunny rabbits, she thought. They had big, liquid black eyes and little wiggly noses with long whiskers. She could never eat anything so absolutely adorable. The idea of killing one of the cute little critters for dinner was abhorrent to her!

“But if you don’t want one to eat, what do you want with it?” Keelah asked, clearly mystified, and Bobbi remembered that Saurians generally didn’t keep animals except for food.

“Well...I might want one was as a pet,” she said. Poking her finger through the wires of the cage, she stroked the soft fur of one of the little creatures. It had purple and gray spots, just like the pelt of Dragon’s old *heechee* that was sewn into the blanket Res. Tizlah had made for him.

Would the big Kindred like it if she bought him a *heechee* that looked like his old pet, she wondered? It might be nice to have a sweet little animal to take care of. And she could just picture his face when she showed him that she had found one that looked just like the *heechee* he had lost as a child...

“They’re a fiver, pretty lady,” the merchant said to her, his forked tongue flickering. “Do you want one or not?”

“You know, I think I do,” Bobbi told him. “In fact...”

But suddenly, Keelah was gripping her arm.

“Bobbi, we have to get away from here.” Her voice was low and frightened. “Come on—we have to get back to the Market—now!”

Looking up, Bobbi realized that they had, indeed, wandered past the last stall that marked the boundaries of the Market. The *heechee* seller must have backed up little by little and she had followed, not noticing where she was going because she was focused on the cute, furry little animals in his wheeled cart. But why would he lead them outside the bounds of safety?

A movement in the corner of her eye drew her attention and answered her question. Two large Saurians with colorful, moving tattoos on their scaly arms had ducked out from the blind alley that ran between the rows of houses and the Market place. They were headed straight towards her and Keelah.

“Come on!” Keelah exclaimed. “I know them—they’re enforcers from the Silver Scales Clan—we need to get back to the Market!”

But it was too late. Even as they started to run, the huge Saurians were on them.

“Now then, pretty little mammalian, where do you think you’re going?” one of them growled, grabbing Bobbi’s shoulder and swinging her around.

“Yeah—don’t run away when we just want to talk to you,” the other one said, grinning widely to show a mouthful of needle-sharp teeth.

“Let me go!” Bobbi shouted, trying to yank her arm away and failing. “You’ll be sorry if you don’t—I belong to Dragon of the Crimson Blades Clan!”

“We know that—why do you think we’re after you, girly?” the enforcer

who was holding her snarled. His grip on her tightened painfully. “Somebody don’t like it that Dragon’s got himself a bride. Seems like they want you *disappeared.*”

“Let her go!” Keelah shouted. She was still holding the pointed wooden skewer her candied meat stick had been on and she used it to stab the Saurian holding Keelah in the arm.

He shouted but never lost his grip. Instead, he shoved Keelah to the ground with his other hand.

“Leave well enough alone, you little slut,” he snarled. “Unless you want to die alongside her!”

“Keelah, run!” Bobbi shouted, as her friend started to scramble to her feet.

“I don’t want to leave you!” Keelah protested. But by now the other thug had drawn a long, silver knife and he was menacing her with it. Bobbi was desperately afraid he was going to stab her friend to death right in front of her.

“Go back to the compound and get help!” she told Keelah. “Run—hurry! Get one of the guards!”

Keelah took a look at the knife and seemed to understand that she was outmatched—a wooden skewer, no matter how sharp, wasn’t going to be able to fend off the huge butcher knife the other clan member was holding. With a last, agonized glance at Bobbi, she turned and ran back through the Market place.

“Help! Help!” Bobbi heard her shouting. “They’re taking my friend—help!”

“Hey, shouldn’t we try to stop her?” the clan member with the knife

asked, frowning.

“Nah—let ‘er go,” the goon holding Bobbi said, shrugging. “Nobody at the Market gives a damn about another stupid female getting taken. We’ll have the job done long before she finds anyone to bring back with her.”

And with that, he started dragging Bobbi back to the blind alley he and the other henchman had come out of.

“C’mon,” he told his friend. “Let’s have some fun.”



Dragon shook his head as he watched the other male leave the jewelry shop. Surely Hexler was mistaken. A hit from another Clan, Dragon could well believe. Zerlix had pissed off nearly everyone in a forty click radius and many would be wanting to retaliate. But a hit on Bobbi from inside his own Clan? Never.

And besides, Bobbi is safe in the compound, he told himself. Mother Tizlah would never let her go out to the Market before she's been here a whole solar month—she never breaks her own rules.

But what if Zerlix had decided that if *he* couldn't have Bobbi, no one could? What if the hit was coming from *him*? Dragon thought, as he stepped outside the jewelry store and into the busy street.

The thought made his blood run cold. Surely not. Surely Bobbi was safe inside the family compound.

But what if she's not? whispered a little voice in his head. *What if she's at the Market right now and she's in danger?*

Suddenly a voice spoke up inside his head—that same, strong feminine voice he'd heard in his dreams.

“Warrior, head the warning,” it said.

Dragon had been headed in the opposite direction, but now he turned towards the Market. He wasn't about to ignore that voice—or the gut feeling he had that something was wrong.

He started off at a fast walk, which turned into a jog. But his sense of urgency grew and grew. Before long, he was running full out, heading for the Market. He had to get there and make sure everything was all right. He had to make certain the female he cared for was safe.

He just hoped the warning he'd gotten from Hexer was wrong. As the Market grew nearer, he was certain he must be. Surely his adoptive mother wouldn't have allowed Bobbi to come out. And even if she did, she would keep an eye on her. She would...

And then he heard the screaming.

Bobbi! He knew it was her at once. And with that realization, something came forward inside him—something that had been hidden deep down and was now surging to get out.

No, Dragon thought. No, you can't—we can't!

Though who he was talking to and what they couldn't do, he was unable to say. It was as though there was a second self hidden inside him—another being that cared for Bobbi every bit as much as he did—a being that had awakened when he found her on Avria Pentaura.

A deep, growling voice spoke from inside him and the words somehow came out of his mouth.

“Mine,” it said. ***“She is Mine—Ours. And we will kill to protect her!”***

Dragon had no idea who was speaking, but he agreed entirely.

Whoever was hurting his female was going to die.



“*G*et your scaly hands off me! Let me go!”

Bobbi wasn’t going without a fight. She hit and kicked and screamed at the top of her lungs. But her petite size worked against her, as it had when Dragon had kidnapped her. She was simply too small and the Saurian thugs were too big. And, just as the first thug had predicted, nobody came to the sounds of her shouts and cries—clearly a woman getting hauled away by predatory men wasn’t unusual enough to warrant any attention here on Saurus.

Still, she wasn’t giving up. Even as they dragged her into the dark alley, she kept yelling and fighting.

“Help! Help me! Fire!” she shouted, since she had heard that shouting “fire” often got attention when calling for help wouldn’t. “Rape! Murder! Fire! *Help!*”

“Can’t you shut her up?” demanded the second Saurian—the one with the knife. “She’s so fuckin’ *loud* for such a little thing!”

“I’ll shut her up for good in a minute,” the first one snarled. “Thought we might have a little fun first, though. You ever tried spiking a mammalian slit?”

“I heard they’re all wet and soft and squishy inside,” the second one protested. “Not dry like they oughta be. Fuckin’ unnatural!”

“Yeah, but it might be fun to try,” the first one said, giving Bobbi a lecherous look. “C’mon—let’s do her before we cut her throat.”

“I say we cut her throat *first*,” the second one said, wincing as Bobbi began screaming again. “Gods, she’s loud! If you wanna try her slit, lemme knife her so she don’t scream bloody murder the whole time you spike her.”

He was just raising his knife when someone new entered the alley.

It was hard for Bobbi to see who it was exactly. Saurous was far from its sun, so the outside light was a weak, watery gray. The weak light meant that the alley was quite dark, even though it was only late afternoon.

But whoever had come into the alley with them had glowing eyes with flames dancing in them.

Dragon! she thought, her heart leaping. *It must be him!*

But was it? As the person advanced, they seemed to grow even larger than the big Kindred. They were dead quiet but she heard a rustling sound, as though somewhere a pair of vast wings had just unfolded. Suddenly, it was even darker in the alley as though those same wings had somehow blotted out the sun.

The two goons hadn’t noticed the newcomer up until now—they had been too busy planning how to rape her and kill her—or else kill her and then rape her lifeless body, she thought with a shiver. But when the light was blotted from the sky, they both looked up at the glowing red and yellow eyes above them.

And then the being spoke.

“Mine,” it growled and Bobbi thought again it must be Dragon—it sounded like his voice when it got that odd, double echo in it—as though someone or something else was speaking through him. But though Dragon was tall, he wasn’t *that* tall. The glowing eyes were nine or ten feet above them and what about the wings that seemed to be blotting out the sun? What was *that* about?

“D-dragon?” she gasped hoarsely. Her voice was almost gone from screaming. “Is...is that you?”

“Whozat you’re talkin’ to, girly?” the first Saurian demanded, shaking her.

“Yeah—what the fuck?” the second attacker asked. And then he got a better look at the glowing eyes and repeated his question in quite a different tone. “*What the fuck?*”

“MINE!” the thing in the alley roared.

There was a swift motion in the dark and then the second thug was snatched up and lifted high in the air. Choked gurgles came from his scaly throat and then a patter of oily green Saurian blood rained down on the dirty pavement. Something had impaled him, Bobbi thought numbly. Was it a silver knife blade...or something else?

Whatever it was, it was covered in blood and sticking out of his back as he dangled in the air like a rag doll.

“Holy fuck!” the first Saurian gasped. He dropped Bobbi’s arm and took a step backwards. “Look, you can *have* the girl!” he exclaimed, and actually gave Bobbi a shove towards the glowing eyes, which sent her stumbling to her knees. “You can have her!”

The attacker who was impaled in midair, dropped to a heap in the alley

and then the glowing eyes advanced again. Whatever it was rushed over her and Bobbi felt a wind, as though invisible wings had stirred the air around her. The force of their motion pushed back her hood and whipped her hair all around her face as though she was caught in the middle of a whirlwind.

Looking behind her, she saw that the Saurian who had grabbed her was being held in the air as well.

“Look, I said you can have her!” he was babbling. “It was nothing personal! Just a job—just a hit! I only took it ‘cause I was low on cash. Please, you have to understand—”

And then the thing—whatever it was—ripped him in two.

Bobbi watched numbly as his top and bottom halves parted ways, torn in two at the waist as though the huge thug was as flimsy as a paper doll and the thing holding him was a vengeful god.

“***MINE!***” the thing roared again and dropped the two, still-quivering lumps of flesh to the bloody pavement. Then it turned and Bobbi saw its huge, lantern-like eyes were fixed on *her*.

Oh God, she thought as they came towards her. *Oh, no...oh, no, no ,no!*

“Please!” she gasped, holding up an arm, as though to try and ward off the monster. “Please—please don’t hurt me!”

The glowing eyes seemed to get closer to the ground and when the voice spoke again, it had lost the wild double echo.

“Bobbi?” it said and this time it sounded familiar. “God, did those bastards hurt you? Are you all right?”

“D-dragon?” she stuttered, trying to make out his features in the gloom. “Is that you? But I thought...”

“Thought what?” He scooped her up and held her close to his broad chest.. “What are you doing out here, anyway?” he demanded, sounding upset. “Why in the hell would you go outside the Market boundaries? And why were you at the Market in the first place? You haven’t even been in the compound a whole month yet—you shouldn’t have been allowed out!”

As he spoke, he carried her out of the alley into the weak, gray sunlight and Bobbi saw that something had torn his shirt to shreds and he was smeared all over with green, oily Saurian blood. Had *he* been the killer in the alley? But how was that possible? She remembered the deep, wild voice and the feeling as though wings were fanning the air around her.

“Who *are* you?” she whispered, looking up into his eyes, which were bronze again.

“The male who loves you,” he growled. “And I want to know how in the hell you ended up in an alley with two thugs trying to kill you?”

“I...I was just trying to buy you a pet,” Bobbi whispered. And then the enormity of what had almost happened to her came down on her head all at once and she burst into tears.



Dragon cradled the sobbing *feela* close to his chest as he walked swiftly through the Market and back to his family's compound. He ignored the curious stares Bobbi's tears and his own, blood-splattered appearance drew. The only thing that mattered now was that the female he loved was safe.

He wasn't entirely sure what had happened in the alley. For a moment it had felt almost like someone—or *something* else—had taken over his body. It was that other entity—the one who had been awakened when he found Bobbi, he thought. The one that Claimed her the same way Dragon did.

It should have felt wrong to share her with that other entity—with the wild thing that was hidden inside him. But for some reason, Dragon didn't mind sharing in this instance. It was as though they were both protecting her—keeping her safe—loving and cherishing her together.

You should have marked her. The voice spoke up again, but this time it was inside his head instead of speaking through his mouth, which was a relief.

What do you mean, "Marked her"? Dragon thought at it.

It occurred to him that maybe he was going crazy—talking to a voice in his head like this. But it didn't *feel* crazy or wrong at all. On the contrary, it felt *right*. As though the voice was part of him—a part that cared about Bobbi

every bit as much as he did himself.

Should have marked her with our scent, the deep, wild voice advised him. ***Then no other males dare come near.***

It fell silent but Dragon's head was suddenly filled with images of himself and the little *feela* in his arms—images of Bobbi lying back with her legs spread as he pressed between them, rubbing his cheeks and mouth all over her naked body—pressing his lips to her inner thighs and soft little pussy to mark her with his scent. His scent that would act as a deterrent to any other male within a three click radius...

I can't, he thought. *She told me her kind doesn't allow that—doesn't allow tasting—until after marriage.*

But she isn't safe. The wild voice was back, arguing with him. ***If you do not keep her safe, then I will!***

Then it fell silent again, but it was by no means gone, Dragon thought. And he recognized a threat when he heard one. This thing inside him had already proved that it could take him over—though the only time it seemed to feel that was necessary was when Bobbi was in danger. It was threatening to come out again, if he didn't do everything in his power to keep the woman they both loved safe.

Why had it never come out before? He thought of all the fights—many for his life—that he had been in since he had become a man and joined one of his Sire's crews as an enforcer. Where had the secret, strange entity been during all of those?

You had not found her yet, the deep voice answered. ***I was not needed. Now, I am and so I awoke. She woke me.***

She woke me, too, Dragon thought, looking down at Bobbi's tearstained

face, her big blue eyes swollen with crying. *She woke both of us...and we can never go back to sleep again.*

His inner thoughts—and the strange conversation with the voice from inside him—were interrupted when he was halfway through the compound. Mother Tizlah, two guards, and the little Pleasure Girl that Bobbi had befriended—Dragon thought her name was “Keelah”—all came rushing out the kitchen doors to greet them.

“Oh, son! What happened, is she all right?” His mother looked anxiously at the still-weeping Bobbi in his arms. “And what about your clothes? They’re in rags!”

“Bobbi will be fine,” Dragon said shortly, ignoring the question about his shredded shirt. “Though she would have been better if she hadn’t been allowed to go out into the Market! What were you thinking, Mother Tizlah? She hasn’t been with us a whole solar month yet! How could you break your own rule and put Bobbi in danger?”

“How could I know she’d get into trouble just going to the Market?” his adoptive mother exclaimed. “Your Sire thought it would be a good thing for her to learn how to bargain before the two of you got married. And since the wedding is in only two weeks—”

“All right, all right,” Dragon growled, cutting her off. “The important thing is that I got to her in time.”

“Bobbi, are...are you all right?” It was Keelah asking, looking over Dragon’s elbow to see Bobbi’s tearful face. “I...I’m so sorry I had to leave you—I ran as fast as...as I could to...to get help!”

Indeed, she was panting, nearly gasping for air as she spoke and the look in her eyes showed her honest concern.

“I’m all right,” Bobbi whispered hoarsely, looking up at her friend. “I’m just...it was just a lot, that’s all.”

“Thank you for running to get help,” Dragon told the Pleasure Girl.

But Keelah shook her head.

“We would have been too late, I’m afraid. How did you save her? What happened to the males who tried to take her?”

“What? Who tried to take her? What happened?” Mother Tizlah demanded.

“I’ll tell you later,” Dragon said curtly. “Right now, I must care for my bride.”

And he left them all behind and strode down the corridor leading to his rooms. He was going to check Bobbi over carefully and thoroughly, he told himself.

And then he was going to be certain that no male who wasn’t him would ever dare to approach her again!



“*Y*ou don’t have to carry me everywhere—I can walk,” Bobbi said as Dragon carried her through the door to his room and kicked it shut behind him.

“The Hell you will,” he said shortly and continued to cradle her close to his broad chest.

“I really can, though,” she protested.

Her voice sounded weak and hoarse in her own ears—first from screaming and then from crying. She wasn’t a bit ashamed of the first—her screaming was probably what had helped him find her. But she *was* ashamed of the crying—it made her feel girly and weak and helpless.

Weak or not, though, she hadn’t been able to help it. Everything had just come rushing over her—the attack, the near-rape—the second one in two weeks—and then that *thing* in the alley. What in the Seven Hells, as the Kindred said, was it? Was it part of Dragon?

She thought it must be. But was it real? Or had she imagined it? Had her mind broken under the strain of being attacked and dragged into the dark alley?

She certainly *felt* broken, Bobbi thought as she lay limply against the big

Kindred's broad chest. As frightened as she had been of the thing she'd seen—or *thought* she'd seen—in the alley, he still felt like safety to her. His warm, spicy scent invaded her senses and seemed almost to act as some kind of a sedative—not to make her sleepy but to calm her down.

As she breathed him in, Bobbi felt her heart slow its frantic rhythm and she could have sworn that her blood pressure was going down too. Being close to the big Kindred was better than doing yoga and meditation combined.

Safe—he keeps me safe, she thought, nuzzling against him.

*He's your kidnapper—you wouldn't even **be** in this situation if he hadn't brought you here in the first place*, a voice in her head tried to argue.

But Bobbi couldn't make herself care. All she wanted to do was snuggle against the big Kindred's broad chest and let herself forget the whole awful mess.

And then Dragon was carrying her into the bathing chamber and running steaming hot water into the big soaking tub.

“What are you doing?” Bobbi asked, as he stood her carefully on her feet and began unfastening her clothes.

“Giving you a bath.” His voice was low and growling—tinged still with a residue of the fury and fear he must have felt for her when he'd found her being attacked.

But was it him that found you or that other thing? whispered a little voice in her head. *Do you even know, Bobbi?*

She really didn't know and she was much too tired to ask, she decided as he got her undressed and helped her slip into the steaming tub. As the heated water closed around her, she sighed deeply and looked up at him.

“Thank you for coming for me but how did you know I was in danger?”

“I was warned there was a hit out on you. I started for the Market and then I heard you screaming...” He stopped for a moment and Bobbi saw his jaw clench and big hands curl into fists. “Those bastards...did they hurt you, Bobbi? Please, you have to tell me,” he begged hoarsely.

“Not as much as *you* hurt *them*,” she whispered, and wondered again if she ought to talk about the thing in the alley. The thing which seemed to speak from his mouth sometimes, when he was feeling especially possessive of her.

“Just tell me,” he repeated and his bronze eyes were anguished. “I heard some of what they were talking about. They didn’t—”

“No, they didn’t,” Bobbi assured him quickly. “But that’s the second time in two weeks I was nearly...” She cleared her throat. “Nearly raped and/or killed. Dragon, did it ever occur to you that you’re living in a society that’s toxic for women?”

“I can’t help where I live,” he said roughly. “But I *can* swear to protect you from now on.” He cupped her cheek in one palm and looked earnestly into her eyes. “I vow to you here and now, Bobbi, I’m going to take steps to be damn sure no male other than me *ever* comes near you again.”

She shook her head, bewildered.

“I don’t understand—how?”

“You’ll see.” There was a grim look on his face as he pulled his hand away. “Are you all right in the tub? I need to take a shower.” He looked down at the green Saurian blood splattering the front of his tattered clothes with obvious disgust.

“I’m fine,” Bobbi assured him. “I love taking hot baths—especially when

it's so chilly.”

He frowned.

“I need to give you more of my blood again. You're chilled to the bone from being outside the compound. Well, don't worry—you aren't going out again.”

“What?” But, Dragon, I *liked* going out!” Bobbi protested. “I mean, until I was attacked. But up until then, I was learning so much! All about bartering and making deals and—”

“And wandering out of the Market where you were fair game for any bastard who happened by,” he growled.

“But they didn't just ‘happen by’—they were out to get me because someone sent them,” Bobbi protested. “One of them said that someone wanted me ‘disappeared’ specifically because I'm with you.” She looked at him more closely. “Did you really say that someone put a ‘hit’ out on me?”

“Yes, they did and I think I know who,” Dragon growled.

“It had to be Zerlix, right?” Bobbi asked. “He's decided that if he can't have me, neither can you.”

Dragon looked like he was going to agree, then a look of doubt passed through his bronze eyes.

“That's my first thought,” he admitted. “And he's *probably* the culprit.”

“Only probably?” Bobbi asked anxiously. “Who else could it be?”

But the big Kindred only shook his head. He had been crouched by the soaking tub, talking to her, but now he rose to his full height so that he towered over her.

“Gonna take that shower now,” he told her as he began stripping. Bobbi

noticed he took a flat packet out of his shredded shirt and laid it carefully on the bathroom countertop before balling the ruined garment up and tossing it away. “I want both of us to be clean and fresh when I do what I have to do,” he said.

“What?” Bobbi asked him. “What are you talking about? What do you have to do, Dragon?”

But the big Kindred only shook his head and stepped into the shower stall.

It appeared that she would have to wait to find out the meaning of his cryptic statement.



“*Y*ou need to *what*?” Bobbi asked, as she looked up at the big Kindred.

“I need to Mark you.” His deep, rumbling voice was patient but firm—as though he was determined not to be put off. “That way other males will know to leave you alone—they won’t come anywhere near you, in fact.”

“Mark me how, though?” Bobbi asked.

Both of them were clean, with no more Saurian blood anywhere. Dragon had gotten her out of the tub and wrapped her in drying sheets after wrapping a sheet around his own trim waist. Then he had carried her to the couch—which was much softer now, since he had added actual cushions at Bobbi’s request. Now he was sitting across from her, looking seriously into her eyes and telling her that he had to “Mark” her somehow to keep other men away, but she had no idea what he was talking about.

“I need to rub my scent all over you,” Dragon explained. “Saurians might not have much in the way of noses, but they have a keen sense of smell.” His voice dropped to a low, possessive growl. “I want to make it undeniably clear that you’re *mine* and any male who dares to lay a finger on you is *dead*.”

“Rub your scent all over me? You mean like pheromones?” Bobbi asked. “But how would you do that?”

“Like this.”

Lifting her arm, he started at her wrist and rubbed his mouth and cheek in a long line all the way up to her elbow. The dual sensation—soft lips and scratchy whiskers—sent a chill racing up Bobbi’s spine.

“You want to do that—to rub yourself against me—all over my...my body?” she asked, somewhat breathlessly.

Dragon nodded, his eyes blazing.

“Every night, starting with tonight. I need to Mark you as *mine*.” His voice had gone deep and growly again and his eyes were blazing.

Bobbi stared at him, her heart hammering in her chest. Was she about to see the creature from the alley? Or was it just Dragon, being his usual possessive self?

“You...you really think that will help to keep me safe?” she asked in a trembling voice.

He nodded firmly.

“Beyond the shadow of a doubt. I don’t know why I didn’t think of it earlier.”

Bobbi didn’t know either...and she also had no idea how this was going to go. But he seemed really determined to do it and honestly, anything that could keep her safe and warn the Saurian males with their scaly skin and needle-sharp, predator’s teeth off her, would be a welcome relief.

“All right,” she said, nodding. “I...I guess it will be all right.”

“Good,” Dragon said and got to work at once.

He did her arms first, and then her back, telling her to lay on her stomach so he could pull down the sheet she had wrapped around herself and cover

her with his scent. He started at the curves of her buttocks and rubbed against her in long, sweeping strokes that made her shiver helplessly—mainly because he wasn't only rubbing his mouth—which presumably had scent glands around it like a cat's—against her.

No, he wasn't just rubbing...he was kissing too. Bobbi realized it when he paused between her shoulder blades and gave her a soft, hot kiss on the sensitive skin of her back.

“D-dragon!” she protested—but not too much. He had been known to want to kiss her all over before and he liked to spend hours kissing her mouth, too. Once she had shown him the powerful pleasure of locking lips, the big Kindred had been a quick convert to the oral arts.

The one exception had always been her inner thighs and between her legs, of course. Bobbi would allow the big Kindred to kiss her anywhere else but not *there*. It was too dangerous—too close to tasting, as far as she was concerned. And, up until now, Dragon had always observed her rules.

But not tonight.

“Spread your legs for me, *feela*,” he growled softly, looking up from his position kneeling beside the couch. “I must Mark you and spread my scent *everywhere*.”

“Even...even *there*?” Bobbi nodded down at her pussy mound, which was barely covered with the drying sheet at this point.

“*Especially* there,” Dragon said sternly. He shrugged. “But I can Mark your breasts first, if you like.”

Bobbi bit her lip uncertainly. She was pretty sure she knew what would happen if she let him “Mark” her breasts. The rubbing would turn to licking and the licking would turn to sucking. Which wasn't normally a problem—

she actually loved the way the big Kindred seemed to know exactly how to suck her nipples to get her all hot and bothered.

But he had never followed it up with a trip down south, so to speak. And if he got her all hot and wet...well, who knew what might happen?

"I...I guess that's all right," she said, though she had never been less sure of anything in her life.

"Good. Lie back and let me mark you, little one," he commanded.

Bobbi did as he said, laying back against the fluffy cushions he had lined the couch with. She didn't bother trying to cover her breasts, in fact, she found herself thrusting them up for him, almost offering herself to the big Kindred. What else could she do?

"Gods, I love your soft ripe mounds," Dragon growled. He pressed his face between her breasts and she moaned and shivered as his rough cheeks made contact with her tender slopes. Then, just as she had imagined he would, the big Kindred began kissing and licking her breasts.

"Dragon," she protested breathlessly. "Do...do you really think that's necessary?"

"What—this?" Locking his eyes with hers, he leaned down and sucked one of her tight nipples between his lips. He drew it deeply into his mouth, making Bobbi arch her back and sending shivers of pleasure down her spine. He seemed to tease her forever—sucking hard one moment and kissing gently the next. And then he took his time with her other nipple as well, sucking and licking and Marking her thoroughly, everywhere on and around her breasts.

"Oh, *God!*" she gasped, when he finally let her nipple slip from between his lips. "You're, uh, certainly being very thorough with this 'Marking'

business.”

“Not going to leave any part of you unmarked, little one,” he growled softly, reaching up to stroke her flushed cheek. “Which is why I need you to spread your legs for me now and let me in.”

Bobbi bit her lip again.

“Just...just to Mark me?” she whispered, looking at him uncertainly. “I... I mean by rubbing against me, right? Because you know you’re not supposed to be, er, tasting me until we get married, right?”

“I know,” Dragon said, frowning. “But I have to do everything I can to Mark you with my scent, little one. It will keep you safe—do you understand?”

“I guess so,” Bobbi admitted. She couldn’t help noticing that he hadn’t specifically *promised* not to taste her pussy. It shouldn’t really matter though, she told herself—that particular sex act had never done much for her before.

If it doesn’t do anything for you then why is your heart pounding so hard? whispered a skeptical little voice in her head. *And even if it doesn’t turn **you** on, it’s bound to turn **him** on and you know what that could lead to!*

Yes, she knew well enough. *Bonding Sex*, whispered the voice in her head. *Be careful, Bobbi—you’re skating on thin ice here and you know it.*

She did know it, but what could she do? Dragon was determined to Mark her as his own and she didn’t have the will to refuse him.

He looked at her, his eyes blazing.

“Are you going to open for me, little one? Are you going to let me Mark your inner thighs and your soft little pussy?”

“Yes,” Bobbi whispered and her legs seemed to open on their own, giving

in to his desire. “Yes, if...if you really think you need to.”

“I need to,” Dragon growled. And then he was dragging his hot tongue up her inner thigh from her knee to the place where her leg joined her body.

“Oh!” Bobbi gasped as he rubbed his rough cheek against her mound and inhaled deeply, as though he couldn’t get enough of her scent. She felt so incredibly sensitive right now—she wasn’t sure if she could take it if he did the same thing to her delicate pussy lips.

But rather than rubbing, Dragon began kissing instead. Gently, he placed open mouthed kisses on her outer lips, lapping them delicately with his tongue, teasing the top of her slit lightly, slipping just the tip of his tongue inside her, though he never quite dipped low enough to taste her aching clit.

Unable to help herself, Bobbi gave a little moan and thrust her hips up, just a tiny bit. Though she knew she shouldn’t encourage him, her body was crying out for *more*.

“Gods, Bobbi,” he growled hoarsely. He looked up at her, and the flames were dancing in his eyes again. “Can’t get enough of you, little one. The way you look...your sweet, feminine scent...the flavor of your juices...they’re all calling to me. I’m sorry, but I need to Mark you inside too.”

“You...you mean you need to...” Bobbi trailed off, unsure how to say it.

“Need to spread you open and lap your soft little pussy,” Dragon finished for her, his eyes burning even brighter. “Gods, yes, little one. Can you be good for me and let me do that? Can you let me taste your soft little pussy and Mark you inside?”

Bobbi’s heart felt like it was going to beat right out of her chest. She wanted desperately to look away, because maybe if she did the spell would be broken. But his eyes held her—his flaming eyes that were drowning deep

with desire. Looking into those eyes, she knew she was lost—she couldn't stop him. Didn't *want* to stop him.

“Yes,” she whispered. “I...I can do that, Dragon. I can let you Mark me inside.”

“Good girl,” he growled softly. “Such a good girl to open yourself for me, Bobbi.”

Then he ducked his head again and spread her open, using his thumbs. He studied her for a moment and his eyes were half-lidded with lust.

“So fucking beautiful,” he growled hoarsely. “So hot and wet and *perfect*.”

Then he dipped his head and, starting at the entrance to her channel, lapped upwards, dragging his tongue over her inner pussy like a man eating an ice cream cone.

“*Ohhh!*” Bobbi moaned, bucking her hips again as he reached her sensitive clit. She had never been with a man who was so eager to taste her before and it was a novel experience. Most guys weren't too interested to start with—they acted like someone trying a foreign food they weren't sure they would like at a new restaurant—a few quick licks and then on to something else.

But Dragon was different. He acted like someone who had just been introduced to chocolate for the first time in his life. He lapped and tasted Bobbi's pussy as though it was the most delicious thing he'd ever had and he just couldn't get enough. Yet, for all his eagerness, he somehow found time to pay special attention to her needy little clit, too.

Bobbi had already observed that the big Kindred seemed to know exactly how to touch her to make her come. Now she saw that he also knew exactly

how to *taste* her. Though he seemed to enjoy going down on her immensely, he wasn't just doing it for his own benefit. His aim was to bring her pleasure and in that, he succeeded admirably.

“Oh, Dragon! There—right *there!*” Bobbi moaned, threading her fingers through his thick, black hair as she thrust up to meet his talented tongue. He had somehow figured out that the right side of her clit was more sensitive than the left and now he was licking her over and over in that one, sensitive spot, shooting sparks of pleasure through her entire body as she cried his name.

Her response to his tongue and mouth on her only made Dragon redouble his efforts. Growling possessively, he wound his muscular arms around her thighs, splitting her even wider as he continued to lap steadily over that one, delicate spot. The good thing about the big Kindred, Bobbi thought, was that he didn't go skipping all over the place like other men did. Once he found the right spot, he stuck with it until she came for him—which she invariably did.

This time was no different. As she moaned and tugged his hair and felt herself get closer and closer to orgasm, he continued to lick her with stamina even the greatest lover would envy. She was close now, so *close*, Bobbi thought deliriously. All she needed was just a little bit more to push her over the edge...just a little bit *more*...

As though he could somehow hear her thoughts or sense her needs, the big Kindred slid two long fingers deep in her pussy. And, as he began to fuck deeply into her, Bobbi felt herself at last begin to come.

“Dragon—*Dragon!*” she wailed, tugging his hair so fiercely it had to hurt as she bucked her pelvis up to meet his mouth.

But her pulling only seemed to urge the big Kindred on. He growled deep

in his throat—a hungry, possessive noise that seemed to vibrate through her entire body and make her orgasm even more intense—and redoubled his efforts.

He rode out her bucking and thrashing as she lost control, moaning and crying as the pleasure rolled through her like a Tidal wave. It wasn't until Bobbi collapsed and lay panting on the couch, every muscle limp, that he finally stopped licking her and withdrew his fingers.

“Gods, little one.” His eyes were half-lidded with lust as he licked her honey off his fingers. “Never knew you could come so hard—you nearly screamed the entire house down, I think.”

“S-sorry,” Bobbi panted. “Didn't know you were going to be so...so good at that,” she finally got out. “Most men aren't, you know.”

“You'll never have another male between your thighs again,” he swore, his eyes flashing. “No one but me is going to taste and pleasure this soft little pussy.” He laid a gentle kiss on the top of her mound. “No one but me is going to lap your juices and hear your moans as I go down on you.”

Bobbi looked at him uncertainly.

“Remember that we can't, uh, make love until we're married,” she cautioned him. “Remember that you promised me that.”

“I won't forget—even if I might wish I could,” he growled. “Right now, I just want to spend the night tasting you and Marking you until the whole world knows beyond the shadow of a doubt that you belong to *me*. **You... are... MINE.**”

The last three words held that strange double echo, but Bobbi was too tired from the intense orgasm to feel very frightened of it this time. It occurred to her that if the beast—or whatever it was she had seen in the alley

—was willing to stay locked up inside Dragon during such an intensely emotional and intimate act, she must be safe with him.

“Yours,” she murmured, reaching down to stroke the shaggy, black mane.

She didn’t know how to feel about his statement—his assertion that he owned her. She only knew she wanted to be near him right now.

“God, Dragon, come kiss me,” she murmured, tugging at his broad shoulders. “I want to taste myself on you.”

His eyes blazed again.

“Gladly, *feela.*”

And then he was gathering her into his arms and feeding Bobbi her own secret flavor on his tongue until she moaned helplessly and kissed him back with all the passion and need that was in her.

It’s wrong, Bobbi—this is wrong! You should be trying to keep your distance, not bringing him closer! whispered a warning little voice in her head.

But Bobbi pushed it away. She wouldn’t make love with the big Kindred or have Bonding Sex with him—she could, at least, promise that much. But she could no longer keep him from tasting her, she acknowledged to herself. Having opened herself to him once, she couldn’t close her thighs to him again.

She lay open on the couch like an unwrapped present, purring with pleasure as Dragon ran his big, warm hands over her body—exploring her, Claiming her all over again. And when the big Kindred once more dipped his head to lick between her thighs, she welcomed him in, stroking his hair as he lapped her much more gently this time, giving her almost a long, extended kiss until she came again for him with his name on her lips and her heart

pounding.

She was his, Bobbi admitted to herself. She was owned by the big Kindred now, in almost every way.

The question was—would she ever be free again?



The next morning Bobbi woke up feeling amazingly good. She yawned and stretched, reaching for Dragon...only to find his side of the sleeping pit was empty.

“Hey, Dragon? Where are you?” she called sleepily, looking around. They had been up late, pleasuring each other—though mostly it was Dragon pleasuring her since he couldn’t seem to get enough of tasting her pussy. Kat’s remark about Kindred loving to go down like curvy girls loved chocolate cake had occurred to Bobbi more than once, as she welcomed him between her thighs and moaned as he explored her over and over.

All in all, it had been a late night and she was surprised he was up early. The glows in the corners of the room were still dim, meaning that morning wasn’t far advanced yet.

“Here I am.” He looked over the lip of the sleeping pit and smiled at her. “Are you ready to get up, sleepy head?”

Bobbi smiled at the tender little nickname coming from his lips. He was so big and tough looking she was certain none of his crew would believe he could be so sweet and gentle when it suited him.

“I’m ready,” she said, holding up her arms like a little girl asking to be picked up. “Why are you up so early?”

“I just have a few things to tend to before First Meal,” Dragon told her as he picked her up and set her back down outside the pit. He frowned slightly. “And I couldn’t sleep anymore—I kept dreaming.”

“Were you having that dream about those people again?” Bobbi guessed as she wrapped a fur blanket around herself and settled on the couch. “The Kindred couple we both saw when we shared that dream the first night after you took me from Avria Pentaura?”

She almost said “the first night we were together,” but the fact remained that they were together *only* because he had kidnapped her. She didn’t want to lose sight of that, no matter how much she was beginning to care for the big Kindred.

“As a matter of fact, I *was*. I...dream of them almost every night,” Dragon admitted in a low voice. “And every time I dream of them, the dreams get clearer and clearer. The place they’re in, for instance, it has wall tiles that are two different colors.”

“The tiles near the ceiling are blue and they shade down to purple near the floor, right?” Bobbi asked.

He gave her a surprised look.

“Well, yes. How did you know?”

“I’ve been dreaming of them, too,” Bobbi told him. “Not every night, but pretty often. And you’re right, the dreams *are* getting more vivid.”

“I almost feel like I know them,” Dragon murmured. “Or like I knew them a long time ago.”

“Dragon, do you think...” Bobbi began and then stopped, biting her lip.

He frowned. “Go on. Do I think what?”

“Well, do you think maybe you *did* know them?” Bobbi asked softly. “I mean, you told me your parents were killed here and that you don’t remember them at all. But the place they’re staying in the dreams looks like a Saurian building. I mean, with all the tiles inside and the way the furniture is shaped. Do you think...” She cleared her throat, trying to be delicate. “Do you think the people we’re dreaming of might actually be your parents? And you might be Tolor, their little boy?”

“Gods...” Dragon got a startled look on his face and sank heavily onto the couch beside her. “*Gods,*” he muttered again.

“I mean, maybe I’m wrong,” Bobbi said quickly, but he shook his head.

“No. No, you’re *right*. I see it now—I just wonder that I didn’t before.” He ran a hand through his hair. “What made me remember?”

“Maybe seeing another mammalian—seeing *me,*” Bobbi suggested.

“You could be right.” Dragon gave her a guarded look. “You’ve awakened a lot of things inside me, Bobbi. More than you know. And memories of my past aren’t the strangest by far.”

Bobbi held her breath for a moment. Did she dare? Yes, she decided, she had to go for it.

“Are...are you talking about what I saw in the alley yesterday?” she asked carefully. “The...the thing that *was* you and *wasn’t* you at the same time?”

The thing that tore those two guys apart like they were paper dolls, whispered the little voice in her head, but she kept those words to herself.

Dragon looked at her for a long time, as though considering what to say. At last, he nodded.

“Yes,” he said heavily. “That.”

“What *is* it?” Bobbi asked softly, wrapping the blanket more tightly around herself. “I...I’ve heard it speak through you sometimes when you’re feeling, uh, possessive of me. But whatever it is, it must be *huge*.”

“I don’t know what it is.” Dragon shook his head. “I was hoping maybe *you* could tell *me*.” He looked at her appealingly. “After all, you know more about my people than I do.”

“I don’t know that much, though,” Bobbi protested. “I mean, I know there are many different kinds of Kindred, but I’ve never heard of any that turned into a...” She almost said “a monster” but she closed her lips on the word. “Into another being,” she finished instead. “I really only know about the three main kinds—Beast Kindred, Blood Kindred, and Twin Kindred.”

He sighed and shook his head.

“Whatever it is, it only came awake when you came into my life. It told me that you awakened it.”

“It did? I mean, you actually *talked* to it?” Bobbi asked, surprised.

He nodded.

“I did. Yesterday after the fight in the alley. It was, er, very close to the surface still. It was the one who told me to Mark you. It told me that if I didn’t protect you, it would.”

“Meaning it would come out again?” Bobbi put a hand to her throat. “Oh my God!”

“I don’t think it came all the way out yesterday,” Dragon told her. “Only partially because it sensed that you were in danger.” He sighed. “I guess I shouldn’t say ‘it’—I should say ‘he’. Because he’s *definitely* male and he’s

definitely part of me.”

“So...you don’t mind having this...this other guy inside you?” Bobbi asked. “Even knowing he could, uh, come out and take over at any time?”

“I think he would only ‘take over,’ as you put it, if you were in danger,” Dragon said. “His main focus seems to be protecting you—which is my main focus too,” he added.

“But still! Just the idea that you might turn into...into something else. That this thing could come out and take over your body at any time...” Bobbi shivered all over, feeling like someone had dumped ice cubes in her belly.

Dragon gave her a distressed look.

“Bobbi, no! Please don’t think like that.” He took her hands in his and ducked his head so he could look into her eyes. “I might not know much about him, but I do know one thing: whoever this...this person is inside me, he cares for you. He loves you as I do. And he would *never, ever* hurt you.”

“But he’s so big!” Bobbi protested. “I remember thinking that it looked like you’d grown ten feet tall! And he’s so massively *strong*.”

The corners of Dragon’s mouth twitched in a small smile.

“And how does that make a difference? You and I are already such different sizes and strengths but have I ever hurt you?”

“Well, no,” she admitted. “Aside from throwing me over your shoulder and carrying me around like a doll.”

“I like carrying you,” Dragon murmured. He scooped her up off the couch without warning and cuddled her in his lap. “I like *holding* you,” he murmured, his deep voice rumbling in her ear as he pressed her against his chest.

“Dragon! Put me down!” she protested, but without much heat. The fact was, she kind of liked their size difference too. She’d dated men taller than herself all her life—it was kind of hard to avoid it when she was so petite. But she’d never dated a giant like Dragon and she had to admit, rather than making her afraid, his massive size made her feel safe and protected.

He cuddled her for a moment more and kissed the top of her head tenderly, then sighed.

“I *will* put you down, but only because I have business to attend to before First Meal. But first, I have something for you.”

“You do?” She frowned, rearranging her blanket as he set her down on the couch beside him. “What is it?”

“You’ll see—I’ll bring it to you.”

He left the couch and came back in a moment with the flat packet Bobbi had seen him taking out of his ruined shirt the night before.

“I’m really glad I didn’t lose this during the, er, fight,” he remarked, as he opened it carefully. It seemed to unfold like an envelope, only all four triangular corners opened up to reveal a kind of case lined in some kind of gray velvet.

“Oh!” Bobbi looked at what he had revealed in genuine surprise.

Lying on either side of the gray velvet lining were what looked like fifteen or twenty golden bangles. And in the center was a golden chain with a golden dragon, wings spread and a forked tail curling beneath it. It had ruby eyes and a tiny spout of ruby flames were coming from its open mouth which had diamond fangs.

“This is your wedding jewelry and your Claiming piece,” Dragon explained, smiling a little. “I had to have them all specially made because

you're so much smaller than a Saurian female," he added.

"Oh, Dragon—they're beautiful!" Bobbi exclaimed. "But all this must have cost you a fortune!"

"All my savings," he said without a trace of regret. "And completely worth every bit. Of course, you're not supposed to get them until our wedding day—especially not the Claiming piece—but I'd like you to start wearing them now."

"Now? But why?" Bobbi still couldn't believe it. Her ex-fiancé had grudgingly given her a skinny gold band with a tiny chip of a diamond and had claimed proudly that it had cost him one whole month's salary. She hadn't felt a single qualm when she'd broken things off with him and given it back.

In contrast, Dragon had basically emptied his bank account to buy her the very best in Saurian jewelry. She wasn't a materialistic person or one of those girls who loves getting expensive gifts, but she had to admit his gesture moved her deeply.

But his next words made her blood run cold.

"I want you to wear it to show that you're mine," he said seriously. "So that whoever put that hit on you understands that you're already my wife, even if we haven't had the ceremony yet. That makes you off limits—out of bounds to anyone who might be looking to hurt you."

"*Oh,*" Bobbi said faintly.

The lovely gift took on a sinister air when she remembered that there was, indeed, a hit out on her. Which was something she'd never expected to have to worry about, seeing as how she didn't have any ties to Organized Crime back home.

“Here—let me help you put them on.”

Dragon started sliding the thin golden bangles onto her wrists—there were twelve for her right hand and twelve for her left, Bobbi saw.

“Is this how many bracelets most wives start with?” she asked him as he fitted the last one on her.

Dragon shook his head.

“Most start with six on each hand—one for each finger is the tradition.”

“Oh, right.” Bobbi nodded, thinking of the odd, six-fingered Saurian hand.

“I wanted to give you twice as many, to show you how I feel for you, *feela*.” Dragon looked at her earnestly. “And I swear to you now, I’m never taking a single one back from you. We’ll grow old together and you’ll bear my sons and still you’ll have *all* of these.” He gripped both her wrists, now covered in the thin gold bangles. “These and more, when I can buy them for you.”

Bobbi understood that he was vowing never to cheat on her and she couldn’t help being touched. But she felt she *had* to say something, no matter how sweet the gesture was.

“Dragon,” she said gently. “You know the other Kindred—the ones from the Mother Ship—are going to come looking for me at some point. And when they do—”

“Let them come,” he interrupted, his eyes blazing. “I’m not giving you up, Bobbi—you’re *mine*.”

The last word had that deep double echo to it and she was reminded of the other entity that apparently lived inside him. An image rose to her mind’s eye

—a dragon curled around a pile of gold with Bobbi herself sitting right in the middle as the beast guarded her jealously, never taking its eyes from her.

So possessive! she thought, mentally shaking her head.

“What if you came with me, then?” she suggested hopefully. “I’m sure you could find something to do on the Mother Ship. There are so many Kindred there and the opportunities are limitless.”

“And leave my Clan?” Dragon sounded shocked, as though he’d never even considered the idea.

“Why not?” Bobbi asked. “I mean, maybe if you’d come for a visit, you might find that you like it.”

“No.” He shook his head stubbornly. “My Sire needs me here. Zerlix is fucking everything up as it is—Komendant Vizlar needs me to help make peace with the other Clans. If I left—even for a visit—I might come back to find that the Crimson Blades had fallen into ruin.”

“But are you really going to stay here forever?” Bobbi protested. “And keep me here too? What about when it gets cold—I mean *really* cold, Dragon? It’s only summer now and Keelah told me that it’s supposed to be unseasonably hot right now. But I’m barely making it even with the blood you give me and all the warm clothing you’ve bought for me—what’s going to happen to me when winter comes?”

“I’ll keep you warm and protect you, don’t worry about that,” Dragon said, frowning. “Trust me, little one—I won’t let anything happen to you. That’s one reason I bought you this.” He lifted the Claiming piece, with the golden dragon dangling from it and held it out to her. “It can be worn as a necklace but I’d prefer you display it more prominently—so everyone can see.”

“What do you mean, more prominently? How else can I wear it?” Bobbi asked, frowning. She decided to give up arguing with him—for now, anyway. Maybe later she could change his mind about at least *visiting* the Mother Ship. For now, she could sense she wasn’t going to make any more progress.

“You wear it like this.”

Dragon lifted the piece and draped it over her head. Then he did something to the fastening so that she was wearing it almost like a kind of crown with the golden dragon resting on her forehead.

“There.” He sat back and nodded in apparent satisfaction as Bobbi reached up to carefully touch the dragon. It was a little larger than a silver dollar and at first it felt cold against her skin, but the metal soon warmed up.

“You really want me to wear it like a crown?” she asked, arching her eyebrows at him.

He nodded firmly.

“That way no one can mistake the fact that you belong to me, little one. No other male will dare to touch you when they see you wearing that Claiming piece and smell my scent all over you.”

“I would have thought what you did to the two guys in the alley yesterday would be deterrent enough,” Bobbi murmured. “Or what the, er, guy living inside you did.” She shivered when she remembered the fate of the two Saurian attackers again.

“That will help, too,” Dragon said, nodding. “But I want you wearing my jewelry and my scent, too. Please understand, little one...” He took her hands and looked at her earnestly. “I just want to keep you as protected as possible until after our wedding, when you’ll have all the protections of being a wife. I’m tempted to lock you in my rooms until then, but I know you want to

spend time with your friend.”

“I do like spending time with Keelah,” Bobbi said, nodding. “And I *don’t* want to be locked up like a princess in a tower all day.”

“Good—then you’ll wear the jewelry.” Dragon leaned over and kissed her cheek. “And now, I really have to go. I’ll meet you at First Meal.”

“All right.” Bobbi nodded and watched him leave with a preoccupied look on his face. Then she got up and went to look at her new jewelry in the bathroom mirror.

The golden dragon was cunningly jointed so that it conformed to the slight curve of her forehead and didn’t feel stiff or unnatural at all. Its golden tail curled just between her eyebrows and the ruby flames coming from its mouth matched her hair.

She touched it lightly and shook her head. She had so many conflicting emotions about the big Kindred, she hardly knew where to begin.

On one hand, it was clear that he loved her to distraction—he was pretty much obsessed with keeping her safe in every way he knew how. But on the other hand, he wouldn’t even *consider* leaving Saurous or trying any other life. And he expected her to give up her own life and career without a second thought, so she could be his little wife and “bear his sons.”

“I can’t stay here,” Bobbi murmured to her reflection. “It’s horrible and it’s cold. And no matter how sweet Dragon is, he’s my captor, not my fiancé—not really.”

Hearing the words come out of her mouth seemed to break something inside her and tears came to her eyes. But Bobbi couldn’t deny the truth of them. She might have come to care for Dragon—she might even be starting to love him. But she couldn’t give up everything she’d worked for all her life

and settle down on Saurous—she just *couldn't*.

But will he let you go? whispered a little voice in her head. And the image that rose in her mind wasn't Dragon. Instead, she saw the same mental picture she'd seen earlier—a dragon like the one on her new Claiming piece, curled around a pile of gold with Bobbi herself in the center as it guarded her jealously with eyes that never blinked.

He'll want to keep you, you know, that little voice told her. *He and Dragon both.*

Bobbi felt a shiver run down her spine. She had no idea what was going to happen, but something told her that leaving either Dragon or the entity that lived inside him wasn't going to be easy.

Not easy at all.



Dragon found his Big Brother in his rooms, lolling in his extra-large sleeping pit with a Pleasure Girl on either side of him. Zerlix was naked, his flaccid corkscrew phallus laying limply against one scaly thigh. No doubt he'd been using it all night long, forcing himself on the helpless girls he surrounded himself with, Dragon thought, feeling disgusted.

He knew it was the Saurian way for a male to buy Pleasure Girls and use them any way he wanted, but the practice had always seemed wrong to him on many levels. He remembered Bobbi telling him that Saurian society was “toxic” for women. Maybe she was right.

Still, it's my society—my culture, he argued with himself. Or it might as well be, since I've been raised in it. I can't leave it now, not even to go to my birth people—my Sire and Mother need me too much. If I leave them, Zerlix will fuck everything up and bring the whole Clan to ruin!

Speaking of Zerlix, his Saurian brother's rooms were much larger and more extensive than his own—they had to be, considering the number of Pleasure Girls Zerlix insisted on keeping. Most of them were still sleeping on thin pallets strewn around the floor and many of them bore the marks of his brother's fists, Dragon saw.

One of the girls beside him in the pit was Keelah, Bobbi's special friend.

She had dark green bruises like a necklace around her throat, as though Zerlix had been choking her while he spiked her, which was one of his sexual proclivities.

Another rush of disgust filled Dragon—the idea of ever hurting Bobbi like that was abhorrent to him. He wanted only to stroke and kiss and caress her petite, curvy body until she came over and over again for him. But Zerlix seemed to actually find *pleasure* in wounding his sexual partners. What was *wrong* with him?

“Hey, get up,” he snapped, leaning down into the pit to shout in his adoptive brother’s ear hole.

Zerlix shifted to one side and cracked one slitted yellow-green eye to peer up at Dragon.

“The fuck do you want?” he snarled sleepily, not bothering to get up.

“To talk to you, you piece of *shit*,” Dragon growled.

This got Zerlix’s attention. Dragon wasn’t in the habit of insulting the future leader of the Clan right to his face—but in this instance, he definitely felt like it was warranted.

“The fuck are you talking about?” Zerlix demanded, finally sitting up. The girls on either side of him stirred, but neither opened her eyes.

“I’m talking about the hit you put out on Bobbi,” Dragon snapped. “Did you think giving it to another Clan would keep me from finding out you ordered it?”

Zerlix’s slitted eyes opened wide in surprise.

“What? Who said I put a hit on her? I haven’t gone anywhere near the little bitch since my Sire gave her to you at the fucking feast!”

“Don’t lie to me!” Dragon insisted. “I fucking *know* it was you! The warning I got said the hit came from inside my own Clan—who else would do it?”

Zerlix hoisted himself out of the sleeping pit and scratched his scaly balls—all three of them, since Saurian males had anywhere from three to six testicles.

“Did you ever think it might be my Sire? Maybe Komendant Vizlar put the hit on your future bride himself—did you think of *that*?” he asked casually.

“Of course not!” Dragon felt sick at the thought. “Why would he want Bobbi dead? Why would he put a hit on her after he already gave her to me?”

Zerlix shrugged.

“Maybe because he doesn’t want a whole tribe of fucking mammalians running around his compound. It was one thing for him to take you in—you’re just one mammalian alone and you don’t take up much space, even if you are built like a fucking tower.” He glared up at Dragon. “But now you’ve got a bitch to breed with and he probably doesn’t want a whole herd of weak little prey animals infesting his home once she whelps.”

“Watch how you speak about the future mother of my sons,” Dragon growled, glowering at him. “And you’re just trying to throw dirt on the trail—I know you’re the one who ordered the hit. You should know that anyone else who tries for Bobbi will end up like the two I dealt with yesterday.”

“Fine. Whatever you say, Little Brother.” Zerlix shrugged his scaly shoulders, apparently completely unconcerned. “Believe what you want. I won’t deny I have plans for your little female, but they don’t involve killing her.” He grinned, showing a mouthful of razor-sharp teeth. “Well, not until

I've spiked her first."

"You fucker!" Dragon punched him, hard in the jaw, knocking the Saurian back into the sleeping pit. The girls who were still sleeping there came awake, screaming as he landed on top of them.

Zerlix glared up at him, rubbing his jaw where a lump was already forming.

"You'll pay for that, Little Brother. See if you don't."

Dragon poked a finger at him.

"Stay the fuck away from Bobbi if you want to keep breathing," he snarled. "I mean it, Zerlix—I won't warn you again."

Then he turned and stalked stiffly from the room. Zerlix was lying, he told himself as he went down the long, tiled corridor that led to the dining hall. He had always been a liar and a cheat and a thief. He had placed the hit on Bobbi and all that nonsense about it being their Sire was just a distraction—just another lie.

But what about the way Mother Tizlah sent Bobbi to the Market yesterday, even though she hasn't been here a month yet? whispered a little voice in his head. What about the way she said it was your Sire's idea to let her go out in the first place?

Dragon shook his head, pushing the foolish thought aside. Komendant Vizlar wouldn't do something like that. Zerlix might be an asshole he couldn't stand, but Dragon loved and respected his adoptive parents—especially his Sire who was always fair.

Komendant Vizlar was an honorable male, who would never try to hurt the woman Dragon had Claimed as his bride-to-be. Nor would he mind having Dragon's sons running the tiled halls of his compound. He wanted

only the best for his adopted son—Dragon was sure of that.

But Zerlix's words lodged like a stone in his heart, no matter how hard he tried to forget them. And somehow Dragon felt a little *less* sure of his Sire's love than he had been before.

Don't be foolish, he told himself. *Surely my Sire had nothing to do with it.*

Just in case, though, he would make an announcement at Last Meal that night, when the entire Clan was gathered to eat. He would say that whoever had placed the hit on Bobbi should call it off...or they would be very, very sorry.

VERY SORRY, the being within him agreed in a low, rumbling growl and Dragon felt comforted. No matter what happened, he wasn't alone in this. He would protect the women he loved—the woman they *both* loved—no matter what happened.



“Oh, Bobbi—is that your Claiming piece? Did Rep. Dragon give you your wedding jewelry early?” Keelah’s eyes widened as she looked Bobbi over after breakfast that day.

“Yes, he did.” Bobbi was eyeing her friend, too. There were dark green marks around her neck, as though someone had been choking her. But Keelah came to their morning work in the kitchens injured so often, she had almost stopped commenting on the bruises and contusions.

Every mark she saw on her friend hurt her heart, but it only seemed to make Keelah sad when Bobbi brought the abuse up. She always just repeated how lucky she was to still be in the compound and then said she hoped that Zerlix would never tire of her.

This time, however, Bobbi couldn’t be silent about what she saw. If Zerlix had started choking Keelah, who knew where it might end?

“Did *he* do that to you?” she asked, pointing to the marks around the Saurian girl’s throat. “Did he choke you last night? Is that what he’s doing now? *Strangling* you?”

“Oh...it really isn’t as bad as it looks.” Keelah’s fingers fluttered nervously at her bruised throat. “And besides, there’s something I need to tell you.”

“I can have Dragon talk to him—or try to, at least,” Bobbi said, frowning. “You can’t go on like this, Keelah!”

“I *have* to, you know that,” Keelah whispered, her eyes darting around nervously. “And anyway, having Rep. Dragon talk to him would only make things *worse*. Especially after this morning.”

“Why? What happened this morning?” Bobbi demanded.

“That’s what I have to talk to you about. Come on—let’s go in the pantry so we can have some privacy.”

Keelah pulled her through the kitchen, which was already bustling with activity, and into the back storage room, lined with shelves.

Bobbi shivered, as she did every time she entered the room, remembering Zerlix’s attempted attack on her, which hadn’t been that long ago. However, there was no one here but her and Keelah now, so they should be safe enough, she told herself.

“Now what do you have to tell me?” she asked, after the two of them had hidden themselves behind the second row of shelves, which held enormous glass jugs filled with pickled *rousen*—rat like creatures with long, naked tails and purple fur.

“That Rep. Dragon came into Rep. Zerlix’s rooms and threatened him today before First Meal.” Keelah kept her voice low and one eye on the doorway, clearly watching in case someone should come in. “He seemed to think that Rep. Zerlix had ordered a hit on you.”

“That’s what he told me, too,” Bobbi said. “Why? What did Zerlix say?”

“He denied it,” Keelah said, her eyes growing wide. “Bobbi, he said he thought *Komendant Vizlar* was the one who put the hit on you!”

“But that can’t be true, can it?” Bobbi asked uneasily. It was one thing to have Dragon’s sadistic adoptive brother after her. But if his father, the leader of the Clan had decided that she was disposable...well, that would be bad. *Very bad indeed. The call is coming from inside the house!* she thought and felt sick.

“I don’t know if it’s true or not.” Keelah shook her head. “But I *do* know you’d better be careful, Bobbi. Somebody wants you dead and we really don’t know who it is.”

“Surely it must be Zerlix, though,” Bobbi protested. “Who else would have any motive? Especially Komendant Vizlar?”

“Rep. Zerlix seemed to think it was because his father wouldn’t like the idea of you and Rep. Dragon hatching a brood together.” Keelah frowned. “No, that’s not right—what is it that mammalians call it? Oh yes—that he wouldn’t like you having a lot of babies.”

“Well, I don’t particularly want a bunch of babies either,” Bobbi said frankly. “But I’m kind of stuck in this situation and as far as I can see, Saurians don’t have any kind of birth control. And even if they did, I doubt it would work for me.”

Keelah’s eyes grew wide.

“Oh, Bobbi! How can you say you don’t want to bear Rep. Dragon’s sons, when he gave you such beautiful Claiming jewelry?”

“Because he’s not giving me a *choice* about it.” Bobbi sighed and ran a hand through her hair, being careful not to disarrange the golden dragon on her forehead. “Look, I won’t say I’m not fond of him—I’m maybe even falling a little bit in love with him,” she admitted to Keelah. “As sick and Stockholm Syndrome as that sounds. But the fact is, he kidnapped me and

brought me here and then just decided he was going to marry me and I get *no say* in the matter.”

“But that’s the way it is for females,” Keelah objected. “We are taken by males for their pleasure.”

“Not where I was raised,” Bobbi said firmly. “In fact...” She hesitated, not sure if she should go on.

“In fact what?” Keelah asked, clearly curious.

“In fact, I believe the people who brought me to Avria Pentaura in the first place are going to be looking for me soon,” Bobbi said at last. “And if they come for me, I want you to come with me, Keelah. But you have to keep quiet about it, do you understand?”

“You’re thinking of leaving? Even though Rep. Dragon is so kind to you and wants to marry you?” The Saurian girl looked shocked.

“I can’t stay here, not even for Dragon,” Bobbi said simply. “If there’s any way to get away, I’m going to take it. And I’m just asking—do you want to come with me?”

“I don’t know...” Keelah still looked stunned at the idea of escape. “Mostly, I guess, I just want to go home,” she whispered at last.

“I’m sure that could be arranged,” Bobbi told her. “The Kindred of the Mother Ship believe that women are equal to men and should be able to make their own life choices. They would help you get home.” She sighed. “*If* they can find me, that is.”

“If they would help me get home, back to the Northern Continent, then yes—I would go with all my heart.” Keelah clasped her hands to her chest. “But Bobbi, it’s so dangerous! Rep. Dragon is going to be watching over you every minute now.”

“I know he will,” Bobbi said grimly. “And I have to be honest, I don’t know how this whole thing will play out. But I wanted to let you know there’s hope—not much, but some.” She reached up to touch the necklace of dark green bruises around her friend’s throat. “You won’t always have to live like this, Keelah. Not if I have anything to say about it.”

“Thank you, Bobbi. That’s so kind of you—you’re a true friend.” Keelah’s eyes filled with gratitude. “I promise you that your secret is safe with me. And if those people come for you, I’ll come with you.”

“Good.” Bobbi felt as though a weight had been lifted off her heart. She was glad she’d told Keelah about the Kindred of the Mother Ship—glad that she’d given her abused friend a little hope for the future.

She didn’t know how soon that hope was going to be torn brutally away.



“Are you sure you’re ready to go to the women’s room?” Dragon looked at her anxiously. “I don’t like being parted from you—not even for a single night.”

“I’ll be fine,” Bobbi assured him. “It’s the Saurian tradition for a bride not to see her husband for a day and a night before the wedding, right? And it’s already past midday so it won’t be that long.”

“Yes, but even one night is such a long time to be parted from you.” He stroked her hair, looking deeply into her eyes. “I love you, Bobbi. And I can’t help myself—I worry for your safety.”

Bobbi felt her heart melting despite herself. She had tried so hard not to fall for the big Kindred—had done her best to tell herself he was her kidnapper, not her fiancé. Yet now, on the eve of their wedding, she couldn’t say she was *entirely* unhappy. Dragon was a good man who loved her to distraction and it looked like they were going to be together the rest of their lives.

Even though it was almost time for the Kindred of the Mother Ship to be looking for her, she had a gut feeling they were going to be too late. Because once she married Dragon and had Bonding Sex with him, their life-long bond would be formed. And Bobbi knew she wouldn’t have the heart to break that

bond—not even to go back to her old life. So unless the Kindred magically appeared before tomorrow—which she doubted—she was already going to be bonded to Dragon by the time they showed up.

I guess I'm going to be a mobster's wife for the rest of my life, she thought with a sense of resignation. As to how she would survive the harsh cold in the winter, she was hoping that being bonded to the big Kindred would increase her ability to withstand the freezing temperatures. And hopefully any kids she had would inherit their father's resistance to cold, the same way Dragon had inherited his own father's resistance.

All of this was a grim prospect, but Bobbi still had hope that she might get Dragon to at least *visit* the Kindred Mother Ship. And if she did, she thought she had at least a chance at getting him to leave Saurous.

"I don't like the idea of you going to the Market, either," Dragon said, breaking her train of thought.

"But that's another tradition, right? I have to buy you a little something as a wedding present to give you during the ceremony. Besides, I'm *dying* for some fresh air," Bobbi told him. "And you know you don't have to worry about the hit on me anymore."

It was true, the fear of assassination was off the table. The day Dragon had given her the Claiming piece and wedding jewelry to wear, he had waited until dinner, when the entire Clan was gathered in the dining hall, and then stood to make an announcement.

"Listen to me, all of you," he'd said, his deep voice booming in the tiled room. "One of you has placed a hit on my bride-to-be."

He had pointed at Bobbi, who once more had the uncomfortable feeling of all the Saurian eyes in the room resting on her.

“Whoever it was, I want the hit called off *now!*” Dragon had continued, glaring around at the different Clan enforcers and crew members. He stared especially long and hard at Zerlix, who was lounging on the other side of his father. “You can see how I feel about Bobbi—she already wears my Claiming piece,” he added, pointing at Bobbi again—who, of course, was wearing the golden dragon headpiece. “She is *mine* and anyone who dares to harm her will feel my wrath. Just ask the two Diamond Death enforcers who came for her yesterday—they’re rotting in an alley at the end of Market Street. If you don’t want to join them, I suggest you leave my bride alone!”

There were uneasy murmurs in response to this speech and Bobbi could see the Saurians looking askance at the big Kindred, as though they weren’t sure what to make of his lethal threat. Komendant Vizlar was leaning to one side and his Advisor, Rep. Yariz, was murmuring in his scaly ear hole.

“Sit down, my son,” he said, after nodding at his Advisor. “Leave this to me.” He had raised his voice and addressed the room. “Whoever has ordered a hit on the little mammalian female, I am hereby ordering you to call it off. Rep. Dragon’s bride-to-be is not to be harmed in any way. These are my orders.”

Dragon had nodded at his adoptive father, gratitude in his bronze eyes.

“Thank you, Sire,” he murmured. “I appreciate your support.”

“Of course, Son.” The Komendant had nodded back gravely. “You must know that your bride is safe if you are to do your best work.”

Zerlix, of course, had sneered at the proceedings—he’s had a large swollen lump on his jaw where Dragon had apparently punched him that morning. But he didn’t seem any more upset or angry than he had been before, Bobbi thought. It was difficult to know if he had been behind the hit

or not.

As for Komendant Vizlar, he had been busy whispering with his Advisor again through the rest of the dinner and his face was completely unreadable to her. If he had placed the hit—which Bobbi doubted because it *had* to be Zerlix—he didn't show any sign.

After his father's pronouncement, Dragon had appeared less anxious about her safety, though he still kept her close and had forbidden her to go outside the compound during the time leading up to their wedding. In fact, going to the Market today to buy him the traditional wedding present, would be the first time Bobbi had been out of the house in two weeks, ever since the attack by the two Death Diamond thugs in the alley.

"I've made up my mind," Dragon said abruptly, breaking into her train of thought. "I don't want you in the Marketplace—not until after we're married."

Bobbi's heart sank—she'd been looking forward to getting out of the house for a breath of fresh air—even if it *was* extremely frigid air.

"But the tradition—" she began.

"Fuck tradition," Dragon said harshly. Leaning forward, he cupped her cheek. "I can't be apart from you so long unless I know you're safe. You can buy me a wedding present after the wedding, all right?"

Bobbi wanted to argue, but she could tell it would do no good. Dragon was extremely stubborn and possessive when it came to protecting her and it was clear he wasn't budging on this point.

"All right," she agreed with a sigh. "I guess I'll just gossip with Keelah all day then." She shook her head and her throat got tight. "I just hope Zerlix hasn't beaten her again, poor thing."

Dragon gave her a serious look.

“I know you want your friend to be free, but there’s nothing I can do about her situation until after Zerlix gets tired of her.”

“I know.” Bobbi nodded. “But you *promise* to buy her as soon as he lets her go?”

He nodded.

“I promise, *feela*. I’ll pay her price and you can either keep her here with you as a companion, or I’ll fly her back to the Northern Continent to be with her family.”

“That choice is going to be up to Keelah,” Bobbi reminded him. “Just because you’re buying her for me, doesn’t mean I’m going to *own* her. She’s my friend, Dragon—I want her to be happy.”

“Just as I want *you* to be happy, little one.” He stroked her cheek lovingly.

“If you truly wanted that, you’d come back with me to the Mother Ship,” Bobbi said desperately, deciding to try one last time. “Even for a short visit —”

“Let’s not fight about this.” Dragon frowned sternly. “You know my Sire needs me here to help with the Clan. And you only want me to visit because you hope that I’ll decide to leave Saurous and go live on the Mother Ship with you—which is never going to happen.”

In fact, that was most definitely Bobbi’s hope and she hadn’t quite given it up yet.

“Just *think* about it,” she pleaded softly, though it hurt her pride to have to beg. But that was what she had been reduced to, because she was only a

woman and women had no rights on Saurous.

It wasn't lost on her that Dragon had the final say in their relationship—that the balance of power was shifted entirely and permanently to his side. It was certainly not a situation she'd ever expected to find herself in—she had been a strong, independent woman all her life and, left to her own devices, she never would have fallen for a man with such patriarchal views.

She didn't entirely blame Dragon for his attitude towards women—(that they must be protected and didn't have the right to make their own choices)—or his views on marriage—(that the man was the absolute head of the household and always had the final say in any situation.) In this case it was Nurture over Nature and he was very definitely a product of his environment. He had been raised by Saurians in the Saurian way—which was horribly misogynistic—so he was just acting the way he'd been taught.

It's like I traveled back in time and I'm marrying a guy from the 1950s, she thought, looking up at the big Kindred. I wish there was a way to bring him into the present.

Still, things could be worse, she told herself. At least Dragon didn't treat her as though she was disposable—a toy that could be mistreated and easily cast aside once he got tired of it. If he had treated her the way Zerlix treated women, she never would have fallen for him.

Maybe that would have been better, she thought. Maybe then I would have tried harder to get away instead of spending every night in his arms with his face between my legs!

Which, to be honest, was *exactly* how they had spent almost every night for the past 2 weeks, ever since Dragon had decided that Marking her was important to keep her safe from other males. The big Kindred was a

wonderful lover—both tireless and selfless when it came to her pleasure. But Bobbi couldn't help wondering if having an amazing sex life could compensate for living on Saurous the rest of her days.

“What are you thinking, *feela*?” Dragon looked at her intently. “You're not going to be upset just because I can't leave my duties here to go visit the Mother Ship, are you?”

“If you can't leave your duties, what about letting me go visit for a while and then come back?” Bobbi suggested hopefully. “After we're married and we form a bond, that shouldn't be a problem—you know I'll come back to you.”

He frowned possessively.

“What? You mean let you go off on your own to a place beyond Night's Curtain with a lot of unmarried males? I don't think so—that wouldn't be safe, little one.”

Bobbi stared at him.

“So I'm *never* going to see my friends and family ever again? Is *that* what you're saying?”

“Don't get upset,” Dragon rumbled, stroking her hair. “You have friends here on Saurous—don't forget your little friend, Keelah. And you and I will make a family of our own.”

“But my parents and sister and nieces and nephews!” Bobbi protested. “And my colleagues at the college—and what about my career? You expect me to give everything up to live here with you and cook and clean and have your babies!”

“Because that's what a woman *should* do,” Dragon said, frowning.

“I have a PhD!” Bobbi shouted at him, losing her temper completely. She had thought she was resigned to this marriage but maybe she wasn’t after all. “I know that doesn’t mean anything to you since women aren’t even allowed to go to school on Saurous, but I worked *really* hard for my credentials! I spent years writing my dissertation and then I had to defend it and...”

But she trailed off, seeing that everything she was saying meant nothing to him. He was shaking his head, a look of incomprehension in his bronze eyes.

“Bobbi, sweetheart,” he rumbled. “Don’t get mad on the eve of our wedding—let’s not part on a sour note.” He stroked her hair again. “I love you—I only want to keep you safe.”

Bobbi took a deep breath and blew it out slowly, counting backwards from ten. Shouting and screaming wasn’t going to change anything, she told herself. Her philosophy of life had always been to make the most of whatever situation she found herself in and clearly her current situation was that she was going to marry the big Kindred, whether she wanted to or not.

Taking another deep breath, she looked up at him.

“I’ll tell you what, Dragon,” she said calmly. “I love you too—I can’t seem to help it. I’ve been drawn to you from the start. In a way, it’s almost like you *made* me love you. But let me tell you something...” She put her fist to her chest, holding it over her heart. “This love I feel for you, it’s a *regretful* kind of love. An *uneven* kind of love. Because this relationship between us is *not* balanced and it’s *not* fair.”

“We have the same kind of relationship my parents have,” he protested, looking taken aback. “I’ve sworn to you that I’ll protect you and love you and keep you safe. I’ll provide for you and give you anything you want, Bobbi—I

swear it.”

“Anything I want but my freedom, you mean,” she said bitterly. “Did it occur to you that I was providing for *myself*, back when you took me off Avria Pentaura? You claim that you took me to keep me safe from Zerlix, but you know you could have just hidden me in your room and then brought me back to the Orniths as soon as it was time for the Kindred of the Mother Ship to come check on me. Instead, you’ve chosen to Claim me and marry me and bond me to you for life—which means I’m trapped here with no way out.”

“You don’t *need* a way out,” Dragon protested. “Listen, since you’re so upset, I’ll make you a promise—after you have our first son, I’ll reconsider the idea of a visit to the Mother Ship, all right?”

“Oh, you’ll reconsider after you get me *pregnant*? Is that it?” Bobbi couldn’t keep the bitterness out of her voice.

All of her suppressed emotions—the fear of losing her old life entirely, the grief over never seeing her family or friends again, the anger at having to giving up a career she loved—all came rushing over her, no matter how hard she tried to suppress them.

“This isn’t fair, Dragon—you know it’s not!” she cried.

“I’m sorry,” Dragon said quietly and this time his deep voice was quiet and sincere. “Sorry more than I can say, Bobbi. I know I’m robbing you of your life—I *know* that.”

He took her by the shoulders, looking at her intently and for the first time during this conversation, Bobbi honestly felt *seen*.

“Then *why*?” she whispered, looking up at him with eyes that were suddenly blurry. She became aware that she was crying but she didn’t care. “Why...why are you doing this?” she asked him.

“Because *I cannot give you up.*” His eyes blazed, flames replacing the bronze. “I can’t set you free and let you leave me anymore than I can stop breathing. I know that’s selfish and wrong—*I know it.*” He shook his head. “I know it but I can’t help it. Because we’re meant to be together. Because *you’re MINE.*”

His voice had taken on the odd double echo and Bobbi knew that their third—the entity that lived inside him—was there, looking out at her through Dragon’s eyes.

“*You’re MINE,*” he said again and there was a note of finality in his voice that brooked no dissent.

“I’m yours,” she repeated dully and swiped at her eyes, which were still full of tears. It was true, she might as well be resigned to it, she told herself. There was no way Dragon was letting her go. And even if he was willing to, the thing inside him would make him chase her down. She would never be free of him...no, she would never be free of *them*, she thought.

“Tomorrow is our wedding day,” Dragon murmured. He cupped her hot cheek and wiped away a tear with his thumb. “If you can’t be happy, at least try not to be miserable.”

“I...I’ll try.” She looked up at him. “I guess you think you own me now—or you will once we’re married.”

“That’s the way things go.” Dragon’s deep voice was surprisingly gentle, as though he was explaining an immutable fact of life to a child. “I’ll own you but I’ll never mistreat you, little one. I’ll provide for you and keep you safe and love you with my whole heart, all the days of our lives.”

“All the days of our lives,” Bobbi repeated dutifully. She sniffed and looked away from him. “I don’t want to talk about this anymore—there’s no

point. I'm ready to go to the women's room now."

Dragon looked like he wanted to say something else but at that moment there was a knock on the door.

He frowned. "That will be my mother, coming to get you and bring you to the women's room."

"Good." Bobbi wiped her eyes more thoroughly on the sleeve of her dress and straightened up. "I'm ready."

She got off the couch and went to the door before Dragon could answer. Outside, Res. Tizlah was standing with a few of the other Saurian wives. She gave Bobbi a toothy smile.

"Well, well—and is the bride-to-be all ready to go? We must keep you away from your future husband for the next day and night—otherwise you'll start your marriage with bad luck and we don't want that!"

"No, of course not." Bobbi tried to smile. "We don't want to start off on the wrong foot." She shot Dragon a look and he gave her one in return—distressed and worried.

"I don't want you to leave yet," he said abruptly. "I think we need to talk some more before you go, *feela*."

"No." Bobbi shook her head. "No, we've said all there is to say." Standing on tiptoes, she planted a resigned kiss on his cheek. "I'll see you on our wedding day," she told him.

Then she turned away and started resolutely down the long, echoing hallway with Res. Tizlah and the other wives in tow. There was no way she could change her fate now, she thought. No way to get out of this wedding... this life that was to take the place of her old existence.

*I love him, she thought again. I can't help myself—I **do** love him. But sometimes I don't like him very much at all!*



“*N*ow then, here we are—the women’s room.” Res. Tizlah threw open the door with a flourish and all the Saurian wives around Bobbi *ooed* and *ahhed*.

The women’s room was a special area, only used on the day and night before a wedding to sequester the bride from her husband-to-be. The wall tiles—the Saurians *did* love their tiles, Bobbi thought—were done in feminine, pastel shades of lavender and pale pink and sunshine yellow. There were several couches in the room and a table at the back was loaded with Saurian goodies to snack on—mostly meat based, of course.

The idea was for the bride-to-be and her friends to have a special day and night—almost like a slumber party—to celebrate her last night of maidenhood and get ready for her wedding. It was also—from what Bobbi had heard—the time when the bride’s mother told her “the facts of life” and what she was expected to do with her new husband on her wedding night.

Glancing up at her Mother-in-Law-to-be, Bobbi sincerely hoped Res. Tizlah wasn’t going to try and have “the talk” with her. She could only imagine how embarrassing it would be—not to mention the fact that Saurian and human anatomy were completely different, so it would no doubt be a pointless exercise.

“Come right in and let’s get this pre-wedding party going!” Res. Tizlah said, smiling brightly at Bobbi. “I know how excited you must be and how you’re longing for the big day, but this should help you pass the time until you can see Dragon again.”

“Thank you.” Bobbi tried to smile at her, but the conversation she’d had with the big Kindred had definitely put a damper on her spirits. She’d been sure that eventually she could get him to agree to at least *visit* the Mother Ship. And once they were there, she’d had strong hopes that she could get him to stay.

Now she saw that it was never going to happen. Dragon was staunchly loyal to his Clan and his adoptive parents—he was never going to leave them under any circumstances. And that meant that Bobbi was never going to leave either.

Because the moment he bonded her to him, that was it—she knew, from talking to Kat, that a bond with a Kindred warrior was for life and that nothing but death could break it. After tomorrow night, after she and Dragon made love for the first time, she would be stuck here forever.

The hell of it was that even knowing all that, she *still* wanted to make love with him. Her body craved his in a way that wasn’t reasonable or right.

*What’s **wrong** with me?* Bobbi asked herself angrily. *Why can’t I hate him for condemning me to this life? Why do I still want him—still love him—even though he’s being such a jerk?*

She didn’t have the answers for any of her questions—she only knew she was stuck and she couldn’t see any way out of this situation.

“Would you like to go on a tour of the women’s room? It’s really quite large,” Res. Tizlah said, breaking into her morose thoughts and making

Bobbi realize she was still standing there, just inside the doorway, staring blankly at the room.

“There’s another area around the corner where the sleeping pits are located,” Res. Tizlah went on brightly. “You can have one to yourself or share it with a special friend so you can chat, if you’re too nervous to sleep before the wedding.”

Her words made Bobbi realize that she hadn’t seen Keelah in the group of women who had come to get her. She’d assumed the Saurian girl would be waiting in the women’s room but now, looking around, she saw that her friend was nowhere in sight.

“Where’s Keelah?” she asked, frowning. “Is she waiting by the sleeping pits?”

“Oh, well...” Res. Tizlah looked distinctly uncomfortable and some of the other Saurian women began whispering among themselves and casting sidelong glances in Bobbi’s direction.

A flutter of unease ran through Bobbi, like a single, icy finger caressing her heart.

“Well? Where is she?” she asked, trying to keep the fear out of her voice. “She’s supposed to be my attendant at the ceremony—where is she?”

“Now, dear, I *did* tell you not to get too attached to her. She was, after all, only a Pleasure Girl,” Res. Tizlah began.

“Was? What do you mean, ‘was’?” The icy finger had become a whole hand, gripping her heart with dread. “Where did she *go*?”

“I sold her,” a hateful, hissing voice replied from behind her.

Bobbi whirled around and saw Zerlix standing in the open doorway of the

women's room.

“You...you *what?*” she demanded, hating the way her voice trembled.

“I sold her, not an hour ago, to her old pimp in the blue light district.” He smirked at her. “You see, I wanted to buy you and my Little Brother a wedding present, but I didn't have any money. So I sold her in order to get you *this.*”

He held something out on a velvet cushion and Bobby saw it was nothing but a piece of bruised *tekla* fruit, which was sometimes used for garnish in the kitchen but wasn't considered edible by the Saurians at all.

“Sorry it isn't more *impressive,*” Zerlix snarled sarcastically. “But I'm afraid she wasn't worth much after I spiked her so often—the pimp said she was ‘damaged goods’. Of course, not nearly as damaged as she's *going* to be after he sells her to the Rough Bloods Clan tonight for a private Spike Party they're having.” His nasty smile widened. “I understand that *every single one* of their enforcers is invited to have some fun and I'm sure your little friend will be entertaining *all* of them.”

All this time, Bobbi had been staring at him, her eyes getting wider and wider as she tried to comprehend this level of cruelty...of *evil*. For a moment, she could hardly speak. It seemed so unimaginably horrible—so unbelievably bad, she had almost lost her voice. Finally, however, she managed to say,

“You...you *sold* her?”

“Are you deaf or just *stupid?*” Zerlix hissed rudely. “Yes, I *sold* her.”

“You asshole.” The words came out in a whisper at first but then her voice caught up with her rage. “You *asshole!*” she screamed and slapped the velvet cushion with its bruised *tekla* fruit out of his hands.

“Now, wait just a minute!” Res. Tizlah huffed, frowning at her. “You

cannot speak to a man like that—especially not my son!”

“Your son is a sadistic sociopath!” Bobbi shouted back.

She knew she shouldn’t—she knew she was probably going to screw up any future relationship with her Mother-in-Law-to-be, but she couldn’t seem to stop. Images of Keelah with her eyes swollen shut from being punched and that necklace of dark green bruises around her throat, rose in front of her eyes and Bobbi simply couldn’t hold herself back.

“He’s sick! He gets off on hurting women,” she shouted, pointing at Zerlix, who was glaring at her from his slitted greenish-yellow eyes. “And he sold Keelah into a horrible situation just because she’s my friend! Because he wanted to hurt me!”

“He sold her because he was *tired* of her, I imagine,” Res. Tizlah said coldly. “I told you this might happen. I warned you not to get too attached to a mere Pleasure Girl.”

“Will you *listen* to yourself?” Bobbi demanded. “You’re acting like she’s nothing but dirt because she’s a ‘Pleasure Girl’—as though she *chose* that life for herself! But it could happen to *any of you!*”

She raised her voice and pointed at the other Saurian women, who were all looking at her like she had gone crazy.

“Because women don’t have any rights here and none of you seem to care! What happens if your husbands get tired of you? They can sell you, the same way Keelah was sold! But you act like that’s just fine—like it’s all you deserve. You act like it’s *normal!*”

Of course, here on Saurous the way Keelah had been treated *was* normal—Bobbi realized that. But she was fed up to the teeth with this nasty place—so sick and tired of the horrible, misogynistic Saurian society she just

couldn't stop.

“Don't you care?” she demanded, looking around the room, trying to catch their slitted yellow eyes with her own. “Don't you care what happened to Keelah? She worked with us—lived with us—don't you give a damn that she's going to be gang raped just because Zerlix is a sadistic asshole?”

“I think you'd better go now, Son,” Res. Tizlah said stiffly, to Zerlix, who was still smirking in the doorway. “It appears that your brother's bride-to-be has taken leave of her senses.”

“It's not just him,” Bobbi said recklessly. She pointed at the older Saurian woman. “You're complicit, too! You raised him to think it was all right to hit and use women any way he wanted to. How could you do such a good job with Dragon and fail so miserably with your biological son?”

“How *dare* you?” Res. Tizlah breathed.

For a moment, Bobbi was certain she was going to slap her—which would have been pretty painful, considering the Saurian's long, curving claws. But the older woman just stood there, her hands clenched into fists, and her eyes flashing. When she finally spoke, it wasn't to Bobbi.

“Take her away from here until she calms down,” she snapped at two of the Saurian wives. “Get her out of my house—out of this compound! *At once!*”

“We'll take her to the Market to buy Rep. Dragon his wedding day present,” one of them—Res. Leezah—said quickly.

“Yes, yes—good idea!” another wife—Res. Jynah answered in a nervous voice.

The two Saurian women each took Bobbi by an arm and hustled her out the door of the women's room as quickly as they could. Bobbi thought of

yanking away from them, but she wanted to get away from the house as badly as Res. Tizlah wanted her to.

As she passed Zerlix, he gave her an ugly, sneering smile that exposed all his long, needle-sharp teeth. Bobbi was fed up with him too. Taking a deep breath, she spit at him—spraying his flat, scaly face.

The Saurian jerked back, swiping at his eyes and nostril slits.

“You little mammalian *bitch*,” he snarled, glaring at her. “You’ll pay for that!”

“And you’ll pay for what you did to Keelah, you bastard,” she snapped back. “I don’t know how, but I’m going to make you pay!”

She wanted to say more but the two Saurian women on either side of her gave each other frightened looks and dragged her hurriedly down the hallway. Bobbi had no choice but to go with them, even though what she wanted more than anything in the world was to run back and claw Zerlix’s slitted yellow eyes out.

He was going to pay, all right. She didn’t know how, but somehow she was going to make him pay!



*P*lease! Please, just let me see Dragon! Please, I have to go see him!”
Bobbi begged.

Her rage at Zerlix had given way to fear for her friend and desperate urgency. She knew that if she could only talk to Dragon, he would go and buy Keelah for her. If she could just see him for a minute and explain the situation, he could go get the Saurian girl before anything awful happened to her.

And awful it would certainly be. Keelah had spoken in frightened whispers of the “Spike Parties” that some of the Clans held for their enforcers. According to her, they were rough affairs where a single Pleasure Girl was passed from male to male all night until she expired—literally spiked to death.

It was a horrible fate and Bobbi was determined it wasn’t going to happen to her friend.

“Please,” she begged Res. Jynah, who was holding her right arm. “Please, just let me go see him!”

“Silly girl, he won’t be in his rooms,” Res. Jynah said briskly as she and Res. Leezah shoved Bobbi into a too-big coat that was hanging on a hook by the back door.

It was an all-purpose garment with a big hood, used by just about anyone who wanted to work in the garden during one of the rare rainstorms Saurous had. It wasn't very warm, but Bobbi barely noticed.

"Of *course* he'll still be in his rooms," she protested. "I just left him not that long ago. Please, I only need to talk to him for a moment."

"It's well past noon—he'll be in the blue light district by now playing with the Pleasure Girls," Res. Leezah said. "Or maybe on his way to the spaceport. Men have to play before their wedding—it helps them relax."

"But I have to talk to him! He has to buy Keelah!" Bobbi protested.

"And why would he do that? She's nothing but a broken-down Pleasure Girl who's seen better days," Res. Jynah sniffed. "Don't worry, if I know men, he'll be looking for someone much fresher to spike before his wedding day."

"No, he won't!" Bobbi exclaimed. "He said he'd buy her for me as soon as Zerlix lost interest in her."

Both Saurian women looked confused.

"Why would he do that?" Res. Leezah asked. "Why waste his money on someone like *her*?"

Bobbi wanted to slap them both—were they completely heartless? Didn't they care at all about the horrible fate that awaited her friend?

"Come on, we're getting you out of here," Res. Jynah said as the two of them marched her out the door and into the bitter cold.

"Yes, we'd better! If Res. Tizlah comes and finds her still in the house, we'll be whipped for sure!" Res. Leezah exclaimed. "Why did you have to be so nasty and rude to her anyway?" she snapped at Bobbi. "She's going to be

in a *terrible* mood for days to come!”

“Yes, everyone knows she won’t tolerate any criticism of Rep. Zerlix,” Res. Jynah added. “You’re really lucky she didn’t whip you herself!” she told Bobbi. “Though she’ll probably expect Rep. Dragon to do it once you’re married. It’ll be his duty to punish you for slandering his brother.”

“I wasn’t *slandering* anyone. I was telling the truth!” Bobbi was already shivering in the chilly air as the two Saurian women walked her briskly towards the Market.

“If that wasn’t slander, I’d like to know what is! And did you see the way she spit in his face?” Res. Leezah said, talking to Res. Jynah over Bobbi’s head. “I never saw anything like it! So shameful!”

“Don’t either of you care that you could both wind up in the exact predicament Keelah is in right now?” Bobbi demanded, looking at both of them. “Doesn’t it scare you how *disposable* women are here?”

“That would never happen to either of us,” Res. Jynah said primly. “My husband, Rep. Heesor is a good man. Why, I still have over half the bracelets he gave me on our wedding day!” She looked at the gold jewelry flashing on Bobbi’s wrists. “Though why in the world Rep. Dragon gave so many to a nasty little thing like you, I’ll never understand!”

“I’ll give you one of them right now if you’ll just go find Dragon and give him a message for me,” Bobbi said, in a burst of inspiration. “I’ll give you more than one—as many as you want!”

“Listen to her! Offering to give me her wedding jewelry just as though she had the right!” Res. Jynah sounded shocked.

“How dare you offer to give away the jewelry Rep. Dragon gave you! Wretched, ungrateful girl!” Res. Leezah chimed in. She looked over Bobbi’s

head at Res. Jynah. “Have you ever heard the like?”

Res. Jynah shook her head.

“What in the world Rep. Dragon sees in her, I’ll never know.” She made a disgusted face at Bobbi, wrinkling her nose slits. “Ugly little *mammalian*.”

They had reached the Market by now and Bobbi realized that neither of women was going to help her rescue Keelah. The two of them were blind to their own precarious positions, secure in the fact that they were married wives instead of Pleasure Girls, who they held in contempt. Just like Res. Tizlah, they didn’t seem to think that Zerlix had done anything wrong. And as for Keelah, well, they seemed to think she deserved her fate.

It’s up to me, she thought desperately. But what could she do? She felt certain the Dragon was still in the house—she didn’t think he would be out participating in a day of debauchery just because it was the Saurian custom to do so before his wedding. But there seemed to be no way to get to him without running into Res. Tizlah and being stopped before she could see him.

Maybe if I sneaked in the back way... she thought. But no—the women’s room was between herself and Dragon’s rooms, which were in a far corner of the large house. If Res. Tizlah caught her, she would just confine her to one of the sleeping pits and keep her from getting to Dragon at all.

Which means I won’t see him until tomorrow morning and by that time Keelah will be dead!

Not just dead but spiked to death—what a horrible thought!

Then don’t think it, Bobbi told herself desperately. *Think of something else—think of a solution. You can’t get to Dragon and you can’t get a message to him so what else can you do? How can you save Keelah? Think, Bobbi—think!*

She thought desperately and, as she did, her eyes wandered to the end of the Market where the candied meat stall stood. She remembered Keelah telling her about her childhood, running around the fair with her brothers and sisters, and felt a lump in her throat. Poor Keelah, all she'd ever wanted was to go home and now it was looking more and more like she was going to die a horrible death instead!

She tore her eyes away from the candied meat on a stick stand and they landed on something else instead—the end of the Market. And beyond that, the blue light district where the windows were just beginning to blink on, showing a pale, blue light that spilled out onto the dingy street.

Suddenly, Zerlix's words rang in her head.

"I sold her not an hour ago to her old pimp in the blue light district," he'd said.

And I know where that is! Bobbi thought, feeling a flash of excitement. She remembered which of the sagging buildings Keelah had pointed out to her—she even remembered her old pimp's name—Rep. Wheezler.

What if I went down there and bought her myself? she thought. *Why shouldn't I?*

But what could she pay with?

The jingling of the thin golden bangles on her arms as they walked briskly down the rows of stalls answered her question. Of course, no doubt it would be considered shocking, a woman using her own wedding jewelry to pay for something, but Bobbi didn't think the pimp would care. Keelah had said how much he liked jewelry and she had a *lot* of it.

Also, Dragon would understand. He knew how important Keelah was to her—he wouldn't be mad at her at all, Bobbi was sure. She would explain

that there was nothing else she could do—that he had been inaccessible and she'd had to act on her own.

But could she really do it? Could she march right up to the Pleasure House and knock on the door and demand to speak to Rep. Wheezler and then offer to buy Keelah for some of her bangles?

It's broad daylight and I don't have a hit on my head anymore—it should be safe enough, Bobbi thought. Of course, she might have some difficulty sneaking Keelah back into the house, but she was sure she could manage somehow.

I'll bring her through the side kitchen door and hide her in the pantry, she thought, with a sudden burst of inspiration. *Until after the wedding. Then I'll tell Dragon and he can pretend that **he** went and bought her.*

The question was, how could she slip away from the nasty Saurian women on either side of her and get to the end of the Market unnoticed?

Her answer came in the form of a stall with brightly colored fabrics in exotic new patterns.

“Oooo, stop a minute, Jynah!” Res. Leezah exclaimed, catching sight of the stall's wares. “I've never seen a pattern like that, have you?”

“No, that I haven't!” Res. Jynah came to a halt as well, mesmerized by the fabric.

“It *is* really pretty,” Bobbi said tentatively.

The two of them exchanged a look.

“Come to your senses, have you?” Res. Leezah asked, raising one scaly eye ridge. “Are you going to behave yourself now?”

“I'm sorry I was so upset earlier,” Bobbi said. “But I *do* need to find a

present for Rep. Dragon.”

“Well, at least she’s speaking sense now,” Res. Jynah remarked.

“I know,” Bobbi said. “Why don’t the two of you look at that fabric stall and I’ll look over here at the stall selling money-purses? Do you think Rep. Dragon might like one of those?”

“Maybe he would.” Res. Leeza sounded distracted—she only had eyes for the fabric. “Ooo, look at this one! Colors just like the tiles on the women’s room wall!” she said to Res. Jynah. “And just feel the material—so soft!”

“It is soft.” Res. Leeza remarked, feeling it as well. And soon the two Saurian women were immersed in the many different fabrics on display with their backs turned to Bobbi.

This is my one chance—I’d better take it!

Bobbi pretended to peruse the little money purses with their pebbled leather hides for less than a minute, before turning away from the other stall. Pulling the too-big hood well around her head so that it hid her face, she jammed her hands in her pockets and headed for the end of the Market.

She would not abandon Keelah to her horrible fate. She was going to save her friend no matter what, she told herself.

She had no idea that hungry eyes were watching her and marking her progress to the blue light district, getting closer with every step she took.



The Saurian tradition for husbands-to-be, was to go out carousing on the day and night before their wedding. It was supposed to be good luck for a male to spike as many other females as he could before he got wed to his wife.

But it was a tradition that Dragon had no interest in participating in. He had no wish to make love to any woman but Bobbi. Indeed, even if they had been on a planet dominated by mammalian life instead of Saurian, he still wouldn't have cared—he only wanted his petite, curvy *feela* and no one else.

So, after putting off the members of his crew who came by his rooms, asking to take him out, he went back inside and sat on the couch, trying to watch a program on the curving 3-D screen. Nothing caught his attention, however, and he found himself thinking of Bobbi again—of the last words she had said to him.

*She said she loves me but it's a reluctant love—like she doesn't **want** to love me.*

Her words troubled him—troubled him a *lot*. She was upset that he had taken her from her life and made her a part of his world, giving her a new life to live—but that was what males did with females, Dragon argued with himself. Women were taken all the time from their homelands in distance

cities or continents and used as Pleasure Girls or taken as wives.

Of course, Dragon didn't approve of the fate of the Pleasure Girls—he never had. But he wasn't proposing to use Bobbi that way—he was going to give her a wonderful life. He would care for her and protect her and give her anything she wanted. In return, all she had to do was be faithful to him and bear his sons—was that so much to ask?

Her other complaint seemed to be that their relationship was unequal and he was the only one making decisions for the two of them. But again, that was how it was *supposed* to be—at least, that was how Dragon had been raised. Res. Tizlah had a great deal of power running the household but Komendant Vizlar's word was law and she never crossed him. Shouldn't that be the way with his own marriage, too?

She's just upset because she was raised differently, Dragon told himself uneasily. He remembered her saying that the Kindred of the Mother Ship believed women were equal to men. But how would that work? What if a man and his wife were having a disagreement and neither had the right to the final say? How would anything ever get decided?

*But what if she's right? What if women **should** be allowed an equal say? What if she has a **right** to be upset?* whispered a little voice in his head. *After all, the Saurian way can't be the only way of living in the universe. The Kindred of the Mother Ship must make their strange arrangement with their wives work **somehow**...*

His musings turned hazy as he leaned back on the couch, which was much softer now that Bobbi had gotten him to add some cushions to it. Dragon had been up much of the night worrying about the time he must spend away from his curvy little *feela* and now he felt tired.

I'm glad I forbid her to go to the Market, he thought sleepily. Otherwise I'd have to worry even more.

He thought that later on he would go by the women's room and check on her. He couldn't see her of course—that would be bad luck on the eve of their wedding. But he might just ask one of the women to tell her that he loved her and that he couldn't wait to wed her...

His thoughts drifted off as his eyelids closed.

And then the dreams began...



Bobbi took a deep breath and rapped sharply with her knuckles on the peeling gray door. The blue light district with its sagging buildings and chipped and peeling paint certainly wasn't much to look at, but presumably the men who came here weren't interested in the decor.

There were no other customers around yet—for which she was *extremely* grateful. As far as Bobbi could see, she was the only one on the street so far. But then, it was still light outside, so maybe it was too early to “play” yet.

Still, evening would be coming soon and she didn't want to be in this district after nightfall. Hopefully she could conduct her business quickly and get Keelah back to the house before anyone was the wiser. As for Res. Jynah and Res. Leezah, they were probably still shopping—at least Bobbi hoped they were.

No one had come to the door, so she knocked again, more loudly this time.

“Hello?” she called. “Hello? Is anybody there?”

Oh God, what if nobody was in the building? What if the pimp had already taken Keelah to the spaceport to sell her to the other Clan for their awful party? What if—

The door swung open suddenly, revealing a Saurian woman wearing a *lot* of dark green rouge on her flat cheeks and sparkly yellow shadow on her eye ridges. She had on a dress that was split high enough to show her vaginal slit, which had been bedazzled with two rows of tiny, flashing pink and blue lights to draw attention to it.

Like a runway at the airport! Bobbi thought. It was an interesting cultural display, but she didn't have time for research at the moment.

The Saurian woman—obviously a Pleasure Girl—looked down at Bobbi with apparent surprise.

“A mammalian?” she said, her voice hoarse and low—possibly from breathing in the clouds of blue smoke Bobbi saw swirling behind her. “The fuck are you doing here?” she asked, frowning.

Bobbi had practiced what she would say all the way here. Now she lifted her head and spoke in a cool, professional tone.

“I'm here to speak to Rep. Wheezler about a business deal. Please tell him if he'll see me at once, I can make it worth this while.”

She pushed up the sleeves of the oversized coat and showed the many golden bangles adorning her arms.

The Pleasure Girl's eyes widened and she gave a short nod.

“Well, mammalian or not, Rep. Wheezler *does* love his gold. Come in, come in.”

She held the door open and Bobbi entered. They went down a short hallway, past a dark staircase leading to the second story, and into a front room that was filled with smoke. Several other Pleasure Girls were sitting in the middle of the floor around a large hooka-like contraption. It had four flexible arms coming from its fat silver body and the Saurian women were

sucking on them and then releasing plumes of blue smoke from their nostril slits.

“Stop with the dream weed for a minute,” the first Pleasure Girl called to them. “Rep. Wheezler has business and he needs to be able to see who the fuck he’s talking to!”

There were some mutters of discontent from the other women at this pronouncement, but the first Pleasure Girl seemed to have some authority over them. After several angry looks at her and Bobbi, they hung their pipes on hooks on the sides of the hooka-thing and left the room, climbing the staircase she’d seen on her way in.

The smoke still lingered in the room and Bobbi accidentally breathed some in and then coughed it out again. It had an odd flavor—bittersweet and acrid—that lingered at the back of her tongue.

“Wait here,” the Pleasure Girl with the landing strip vaginal slit said to her. “And try not to breathe in too much of the smoke if you don’t want a case of the echoes.”

“The what?” Bobbi asked, and coughed again. But the girl was already gone, presumably to go get Rep. Wheezler.

Bobbi wandered around the room, waving at the lingering clouds of smoke and trying not to breathe too much of it in. When a bit of it cleared, she was able to see the room more clearly. To her surprise, it looked familiar.

“I’ve been here before—I know I have,” Bobbi muttered to herself. “The walls...I’ve seen these walls.”

But how could that be? She shook her head but couldn’t get rid of the odd sense of *déjà vu*. Waving more smoke out of the way—it was denser than normal smoke and stayed together in big clouds until she broke them up with

her hand—she looked more closely at the wall tiles.

“That’s it—it’s the tiles!” she muttered to herself. They were dark blue at the top of the wall, near the ceiling, but they got lighter as they went down. Near the middle of the wall, they turned from pale blue to lavender and continued getting darker until they were a deep purple down near the floor.

Now that she had recognized the tiles as the familiar element, Bobbi finally remembered where she’d seen them before.

“The dream!” she exclaimed. “I saw them in the dream I shared with Dragon!”

She got so excited, she accidentally breathed in another big lungful of the dense blue smoke and started coughing again.

This coughing fit was worse than the previous one and Bobbi ended up doubled over, hacking like she had a three-pack-a-day habit. When she finally stood up again, she felt light-headed and woozy.

And then she realized there was someone else in the room with her.

It was a tall Kindred man with flames dancing in his eyes and a woman with long, brown hair.

“I don’t like it here, Taurex,” the women said. She shivered and crossed her arms over her breasts tightly. “It’s so cold and I don’t trust these people.”

“The males treat their females shamefully,” the man agreed. “But we’re only here for a little while longer, Lalish, my love.”

Suddenly, a little boy with black hair and bronze eyes came running into the room.

“Mumma! Poppa!” he yelled. “I saw a man coming—one of the lizard people.”

“Where?” The woman went to the front window and looked out of it, her eyes troubled. “It’s those men from the Crimson Blades Clan, Taurex. What if they’re here to demand a cut of our profits again?”

“They can forget about it,” the man said grimly. “We don’t even know them and we don’t owe their Clan any allegiance! Don’t worry, my love, I’ll take care of this.”

“All right—just be careful. They scare me,” the woman said. “They’re so cold and unfeeling.”

Suddenly an arm waved the clouds of blue smoke away from her face and the vision of the man and woman and their son disappeared. Bobbi coughed again and looked around, feeling dazed, like she had just woken up from a very deep dream.

“What...where did they go?” she asked, looking around in confusion. “I know them! At least, I *think* I do.”

“You have to watch the dream weed smoke—it can trap you in visions of the past if you’re not careful. We call that ‘getting the echoes’.”

It was a tall, thin Saurian who was talking to her. At first, Bobbi thought he might be another dream. But then he smiled, showing rows of sharp teeth, and she realized she was back in reality.

“Who...who are you?” she asked, still feeling dazed.

“Why, I’m Rep. Wheezler, my dear. I was under the impression that you wanted to see me about a business proposition?” He raised his eyebrow ridges at her and Bobbi remembered why she was there.

“Oh, yes! Yes, of course—please forgive me,” she said quickly. “That smoke...” She coughed again, covering her face with her elbow.

“Yes, it can be quite intense when you first experience the echoes—most disorienting. Would you care to have a seat while your head clears?”

Rep. Wheezler gestured politely towards a couch and Bobbi took a seat gratefully—she was still feeling rather lightheaded.

“Thank you,” she said. But she couldn’t get what she’d seen out of her mind. “Would you mind telling me—these ‘echoes of the past’—does everyone see the same thing when they inhale the dream weed smoke?”

“Mainly they see things that happened in the past. Things that pertain to *them*. So one of my Pleasure Girls smoking might see herself with a client she had three weeks ago. Sometimes that befuddles their minds and they get lost in that past episode and forget what’s going on in the present,” Rep. Wheezler explained.

“But isn’t that a problem? I mean, why do you let them smoke it?” Bobbi asked.

“Because in their profession, they *need* to forget, my dear,” Rep. Wheezler murmured. “It’s not pleasant for them, you know. So I try to provide whatever recreation I can to make them more comfortable.”

More compliant, you mean, Bobbi thought, looking narrowly at the pimp. She had never been much into recreational drugs, but she could tell already that the dream weed must be addictive. Probably he got all his girls hooked so they had less initiative to run away.

But there was no point in saying that out loud and insulting him—she needed to keep on his good side if she was going to get Keelah away from him, Bobbi thought.

“Thank you for answering my questions,” she said, smiling her best, professional smile—the one she used when interviewing people during her

cultural studies. “I’ve never heard of dream weed before—and the idea of getting to see echoes of the past is truly fascinating.”

“You’re very welcome, Res...” He raised his eye ridges at her questioningly.

“Res. Bobbi,” Bobbi supplied. “I’m, er, engaged to be married to Rep. Dragon of the Crimson Blades Clan,” she added, hoping that Dragon’s name might carry some weight.

“Ah yes—I have heard of him—the mammalian enforcer adopted into the leading family of the Crimson Blades Clan.” Rep. Wheezler nodded gravely. “He is said to be a fearsome fighter—though he has never darkened my doorway.”

“He doesn’t go in for Pleasure Girls much, I don’t think,” Bobbi said. Then she had a sudden inspiration. “But I think you have one here that he would like and I want to buy her for him, as a wedding present.”

“You want to buy your husband-to-be a Pleasure Girl as a present?” Wheezler raised his eye ridges even higher, in apparent surprise. “Well, that’s certainly a unique idea.”

“I know, isn’t it?” Bobbi gushed, pretending excitement. “He’s going to be so thrilled!”

“I’m sure he will,” Rep. Wheezler said blandly. “And I take it you have a particular girl in mind?”

“Yes, I do and I’m willing to pay well for her,” Bobbi said quickly. “She belonged to Dragon’s adoptive brother and Dragon always expressed an interest in her. But of course he couldn’t have her while she belonged to his kin. Then, just this morning, I was told that she’d been sold to *you*. And since she’s free now, I thought, ‘what a perfect present!’ You know?” She smiled

at him eagerly. “So I’m *really* hoping you still have her.”

“And what would be the name of this girl?” Rep. Wheezler inquired.

“Oh, Keelah. Keelah’s her name.” Bobbi’s heart was pounding. “Please tell me she’s still here. I can pay you well for her!” She pushed up the sleeves of her coat again and showed him the many thin golden bangles she was wearing on each wrist.

“Well!” Rep. Wheezler’s slitted yellow eyes grew wide. “Your husband-to-be must value you highly to gift you with so many lovely bracelets.”

“Yes, he does and I know he would love this gift,” Bobbi said. “Please tell me—*do* you have Keelah here? If not, can you get her back from wherever she is? I’ll be willing to pay for the transportation costs if necessary.”

“Well...she *was* scheduled to go to the spaceport for a special sale...” Rep. Wheezler frowned thoughtfully and Bobbi’s heart plummeted. “But she might not have left yet,” he continued, giving her a surge of hope. “If you wouldn’t mind waiting here, I’ll go have a look for you.”

“Oh, of course.” Bobbi nodded eagerly and put her hands on her knees. “I’ll be right here. I hope she’s still available!”

“I’ll let you know in just a moment,” Rep. Wheezler promised. He rose from the couch, made her an urbane little bow, and then left the room.

Bobbi sat there, nervously tapping her feet as she waited for him to return. She wanted to get up and pace to ease her tension, but there were still clouds of the dense blue smoke hanging in the air and she didn’t want to get caught in ‘the echoes’ again.

Echoes of the past, she thought. But I thought he said it had to be echoes of something that had happened to you. I wonder why I was able to see

Dragon's Kindred parents at all? Does dreaming of them count as something that happened to me in the past?

She supposed it must, or she wouldn't have been able to see the big Kindred's family as she had.

Earlier, when Rep. Wheezler had been explaining about the smoke from the dream weed, she hadn't really considered the implications of what she'd seen but now she did. What she'd been seeing wasn't just a dream—it was something that had *really* happened, here in this room. This area must have been a shop years ago, before it became the blue light district and Dragon's parents must have settled here briefly to sell their wares before moving on to the next planet.

Or that was their plan, Bobbi thought. But they never got a chance to move on. Instead, they were murdered.

“Oh, God!” she gasped, sitting bolt upright as the full implications of what she had seen finally sank in. “They might have been murdered in *this very room!*”

Would she be able to see their deaths, if she went and sucked in another breath of the heavy blue dream weed smoke? Would she be able to see who had killed them? And would Dragon see the same thing if *he* happened to come into this room and take in a big breath of the smoke?

“What an *awful* thought!” Bobbi whispered to herself.

She must never tell the big Kindred that this was the building where his parents had lived...and had quite possibly met their untimely end. He had mercifully forgotten their murder, which he had told her had happened right in front of him when he was only small—when he was still “Tolor.” How horrible and traumatic it would be for him to come here and see it—to live it

all over again! He—

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of the front door opening.

Thinking it must be another customer, Bobbi looked around anxiously for someone to serve him. She certainly didn't want to be mistaken for one of the Pleasure Girls herself! Knowing Saurian men, the new customer might decide to help himself first and ask questions afterwards.

“Hello?” she called anxiously. “Rep. Wheezler? I think you have a customer.”

“Bobbi?” The voice came from behind her, rather than the direction of the front door. Bobbi turned quickly and saw Keelah standing there. She was dressed like the first Pleasure Girl Bobbi had encountered, her face heavy with makeup and a dress that showed her slit. Her voice was shaky as she reached out her arms. “Bobbi, did you really come for me?”

“Yes, of course I came!” Forgetting whoever was at the front door, Bobbi jumped up and put her arms around her friend. “I said I was buying you for Dragon as a wedding present,” she murmured in a low voice in Keelah's ear hole. “I'm going to smuggle you back into the house and hide you in the pantry until after the wedding. Then we can pretend that Dragon bought you for himself and you can stay with me and be safe.”

“Oh, Bobbi, thank you!” Keelah whispered, squeezing her tightly. “Thank you for coming for me! I was so afraid—they said they were going to sell me to the Rough Bloods Clan for a Spike Party!”

“Of course I came for you, but don't thank me yet—we still have to make the sale and get you out of here,” Bobbi murmured. “Just keep quiet and follow my lead.”

Keelah nodded vigorously and let Bobbi go so she could talk to

Wheezler, who had re-entered the room behind as well.

“I take it this is the Pleasure Girl you were looking for?” he inquired politely, raising his eye ridges at Bobbi.

“Yes—this is her!” Bobbi nodded firmly. “How many bangles do you want for her?” she asked, pushing up her sleeves again.

“She’s not for sale, *bitch*.”

The nasty voice was coming from behind her. Bobbi whirled around and saw that the customer who had come in through the front door had made his way to the sitting area. But it wasn’t just any customer.

It was none other than Zerlix and he was smirking at her like a predator who has finally cornered his prey.



Dragon was dreaming...dreaming of the past.

“I don’t like these lizard men, Taurex,” Dragon’s mother said. “I don’t trust them.”

“Don’t worry, Lalish, my love,” Dragon’s father replied. “I’ll take care of them.”

Only he wasn’t Dragon—he was Tolor. He was small but he was loved. And because he trusted his parents, he knew they would keep him safe.

Dragon saw his younger self running into the room, calling for his parents to come, calling that he had seen some of the “lizard men” through the front window and they were coming to the door.

His father—he of the black hair and flaming eyes—said he would handle the situation and Dragon believed him. No, *Tolor* believed him, he corrected himself. Because Poppa was big and strong and he could turn into...

What? What could Poppa turn into? Dragon/Tolor couldn’t remember, but whatever it was, it was big and scary and it could protect them all.

“The barrier is very thin now,” a voice whispered in his head. A strong, feminine voice that Dragon had heard somewhere before. ***“Soon it will be pierced. But for now, warrior, you must awake. Your female is in trouble.”***

And suddenly, Dragon found himself fully awake and sitting on his couch in his rooms. He blinked stupidly, trying to understand what had happened.

I was dreaming of them—of my parents and my younger self. It was so vivid—I could see them so clearly! What woke me up?

“Warrior,” a voice said again. Not a voice in his dream—this was real and Dragon had heard it before. It was as though someone was in the room with him, speaking in his ear. And it wasn’t just a voice—there was a presence that accompanied it. A presence that filled the room so fully he could barely breathe.

“Warrior,” it said again. **“Your female is in danger! You must go to her at once.”**

“You mean Bobbi?” Dragon looked around, but there was nothing to see—just that presence filling his room—overflowing it, like too much water poured into a tank that was about to burst. “She’s in danger? But how do I find her? Is she in the women’s room?”

“Go to the Market and follow her scent,” the voice advised him. **“But hurry if you wish to keep her alive!”**

Then the presence was gone...but Dragon’s mind was filled with another voice.

Hurry! It was the presence inside him—the thing he had no name for. **We must save our female!** it urged him.

“But Bobbi’s in the women’s room, isn’t she?”

But what if she wasn’t?

Dragon got up and reached for his knife. He sheathed it in the holster on his belt and ran out the door. A quick jog to the other end of the large house

and he found his adoptive Mother just outside the women's room door.

“Mother Tilah,” he said quickly. “I know I'm not supposed to see her, but can you tell me that Bobbi is in there?” He pointed to the door. “I just had the strangest dream about her—I need to be sure she's all right.”

“She was just *fine* the last time I saw her.” Mother Tizlah's words were clipped and her lipless mouth was tight.

Dragon frowned—he was very familiar with his adoptive mother's moods and expressions—something was wrong.

“What do you mean the last time you saw her?” he demanded. “Where is she?”

“Son, do you *really* think she's the female for you?” Mother Tizlah asked, not answering his question. “I hate to say it, but she has *horrible* manners.”

“Horrible manners? What are you talking about?” Dragon said blankly.

“Why, she insulted both your brother *and* me,” Mother Tizlah exclaimed. “She called Zerlix all kinds of awful names and said such nasty things to me about how I raised him. It *really* hurt my feelings.”

“That doesn't sound like Bobbi at all—why would she do that?” Dragon shook his head. “I don't understand.”

“What seemed to upset her was the fact that your brother sold that little Pleasure Girl of his. What was her name? Oh yes—Keelah.” Mother Tizlah sniffed disdainfully. “Anyway, he came by to say he'd sold her to her old pimp and it just seemed to set that mammalian girl of yours *off*. She started ranting and raving and screaming that he liked to hurt women and that *I* had raised him wrong and it was just a *mess*.” She shook her head. “I'm sorry to say it, but I really don't think she's going to be a good addition to the family.”

I think maybe we'd better call the wedding off."

"Call it off?" Dragon could hardly believe his ears.

She nodded firmly.

"I've talked to your Sire about it and he agrees. We think she's a bad influence on you, Son! She's dividing the family—coming between you and Zerlix. I think it would be better if you sold her and found another bride, maybe a nice Saurian girl. At any rate, someone not so...*opinionated*." Her nostril slits flared in disapproval as she emphasized the last word.

"Bobbi was probably upset because Keelah was her friend—she was supposed to be her attendant at the wedding and then Zerlix went and sold her," Dragon said reasonably. "Look, let me just talk to her and tell her I'll go find Keelah. I know it's supposed to be bad luck for me to see her before the wedding, but in this case, I think we need to make an exception."

"Oh, she's not here." Mother Tizlah crossed her arms over her chest and frowned disapprovingly. "I couldn't *stand* to have her near me one more minute."

"What?" Dragon's heart began to pound. "Well, where is she then?"

"Res. Leeza and Res. Jynah took her to the Market to get your wedding gift," Mother Tizlah said coolly. "And I certainly hope they take their time. I don't want to see her again until she's ready to apologize to me and your brother."

"She's at the Market?" Dragon exclaimed and the words he'd heard in his rooms came back to him.

"Go to the Market and follow her scent," the voice had said. Could it be the voice of the Goddess that Bobbi had told him his people—his *real* people—worshiped?

“I *said* she was at the Market.” Mother Tizlah sounded irritated. “If you go get her, be sure to tell her she’s not welcome back in my house unless she’s ready with an apology for all the nasty things she said!”

Dragon didn’t answer. He was already running down the long, tiled hallway, headed for the door that led outside. He thought he knew where Bobbi was headed and it wasn’t just the Market. If she knew that Keelah was in the blue light district, she would go after her friend, which would be very, very dangerous. What if she was grabbed off the street? Or mistaken for a Pleasure Girl and used? Any number of terrible things might happen to her and he wasn’t there to protect her!

He burst outside and took a deep, gulping breath of air, smelling and tasting it for her essence. Since a Kindred warrior’s nose is hundreds of times more sensitive than a bloodhound’s, it wasn’t long before he caught her scent.

Hurry—HURRY! the being inside him growled. Dragon was in complete agreement with it. He took off at a dead run towards the Market.

He just prayed he got to the little *feela* before it was too late...



“*I said* she’s not for sale.” Zerlix swaggered into the room, an ugly sneer on his flat, scaly face.

“What? What are you talking about?” Bobbi demanded, clutching Keelah’s hand. “She is *too* for sale and I’m going to buy her!”

“I am very much afraid the gentleman is correct,” Rep. Wheezler said politely, coming back into the room.

“But why not?” Bobbi demanded. “He sold her to *you*—why can’t you sell her to *me*? I don’t care how much she costs—you can have all my bangles—every last one of them!”

The pimp’s slitted yellow eyes shone with greed but he shook his head regretfully.

“I’m sorry, but Rep. Zerlix didn’t actually *sell* the girl to me—he only paid a nominal fee to keep her here for a few hours and tell her a falsehood or two. So she is actually still his.”

“What? But why would he do that?” Bobbi demanded.

“Because I knew that it would lure you out here, away from Dragon,” Zerlix answered her question before Wheezler could. “You’re such a nosy little mammalian bitch, I knew you wouldn’t be able to resist coming down

here to get your little friend.” He grinned at her. “And now I’ve got you *right where I want you.*”

Bobbi felt sick. This was a trap and Keelah had been the bait. How could she have not seen it before?

What an idiot I am! she thought. *I should never have come here alone—I should have waited for Dragon!*

“Now, you little bitch,” Zerlix snarled, taking another step towards her. “It’s time to pay up for all the humiliation you put me through this past month. I’m going to try out your mouth *and* your slit and you’re going to love every fucking minute of it! Gonna spike you *hard* tonight!”

Bobbi felt like someone had replaced all the blood in her body with ice water. Where could she run? Where could she hide? Dragon was far away, back at the house—even if he had known of her predicament, there was no way he could reach her in time. She was completely on her own!

“Excuse me.”

To Bobbi’s relief, Rep. Wheezler came to stand between her and Zerlix.

“Excuse me,” he said again, frowning at the other Saurian. “But you said nothing about using your brother’s bride sexually. I don’t know Rep. Dragon personally, but I *do* know his reputation—he’s completely undefeated and never loses a fight. I have no wish to incur such a man’s wrath—he would be completely ruthless if he found out I was complicit in this act.”

“He’s not going to find out,” Zerlix snarled. “Think about it, man! All we have to do is throw her body in the street when we’re done. It’ll look like she wandered into the district on her own and somebody mistook her for a Pleasure Girl and spiked her to death. You and I never have to be implicated at all.” He leaned closer to the other Saurian, grinning evilly. “*And* I’ll let you

keep *all* of her jewelry.”

Rep. Wheezler turned and gave Bobbi a considering look.

“Can I keep her Claiming Piece as well? I’d have to melt it down of course—it’s much too unusual to sell without calling attention. But it’s quite a lot of gold.”

“Fine,” Zerlix snapped. “Keep all of it—I don’t give a fuck. Only give me a private room to spike her in.” He turned his evil, leering grin on Bobbi. “I don’t want anyone walking in on us while I’m having *fun*.”

“It’s a deal,” Rep. Wheezler said coolly. “I’ll strip the body and take care of disposal when you’re finished with her in return for her jewelry.”

Finally, Bobbi found her voice.

“What? No!” she exclaimed. “You can’t do this to me! You can’t just give me to Zerlix! Look, I’ll give you all my jewelry myself just to help me get away from him!”

She began stripping the golden bangles off her arms but the Saurian pimp was already shaking his head.

“I wish you had spoken sooner, my dear,” he said. “But I’ve already made a deal and I must honor it. Besides, Rep. Zerlix is a loyal customer—it behooves me to keep him happy.”

“It *behooves* you?” Bobbi exclaimed. She couldn’t get over how calmly the two men had just bargained over her certain death. The Saurian pimp was as much a sociopath as Zerlix was! “*It behooves you?*”

“It means that it’s in my best interest to keep a loyal customer happy,” Rep. Wheezler said patiently, as though explaining to a child.

“I know what ‘behooves’ means, you asshole!” Bobbi exclaimed. “I just

can't believe the way you think you can let Zerlix kill me and get away with it! When Dragon finds out—”

“He’s not going to find out, you little bitch,” Zerlix snarled, his forked tongue lashing. “I’ve got plenty of people who will swear I was in the house all day today—he’ll never know Rep. Wheezler and I had anything to do with it. Now come on—it’s time for your spiking!”

Lunging forward, he grabbed her by the arm and yanked her up off the couch.

“No! *No!*” Bobbi shrieked, kicking out at him. This was her death he was trying to drag her to and she was *not* going quiet into that good night!

At that moment, footsteps could be heard echoing in the short front hallway. Then a deep, commanding voice shouted,

“Stop, Zerlix! Let her go!”



Bobbi looked up, hope suddenly filling her. There, standing behind Zerlix, was Komendant Vizlar and his Advisor, Rep. Yariz. The Komendant was frowning at his son, a look of severe disapproval on his flat features.

“Oh, thank goodness!” Bobbi gasped, looking at the older Saurian male. “Please help me, Komendant—he’s trying to kill me!”

Zerlix turned to look over his shoulder and his face sagged with disbelief, though he still didn’t let go of Bobbi’s arm.

“Sire?” he managed to get out. “What are you doing here?”

“Stopping this,” Komendant Vizlar said coldly. “Your mother told me that you had plans for Res. Bobbi here and I’ve come to keep you from committing a grave error.”

Bobbi nearly sagged with relief. This wasn’t the savior she had expected or hoped for—she’d been *hoping* that Dragon himself would come bursting through the door to stop his sadistic Saurian brother from raping and killing her. But beggars couldn’t be choosers and at this point she was just happy to be saved, never mind who was doing the saving.

“But she should have been *mine*,” Zerlix whined, like a little boy denied

the toy he wants. “I Claimed her first, Sire!”

“Be that as it may, she was given to your brother,” Komendant Vizlar said severely.

“But I was only going to have some *fun* with her!” Zerlix exclaimed.

“Fun?” Bobbi demanded, her voice shaking. “You call raping me and murdering me *fun*, you sick asshole?”

“Excuse me, young lady, but there’s no call for that kind of foul language.” Komendant Vizlar gave her a disapproving stare.

“I’m sorry,” Bobbi said, trying to control herself. “But he was going to rape me and kill me! That’s kind of upsetting, you know?” She shook her arm loose from Zerlix’s clawed grasp, which had loosened when his father confronted him. Taking a deep breath, she looked at the Komendant. “Anyway, thank you for coming to save my life. I’m very grateful,” she said formally.

“Oh, I haven’t come to save your life,” the Saurian Mob boss said causally. “On the contrary, young lady, my wife and I have decided that we’ll all be much better off when you’re dead.”

“What?” Bobbi was certain she must be mishearing him. “I’m sorry, *what* did you say?”

“I’m going to have to kill you.” Komendant Vizlar was still speaking in the same tone of voice you’d use to discuss the weather. “It’s nothing personal—just business,” he added. “You’re dividing our family—you’ve all but ruined the excellent relationship between my two sons and I’m very much afraid if I let Dragon wed you, the rift between them would only widen.” He shrugged. “So, you have to die.”

“But if you’re going to kill her anyway, why can’t I spike her first?”

Zerlix whined. “Why stop me, Sire? I was going to be sure she was dead when I finished with her!”

“Because we do owe your brother *some* measure of respect,” Komendant Vizlar said, shooting his son a reproving look. “He is a good enforcer and a member of our family, even if he is a mammalian. It will be hard enough for him to lose his bride on the eve of his wedding, *without* finding out she was spiked by another male before she died.”

“But—“ Zerlix started, but his father cut him off.

“Listen to me!” the Komendant said sharply. “Her death will be quick and clean and completely untraceable. I’ll shoot her in the heart and we’ll dump the body into the East Canal after we strip it of jewelry, to make it look like a robbery. Your mother has already told Dragon that his bride went out to the Market—he’ll think she was taken from there.” He looked at Bobbi, who had retreated to the couch where she and Keelah were clutching each other. “I’m sorry, my dear—as I said, it’s nothing personal. You’re just not a good fit for our family.”

“This isn’t fair!” Zerlix stormed, stamping his foot on the tiled floor. “You *never* give me anything I want! “

Komendant Vizlar turned a cold eye on his son.

“On the contrary, you’ve always gotten almost *everything* you wanted—I think that’s half the trouble with you.”

“Excuse me, Komendant,” Rep. Wheezler said smoothly. “If I may be so bold as to interject, I’d like to offer your son the use of any of my Pleasure Girls that he likes. To help him get over his—*ahem*—disappointment.” He nodded to a recessed staircase at the front of the house that Bobbi had passed on her way in. “Please go up, Rep. Zerlix—my entire stable of girls is

completely at your service.”

Zerlix glared at everyone one last time and then shoved past his father and stomped up the staircase, for all the world like a spoiled kid having a temper tantrum.

His petulant mood no doubt made him dangerous but Bobbi couldn't seem to feel much concern for the Pleasure Girls upstairs—she was too busy being scared to death.

“Please!” she begged as the Komendant stalked towards her. “Please, don't do this! Can't you just send me back to Avria Pentaura where Dragon found me, instead of killing me? Please, I never wanted to come to Saurous in the first place—please just take me back!”

“I'm afraid not, young lady,” Komendant Vizlar said. “If I did that, Dragon would only follow you and bring you back again.” He shook his head. “He's *quite* tenacious, my mammalian son. This way, when he sees your body, washed clean by the waters of the canal, he'll be able to move on with his life and go back to being the excellent enforcer he's always been for our Clan.”

“So you're killing me so your son can have *closure*?” Bobbi demanded.

Komendant Vizlar nodded thoughtfully.

“I suppose you could put it that way, yes. Now please stand and let's get this over with quickly.” He had drawn a bulky, silver blaster and now he pointed its blunt, ugly muzzle at Bobbi's midsection. “After all, I wouldn't want to hit your friend at the same time and accidentally kill *her* as well.”

Bobbi felt faint with fear as she stared down the barrel of the blaster gripped in his scaly, six-fingered hand.

So this is how I die, she thought. But she had enough presence of mind

not to want to take Keelah with her. Slowly and carefully, she disentangled herself from the other girl's grasp.

"Bobbi, no! No, please, don't go!" Keelah begged, clutching at her.

"I have to, Keelah. I'm sorry." She spoke numbly as she stood and took a step away from the couch. "I'm sorry. I wish I could have saved you," she said. "You've been a good friend to me and I wish I could have been a good friend to you."

"You have been! Oh, Bobbi!" Keelah's voice was breaking with sorrow, but it all sounded very far away to Bobbi. "Please," she begged Komendant Vizlar. "Please, don't shoot her! *Please!*"

"Shut up with that yammering, girl!" Rep. Yariz snapped. "The Komendant has made his plans clear and he never changes his mind. If you don't be quiet, you'll die too!"

"It's okay, Keelah. Just be quiet," Bobbi said numbly. "Please," she said to the Saurian Mob boss who had almost been her Father-in-law. "Please just make it quick."

"Right through the heart," he promised her coolly. "I wouldn't want to damage your pretty face, my dear—after all, my son must be able to identify your body clearly and know that you're truly gone."

He aimed the blaster at the left side of Bobbi's chest.

Bobbi took a deep breath and tightened her hands into fists at her sides. She squeezed her eyes closed, waiting for the shot. She hoped it wouldn't be too painful and that he really *could* kill her in one shot.

Please, she prayed, though she hardly knew who she was praying to. *Please, I'm so scared! Please help me...please...*

Suddenly, a warm presence seemed to fill the space around her and Bobbi's nose was filled with the smell of flowers and new fallen rain and fresh baked bread—all the scents of comfort and home.

Courage, daughter, a strong, feminine voice whispered in her ear. ***I have not brought you so far from home, to let you fall now!***

“Who...what...?” Bobbi whispered, opening her eyes to look for the source of the voice. But suddenly, a new voice echoed through the vast, tiled front room.

“What in the hell is going on here?” it demanded. “What are you doing to Bobbi?”



Dragon had been having a strange feeling as he approached the building where his nose told him Bobbi had gone. She had indeed found her way from the Marketplace into the blue light district and her scent stopped at the front door of a dilapidated Pleasure house with windows already glowing blue.

But hers wasn't the only familiar scent his sensitive nose detected. There were others he knew here, too. Zerlix's scent might be a coincidence—his Saurian brother frequented many places where Pleasure Girls were for sale. But why were the scents of his Sire and his Sire's Advisor also swirling around the door?

Dragon frowned. Could he be mistaken? His nose never lied to him but all the smells he detected were mixed liberally with the bittersweet reek of dream weed smoke. Maybe the smoke was distorting his senses?

He had always avoided the drug before, disliking the way even a whiff of it made him feel. It seemed to make hazy, half-formed pictures in his mind. Disturbing pictures that faded away to mist when he tried to examine them more closely.

Shaking his head, Dragon had pushed the strange thoughts aside. Dream weed smoke or not, he knew that Bobbi had entered this building—knew it

beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Quietly, so as not to alert anyone inside to his presence, he opened the front door and slipped into the Pleasure House. Inside, the scent of the dream weed smoke was stronger and he found he couldn't avoid inhaling some of it, though he tried not to.

To his left was a staircase, but Dragon had barely glanced at it. He was concentrating on the voices he could hear coming from the front room. Familiar voices, all of them.

“Please just make it quick,” a soft, feminine voice was begging.

Bobbi's voice! Dragon's heart leapt in his chest. But the voice that answered her was also instantly recognizable.

“Right through the heart,” it said in a cool, detached tone. “I wouldn't want to damage your pretty face, my dear—after all, my son must be able to identify your body clearly and know that you're truly gone.”

What the hell? What is my Sire doing here? Dragon wondered. And what are they talking about?

Taking a deep, measured breath—which unfortunately caused him to inhale more of the dream weed smoke—he stepped into the front room of the Pleasure House and saw an unbelievable sight.

Bobbi was standing in the middle of a large, tiled room with a high ceiling. *The tiles, there's something funny about the tiles—you've seen them before,* whispered a little voice in his head. But Dragon pushed it aside. Because standing across from Bobbi was his Sire and his Sire's Advisor, Rep. Yariz.

But the worst and strangest thing was that Dragon's Sire was pointing a blaster directly at Bobbi's heart!

“What in the hell is going on here?” Dragon demanded, his voice harsh in his own ears. “What are you doing to Bobbi?”

He stepped into the room, glaring at the strange tableau in front of him. His Sire was pointing a blaster at the woman he love. But why?

Pointing a blaster, he’s pointing a blaster at the people you love, whispered a little voice in his head.

Suddenly, Dragon’s vision wavered. Instead of Bobbi, he saw the people from his dream standing across from Komendant Vizlar. The Kindred male—Taurex—had his arm around his wife’s shoulders and Lalish had one of her arms wrapped around his waist. There was a frightened look on her face and she had a hand on their son’s head. Tolor was clinging to her leg, peering shyly at the Saurians who were menacing them all.

The little family had their backs to the tiled wall—the tiles that shaded from blue at the top to purple near the bottom. Tiles he had surely seen before, Dragon realized.

*I’ve seen them before because I’ve **been** here before,* he thought. *I lived here with them—with Mumma and Poppa—when I was little, when I was Tolor.* A sudden feeling of dread filled him like cold, dark water rushing into his mind. Oh Gods, he didn’t want to see what came next! He didn’t want to see!

But his realization and the fear that accompanied it couldn’t stop the scene from playing out to its inevitable conclusion.

“*We’ve come for our cut of your profits,*” Komendant Vizlar was saying to Taurex—to Poppa. “*Things will go easier if you just give us the tribute you owe us.*”

“*We don’t owe you anything!*” Taurex exclaimed. His eyes flamed with

anger. “*We rented this building free and clear to sell our merchandize and we already paid the rent. Nobody said anything about paying some strong-arm group any kind of ‘tribute.’*”

“*You’re on edge of Crimson Blades territory,*” Rep. Yariz told him smoothly. “*That means you pay or you die. Your choice, but pick quickly, I’m afraid my Komendant has an itchy trigger finger and he doesn’t mind wiping out mammalian scum that won’t pay the proper tribute.*”

“*I’ll pay all right.*” Taurex shook free of his frightened wife and took a step forward. Something started happening to him—to Poppa. Somehow, he started *changing*—growing bigger, shifting...

“*I’ll pay you in BLOOD!*” he snarled and his voice was a roar with a double echo in it, as though someone else was speaking through him. He took another step forward...

And the Komendant pulled the trigger. The blaster muzzle flashed—again and again and again. It blew dark holes in Poppa’s forehead and chest and midsection. And the blaster shots hit Mumma too. She gasped and tried to hide Tolor with her body, pushing him behind her as she desperately attempted to be his living shield.

And then she wasn’t living anymore—neither of them were. Mumma and Poppa lay in a heap on the floor, their bodies riddled with smoking holes, their eyes open wide and staring at the ceiling high overhead.

Tolor crawled out from under Mumma and stared at them both, too numb to make a sound. He wanted to believe they were only sleeping—but nobody sleeps with their eyes open, do they? And why weren’t they breathing or moving? What was wrong with them?

“*Dragon? Dragon?*” The familiar voice pulled him out of the echoes the

dream weed smoke had formed in his head. The echoes that had taken only moments to form and to clear...only moments to completely tear down the artificial barrier that had been built in his mind, his young, malleable mind that wanted desperately to forget the horrors he had seen...

Dragon blinked and looked up as the familiar voice called his name again. Once more he saw Komendant Vizlar holding a blaster and once more he was pointing it at someone Dragon loved.

“Dragon!” Bobbi whispered, her lovely blue eyes filled with tears. “Oh please...please be careful!”

“Yes, Son, be careful.” Komendant Vizlar’s voice was cold and calculating.

“You...” Dragon breathed, looking at the man he had called “Sire” for so many years. “You’re the one who killed them! You told me it was a rival Clan, and all along it was *you!*”

The Komendant’s slitted eyes narrowed, then widened in surprise. He glared at his Advisor.

“You said the memory block would hold!”

“It would have if we hadn’t come *here!*” Rep. Yariz protested. “I’m sure of it! But this is where it happened, all these years ago. And there’s dream weed smoke in the air—it’s a bad combination.”

“Well, it can’t be helped.” Komendant Vizlar said briskly. He turned to face Dragon now, his flat, reptilian face calm. “Yes, Son, it was me who executed your biological parents,” he said calmly. “But it wasn’t personal—just a business decision. As was the decision to adopt you into our family and Clan. Rep. Yariz thought you’d make an excellent Little Brother for Zerlix and that you would grow up to be a loyal member of the Crimson Blades

Clan and he was right in every respect.”

“So you *admit* it?” Dragon’s throat felt dry and the dream weed smoke tasted bitter at the back of his throat.

The Komendant spread his arms.

“What would be the point of denying it? Anyway, it’s in the past. You’re a member of our Clan now and, as you know, sometimes Clan members have to make sacrifices.”

“I suppose you want me to sacrifice Bobbi next.” Dragon’s voice sounded strangely flat in his own ears.

“I’m afraid so,” the Komendant said, shrugging his shoulder regretfully in a ‘what can you do?’ gesture. “She’s just not a good fit for our family, Son. She’s dividing you and Zerlix and your mother doesn’t like her.”

“So because you and Mother Tizlah don’t care for her and she’s keeping me from watching over Zerlix and making sure he doesn’t fuck everything up, you want to kill her—kill the woman I love. And I’m just supposed to give her up because it’s a sacrifice I have to make as a good Clan member?”

The words were dry as dust in Dragon’s mouth. There was something stirring inside him—something huge—but he wasn’t quite ready to let it out yet, he thought. He was still in shock. Everything he’d ever been told his whole life had been a lie...a *lie!*

“Believe me, Son, I’m doing you a favor,” Komendant Vizlar said. “This girl is no good for you—no good for the family or the Clan—she only stirs up trouble.”

“Don’t call me that.” The words left Dragon’s mouth in a whisper but he felt as though he had shouted them.

“Excuse me?” The Komendant raised his eye ridges in apparent confusion.

“Don’t call me your ‘son’,” Dragon spat, his voice coming out louder this time. “I was never your son—I was a convenience—something you picked up because you thought I could benefit the Clan and your family.’

“Now, Dragon...” The Komendant took a step towards him but his Advisor put a warning hand on his boss’s arm.

“Watch out—now the memory’s block’s broken he could get dangerous,” dragon heard Rep. Yariz mutter. “Remember his Sire’s abilities—he might have inherited them.”

But it was clear that Komendant Vizlar wasn’t going to give up easily.

“Look, Son,” he said, speaking in that maddeningly calm voice he always used whenever Dragon had been upset over something as a child—something inconsequential or foolish, like Zerlix breaking his latest toy or biting the head off his pet. “I know this is a shock, but your Mother and I raised you to be a good, obedient son and to be loyal to our Clan. And now I need you to accept my decision. The girl has to die and you need to come back to Zerlix’s crew, so you can help him run things when I’m gone.”

“So you want me to just give Bobbi up—just let you kill her,” Dragon said numbly. “So everything can go back to the way it was before. Is that it?”

“Essentially, yes,” Komendant Vizlar said calmly. “Now are you going to be a good and loyal son and listen to your father?”

“I told you—*don’t call me that!*” Dragon roared. He could feel his eyes getting hot and a crimson curtain seemed to drop over his vision, turning everything a bloody red.

Kill them—kill them all! The dark, wild voice spoke up inside him and

Dragon agreed with it completely. They had to die—all of them. Everyone that had hurt him—everyone who wanted to hurt Bobbi. He would protect the little *feela* and avenge his parents at the same time!

The numbness had worn off and he prepared to launch himself at the man who had murdered his family and raised him on lies. The man who now wanted him to sacrifice the only woman he had ever loved and just be “a good son” and serve the Crimson Blades Clan forever.

Already, his brain was cataloging weaknesses and the voice of the killer was speaking in his ear, detailing everything he had to do.

Sideswipe his arm and knock away the blaster, it told him coldly. *He’s old but still strong, you’ll need to get behind him and—*

“Dragon—watch out!” Bobbi shrieked, pointing. “He’s coming down the stairs—behind you! *Behind you!*”

Dragon started to turn but then he felt a sharp, burning pain in his back—a pain that went all the way through him. Looking down, he saw the bright, blood-streaked point of a blade protruding from the right side of his chest.

“*Die*, you fucker!” a familiar voice hissed in his ear

“Zerlix?” Dragon whispered. Turning his head, he saw the face of his Big Brother, twisted with hate.

“That’s right, *Little Brother*. And this is the last time I’m going to call you that!”

The Saurian twisted the knife, sending spikes of agony through Dragon’s back and chest and suddenly the wind was whistling in his lungs and he couldn’t seem to get enough air.

“You were never...my brother,” he managed to gasp and then he was

falling forward—or Zerlix had pushed him—and the floor was rushing up to meet his face.

He was dimly aware of Bobbi crying his name and then...nothing.



“Dragon, no!” Bobbi wanted to run to him, but Keelah was holding her back.

“They’ve got weapons,” she whispered in Bobbi’s ear. “They’ll kill you, too, Bobbi—stay here with me!”

At the moment, Bobbi didn’t care about the blaster in Komendant Vizlar’s hand or the bloody knife in Zerlix’s grip. All she wanted was to get to the man she loved—because yes, she loved him! Despite everything, she loved him with her whole heart and she would have stayed with him forever—even here on Saurous, she realized.

It was a realization that came too late.

Because he’s gone, Bobbi thought numbly, tears blurring her eyes and running down her cheeks. *He’s gone—he’s gone!*

“You fool!” Komendant Vizlar was glaring at Zerlix, who was still standing there with the bloody knife gripped in his scaly fist. “Why did you do that? What a waste! Dragon was a good fighter and an excellent enforcer.”

“He wasn’t going to forgive you for trying to kill that little mammalian bitch of his,” Zerlix protested, kicking Dragon’s limp body, which lay face-first on the floor. A pool of dark crimson was spreading from under him and

his face was turned towards Bobbi, his eyes open to show their pure bronze color. They were empty and unseeing, making her cry even harder.

“He would have come around,” Komendant Vizlar snapped. “He was a great asset to our Clan! One I spent years cultivating!”

“I think your son did the right thing, Komendant,” Rep. Yariz murmured. “The mental block was gone—destroyed by all the dream weed smoke in here.” He waved at a cloud of the dense, blue smoke that still lingered in the air and coughed. “I don’t think Dragon would have forgiven the death of his biological family, let alone your attempt to kill his bride-to-be.”

Komendant Vizlar shot Bobbi a cold look.

“His bride-to-be is the *reason* for all of this,” he snarled, turning to face her. “Everything was just *fine* until *she* came along!”

He took a step towards Bobbi, who shrank back against the couch where she and Keelah were holding each other for dear life.

“She *does* seem to be the start of this tragic incident,” Rep. Yariz remarked, also moving towards her.

“Then let me do what I wanted to do in the first place.” Stepping over Dragon’s body, Zerlix started closing in on her too. “You don’t have to worry about Dragon’s feelings now—he’s fucking *dead*. Let me spike the little bitch and make her pay for what she did to our family, Sire!”

Bobbi wanted to point out that she had never *asked* to be taken into their family—or even to Saurus—in the first place. She wanted to say that it wasn’t her fault Dragon was dead—it was Zerlix who had sneaked down the staircase and stabbed him before she could shout a warning. It was—

Her thoughts cut off abruptly as Dragon’s body twitched.

Did I see that or did I just imagine it?

But then he twitched again. None of the three Saurians facing her saw it and Rep. Wheezler had prudently withdrawn from the room and gone upstairs when the conflict started. Keelah was too busy clutching her and staring at Zerlix and Komendant Vizlar, so Bobbi was the only one who had seen the sudden movement.

I must have imagined it, she thought. It can't be. He—

And then Dragon's body twitched again and his eyes closed. When they opened, the bronze had been replaced by dancing flames.



Bobbi stared in amazement as the big Kindred's body began to change right before her eyes.

First, lines of fiery light began to appear on Dragon's hands and forearms. Like jagged streaks of lightning, they shot up his arms, spreading to the rest of his body. Then, he began to grow—his body becoming bigger and more muscular so quickly she could barely believe what she was seeing.

But that wasn't the end of his transformation.

As Bobbi watched, he began to *change*.

His limbs lengthened and thickened, his neck became long, and his face elongated too—his mouth becoming the massive jaws of a predator. All of his clothes—his shirt and trousers and boots—were suddenly incinerated to ashes, which left him naked and allowed her to see more clearly what was happening.

Fiery red scales flowed over his body, which was still changing from humanoid to something else—scales which showed the golden glow of flames between their edges.

Strangely, all of these changes were silent and still, no one seemed to notice but Bobbi.

“Please,” Keelah was pleading with the Saurians menacing them. “Please, don’t hurt us! Please just leave Bobbi and me alone!”

Bobbi would have joined in the pleading but her attention was still on the sight taking place behind their attackers’ backs.

The big Kindred had quadrupled in size, by now. Giant wings burst from his back, vast and black. Finally, a long, lashing tail with a spiked end sprouted, whipping through the air angrily but still silently.

“Dragon,” Bobbi whispered to herself, her eyes growing wider as she watched this amazing transformation. It must be the beast—that other entity—that the big Kindred kept inside him.

Dragon had turned into a...

“*Dragon,*” she said again. “Oh my God, *he really is a dragon!*”

“What are you babbling about, mammalian?” Komendant Vizlar demanded, glaring at her. “What do you—”

But he never got a chance to finish his question. At that moment, the long, spiked end of the dragon’s tail stabbed him in the back. It spiked right through him and came thrusting out of his chest like a strange, bloody flower bursting into bloom in a place it had no business being.

The Saurian Mob boss looked down at himself, a shocked look on his flat face.

“What...” he bumbled, a trail of oily green blood leaking from the corner of his lipless mouth.

Then the dragon’s tail whipped him high into the air and flung him into a corner of the room like a rag doll. He landed with a *thump* and was still.

Zerlix and Rep. Yariz both turned, weapons in hand, but they didn’t have

time to use them.

“Holy shit!” the Saurian Advisor gasped. He started to run but the dragon curled one huge, clawed hand around his waist and lifted him off the floor. Its jaws, filled with knife-like teeth, opened wide, showing a throat seething with golden flames. Before Rep. Yariz could scream, the dragon casually bit off his head, much like a child might bite the top off a lollypop. It flung the body into the corner with the Komendant’s and turned its flaming eyes on Zerlix.

“What the *fuck?*” the Saurian breathed, his slitted yellow-green eyes growing so large they almost swallowed his face. He seemed frozen to the spot, the bloody knife still gripped in his fist. It still had Dragon’s blood dripping from its blade and he couldn’t seem to understand what was happening.

The dragon curled a clawed hand around him too, examining him from all angles, as Zerlix flailed and shouted,

“Hey, let me down, you freak! What the hell are you doing? Let go of me!”

The dragon pursed its thin lips in a strangely delicate motion and blew a gout of golden flames at him. They stuck to Zerlix like some kind of glue, Bobbi saw numbly. Stuck and spread, climbing up and down his body hungrily to engulf him completely.

Zerlix shrieked and writhed in the dragon’s grip as it reared over him, watching and still holding him tight. Bobbi reflected numbly that if the room hadn’t been so large, the enormous beast never would have fit in here. It already had to duck its head to keep from hitting the ceiling.

“Oh my gods and goddesses, Bobbi,” Keelah’s voice whispered in her ear. “Is this really happening right now? I think I breathed in too much dream

weed smoke! It seems like Rep. Dragon turned into...into a *dragon*. Like from all the old legends!”

“He did,” Bobbi whispered back. “I...I saw it happen.”

She reflected that she wouldn’t have believed her eyes and would probably have attributed the crazy transformation to the dream weed smoke too, if she hadn’t already known about the other being living inside Dragon.

*I just didn’t know it was an **actual dragon**,* she thought, staring at it as she plugged her ears to keep from hearing the awful, hoarse screams coming from Zerlix’s tortured throat.

But alas, the smell wasn’t so easy to block out. She could put her fingers in her ears, but the smell of roasting and burning meat pervaded the entire room, making her stomach roll and she wanted to gag.

“What is the meaning of this?” a new voice asked. It was Rep. Wheezler, coming down the stairs. “What in the world—?”

He stopped short, his eyes growing wide as he took in the scene in his front room. Slowly and carefully, he began backing up the staircase he had come down just moments before.

But it was too late—clearly the huge creature Dragon had become had already heard him.

It whipped its head around and dropped the screaming Zerlix in a burning lump on the tiled floor. With a motion too quick to be seen, its enormous head was suddenly level with the Saurian pimp’s, even though he was halfway up the staircase. It stared at him with flaming eyes.

“This...this can’t be real.” Rep. Wheezler’s voice was thin and choked, no longer the cool, urbane drawl Bobbi had heard him use earlier. “Too...too much dream weed gas—” he began.

And then the dragon grabbed him off the staircase with one clawed hand and bit him in two.

It didn't seem to like the taste of him, though, Bobbi thought faintly. For it spit out the top half of the Saurian pimp at once and dropped the bottom half beside it, still twitching.

Bobbi was reminded of the way the thing had torn the Diamond Death enforcer into two pieces in the alley, like someone tearing a paper doll. The dragon was so huge—so horribly strong! And it breathed fire—what chance had any of the Saurian males who faced it have against it?

And then it turned its flaming eyes on *her*.



“Oh gods and goddess, Bobbi!” Keelah moaned in her ear as the enormous dragon—which filled the entire front room of the Pleasure House—started moving towards them. “What are we going to do?”

“I think...think we’re going to die,” Bobbi whispered back, her throat so dry she nearly choked on the words.

She couldn’t help wondering which would be more painful—being burned or being torn in two or maybe just having her head bitten clean off her neck. That last might be the quickest and cleanest death, she decided numbly. It would certainly be better than being burned alive like Zerlix.

Dragon’s adoptive brother had stopped twitching and screaming by now. He was just a blackened lump of flesh on the floor, filling the air with acrid fumes, so strong they even overcame the lingering odor of the dream weed smoke.

The dragon that Dragon had become dipped its head and looked at her with one huge, golden, flaming eye. An eye that Bobbi estimated was nearly as big as her entire head.

“Please,” she whispered, not even knowing what she was saying as she and Keelah shivered on the couch, clutching each other. “Please, Dragon, if you’re still in there, don’t let it hurt me! Please, you promised it wouldn’t!”

The dragon seemed to understand her fear. It widened its nostrils, inhaling deeply as though catching her scent. Then, to Bobbi's surprise, it began to shrink.

At first, she wasn't sure it was really happening. But then she noticed the dragon only seemed to fill *half* the large room instead of filling it completely. Then his enormous eye—which she was still staring into—shrank from the size of a dinner plate to the size of a softball and then to the size of a tangerine.

And the rest of him was shrinking right along with it. To her surprise, in a moment the enormous dragon was barely the size of a horse. Which was still pretty big, but not nearly as huge as it had been a moment before.

“Oh...” Bobbi whispered, looking up at it. “Did...did you do that for me? Did you shrink yourself down because I was afraid of you?”

The dragon snorted softly and nodded its head—a definite “yes.”

“Well...thank you,” Bobbi said uncertainly. “That’s...very kind of you.”

The dragon ducked its head on its long, flexible neck and slowly approached her.

“Oh! Oh, no!” Keelah gasped. Pulling her legs up tight to her chest, she scooted to the opposite end of the couch, trying to get away from the dragon. “Bobbi, come with me!” she exclaimed, extending a hand. “Come on—we have to get away!”

But Bobbi was no longer sure they needed to run. She was remembering what Dragon had told her about the being that lived inside him. He had said that whoever he was, he only wanted to protect her and that he would never hurt her.

Well, he protected me, all right, she thought grimly, glancing at the dead

Saurian bodies that littered the tiled floor, like game pieces that had been smacked off the board.

It occurred to her that, now that the threat Zerlix and his father had represented was gone, the dragon might want to meet her. Maybe that was what was happening here.

Tentatively, she put out a hand to him.

“It’s all right,” she said, in a voice that wobbled only a little bit. “It’s all right—come here and let’s get...get acquainted.”

“Bobbi, are you crazy?” Keelah whispered from the other side of the couch.

“I don’t think so,” Bobbi said, never taking her eyes off the slowly approaching dragon. “I think he just wants to meet me. He lives inside Dragon, you know, and Dragon loves me. I think—I *hope*—that he will love me too.” She nodded at the red and gold dragon who was even closer now.

As it—*no, he—Dragon said he’s a male*, she reminded herself—as *he* reached her, the dragon dropped gracefully to the floor, folding its legs under it almost like a large cat. He leaned forward and—very carefully—lay his large head in Bobbi’s lap.

“Oh!” she whispered and stayed very, *very* still. After seeing the flames in his throat, she would have expected that the dragon would be too hot to touch. But actually, he was just toasty warm—which was really quite nice, considering how chilly she always was here on Saurus.

“Do...would you let me...let me touch you?” Bobbi’s hand hovered uncertainly over the huge head, which took up her entire lap.

The dragon rolled his eyes up at her in a way that seemed to be affirmative.

Well, here goes nothing! Bobbi thought to herself. Very lightly, she allowed her hand to rest on the top of the dragon's long skull.

To her surprise, his crimson scales were actually *soft*.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "It's like touching feathers!"

She stroked him gently, caressing the length of the enormous head as she looked into his golden, burning eyes. Suddenly, she heard a voice in her head.

"Mmmm...feels good," it said.

"Oh!" Bobbi looked at the dragon in surprise. "Did...did *you* say that?" she asked.

"Yes. Your soft hands feel nice...gentle. We can talk when you touch me," he added.

"We...we can?" Bobbi asked blankly. "Oh, I guess we can!" She stroked the dragon some more—she was getting more comfortable with him now that she knew he was sentient and not just a mindless, ravenous beast.

"You're the one Dragon has been sensing all this time—you're his inner dragon, aren't you?" she asked.

"I am his Drake," the low, rumbling voice corrected her. ***"But yes, I am the one inside."***

"You came out of Dragon to save me, didn't you?" she asked gently.

"To save you and to heal him," the Drake told her. ***"We can heal wounds if we are quick enough."***

"But Dragon's father had a, uh, a Drake inside him too, didn't he?" Bobbi asked. "Why couldn't he heal himself like you healed Dragon?"

"Too many wounds, too fast." The Drake sounded sad, she thought. ***"And his mate had been killed, too. He would not have wished to live."***

“I see...” Bobbi stroked him some more. “So the Drake inside Dragon’s father loved Dragon’s mother the way...”

“The way I cherish you, little one,” the Drake rumbled in her head. ***“You awakened me. I was only semi-conscious until you came into Dragon’s life. When he found you, I knew we had found the female we must love and care for and protect and possess all our lives.”***

“Oh...” Bobbi whispered. “But *how* did you know?” she asked, stroking the great head with its curving, graceful lines once more.

“A Drake always knows,” the Drake told her. ***“We know even before our outer self knows.”***

The “outer self” being Dragon, Bobbi supposed.

“Thank you for saving me,” she murmured. “And for saving Dragon, too.”

“I will always protect you, little one. I will always love you.” The Drake nuzzled her, very gently.

Bobbi felt like her heart might overflow. She could *feel* the Drake’s sincerity and she thought she had never had such a pure love directed at her in her life. Well, except maybe her mom—mothers loved you unconditionally, but almost nobody else did. But that was what she felt coming from Dragon’s Drake—unconditional love and a desire to protect her against anything or anyone who would threaten her.

Leaning down, she wrapped her arms around the Drake’s neck and he lifted his head and pressed closer to her. Bobbi, who had done some riding when she was younger, thought it was like hugging a very soft, very warm horse.

“Uh, Bobbi—what are you doing?” Keelah’s soft voice, both frightened

and incredulous, made Bobbi realize she'd forgotten her friend entirely.

"It's all right," she said, smiling at Keelah. "He's a friend. He's the dragon, er, the Drake who lives inside Dragon. He only wants to keep me safe."

"I can see that he likes you a *lot*," Keelah said. "But what about me? Is he going to...to eat me or hurt me like he did Komendant Vizlar and Rep. Zerlix?" Her voice trembled and she was still curled in a ball at the far end of the couch.

"Oh no, of course not!" Bobbi exclaimed. She looked at the Drake. "You won't hurt my friend Keelah, will you?"

"I would never hurt her unless she tried to hurt you," the Drake assured her.

"There—he just told me he would never hurt you," Bobbi told Keelah, stroking the Drake some more. "He only killed the Komendant and his Advisor and Zerlix because they were trying to hurt me."

"What about Rep. Wheezler, though?" Keelah asked.

Bobbi asked the Drake Keelah's question, since he seemed to communicate only with her.

"He was willing to let others hurt you," the Drake replied. ***"And he was hurtful to females, which is wrong and bad."***

Bobbi was just about to relay this answer when the front door burst open and the sound of footsteps could be heard in the front hallway. Was it Saurian customers, come to try the collection of Pleasure Girls? Bobbi stiffened, waiting to see who might come around the corner and the Drake turned his head on its long neck and gave a low, menacing growl as he prepared to protect her.

But to Bobbi's surprise, it wasn't Saurian males at all who appeared in the large front room of the pleasure house—it was Commander Sylvan and his brother, Commander Baird, followed by several other Kindred warriors she didn't know.

The Kindred of the Mother Ship had finally come for her.



“Dr. McClelland, I’m so glad we’ve finally found you!” Commander Sylvan exclaimed. Then a frown of confusion creased his brow. “But why do you have a Drake with you?”

The Drake, for his part, began to growl and also to grow and Bobbi had to quickly stand on the couch so that she could look over him.

“No, no!” she told him quickly, tapping his hide to get his attention. “No, Drake, listen to me—*look* at me!”

The Drake’s enormous head swiveled on his long neck and he regarded her intently with one burning golden eye.

“These men are friends,” Bobbi told him, pointing to Commander Sylvan and Commander Baird and the rest of the warriors. “They’re Kindred—just like Dragon is. In fact, maybe you’d better let Dragon come out now. I’m sure he’d like to meet some of his people,” she said, as tactfully as she could.

It seemed to her that there was much less chance of mayhem if she had the big Kindred at her side, rather than the huge Drake that lived inside him.

The Drake looked at her for a long moment, then nodded his head a single time.

“*I will go,*” he told Bobbi. “*But I will be watching. If any of them*

threatens you, I will come out.

“They’re not going to threaten me—they’re here to help,” Bobbi promised him. “They’re *friends*.”

The Drake nodded again and then he began to shrink and change until suddenly she was standing there with her arms around Dragon’s broad shoulders instead of encircling the Drake’s long neck.

“Fuck!” she heard Commander Baird mutter. “Never seen one of them change in person. Fucking *fast*.”

“They are indeed.” Commander Sylvan sounded calm. “Hello,” he said, nodding at Dragon, who was completely naked, since he had incinerated his clothing when he shifted. “My name is Commander Sylvan. I’m the Head of the Kindred High Council and I have come to take Dr. McClelland home.”

“You mean Bobbi?” Dragon looped an arm around her waist protectively. Bobbi was still standing on the couch, which meant he was only a little taller than her. “You can’t have her,” he said, glaring at Commander Sylvan. “She’s *mine*.”

“So fucking possessive!” Baird murmured.

“Drake Kindred always are,” Sylvan said calmly. He looked at Dragon. “Are you bonded to her? Is she your mate?”

“We are going to be married tomorrow,” Dragon said, lifting his chin belligerently. “As I said, she belongs to me.”

“She belongs to *herself*,” Sylvan said gently. “Females are not property to be bought and sold and owned.”

“I don’t care what you say—you can’t have her!” Dragon’s arm tightened around her waist. “If you try to take her, you’ll be sorry!”

“Like these Saurian males were sorry, I’m sure,” Sylvan murmured, surveying the room with its many corpses. He looked at Bobbi. “I’m afraid you’ll have to help us, Dr. McClelland,” he said. “Drake Kindred are exceedingly possessive of a female they have Claimed. You’ll have to convince this warrior to let you go.”

“Never!” Dragon’s arm around her tightened even more and he glared belligerently at Sylvan. “We’re getting married tomorrow—the ceremony is all arranged!”

“Dragon, listen to me. Listen.” Gently, Bobbi tugged at his chin until he finally looked away from Sylvan and Baird and focused on her. “Dragon,” she said, when he was finally looking at her. “We *can’t* get married tomorrow. Think about it—your Drake has killed Komendant Vizlar and Rep. Yariz *and* Zerlix. Your poor mother isn’t going to be up for a wedding tomorrow. The Clan is more likely to be holding a triple funeral instead!”

Dragon’s eyes narrowed.

“Don’t call her my mother—she was never that. She agreed with Vizler’s plot to have you killed and she knew the truth about how he killed my real parents—I’m sure of it.”

“Nevertheless, she raised you,” Bobbi said gently. “And I’m sure she loved you, in her own way. But I don’t think you can go back to her now—or go back to the Crimson Blades Clan. Not after what happened here tonight.” She nodded at the bodies scattered around.

Dragon looked like he wanted to protest, but then he looked at the bodies and nodded.

“You’re right,” he said heavily. “There is no place for me in the Crimson Blades Clan anymore—no place on Saurous, for that matter. Where can I

go?”

“You can come to the Mother Ship,” Commander Sylvan offered. “Though I will ask that you keep your Drake under wraps due to safety concerns.”

“Bobbi has told me about the Mother Ship,” Dragon said slowly. “She said there were many of my kind—many Kindred—there.”

“Have you never known your own kind, then?” Sylvan asked, raising an eyebrow.

“He was orphaned at an early age and then adopted by one of the Saurian crime families,” Bobbi explained quickly. “He’s been living here on Saurus, barely ever seeing any other mammals, let alone Kindred, until now.”

“Is he the one who brought you here?” Commander Sylvan asked her. “The Orniths of Avria Pentaura told us that most of the raiders in the party that took you were Saurian but that there was one mammalian amongst them.”

“Yes, Dragon brought me here.” Bobbi nodded. “He kidnapped me, to be honest. But he was trying to protect me from his adoptive Saurian brother who was a real jerk—not to mention a Sadist.” She nodded at Zerlix’s charred corpse, which was still smoking. “And then we got to know each other better and better and fell in love,” she admitted.

“Hmm...there’s a lot to unpack there,” Commander Sylvan said neutrally. “Dr. McClelland, are you familiar with a term the humans have coined called ‘Stockholm Syndrome?’”

“I am and believe me, I’ve thought about that a lot,” Bobbi said seriously.

“She has told me about it, too,” Dragon growled, glaring at Sylvan. “And believe me, that *isn’t* the reason we love each other. I admit I started as

Bobbi's kidnapper but I am also her protector!"

"Look, we can talk about it more on the Mother Ship," Bobbi said. "For right now, can we please get out of here?"

"We can," Sylvan assured her. "And we'll take you straight back to the Mother Ship—I know you'll be relieved."

"I will," Bobbi admitted. She cast a glance at Keelah, who was still curled in one corner of the couch looking scared. "But Commander, can we please make a quick stop along the way? There's someone else here who is longing to go home."

"Of course we can." Commander Sylvan nodded. "Come on, let's go."



“*W*hew! That’s quite an adventure, doll!” Kat shook her head and took another sip of her drink. “It’s certainly a lot more than you bargained for when you first set out for Avria Pentaura!”

“It certainly is,” Bobbi agreed and sipped her own Margarita with relish. “Mmm, this is good. I missed Earth food *so much!*” They were sitting in a little Tex-Mex restaurant having lunch and catching up and the chips and salsa and endless pitcher of Margaritas were *really* hitting the spot.

Bobbi had been back aboard the Mother Ship for a week and she was still getting used to being back to normal—and being warm instead of chilled to the bone all the time.

Not that she didn’t have some fond memories of Saurous. She still got tears in her eyes when she remembered the happy reunion she’d witnessed between Keelah and her family on the Northern Continent. She had promised to come visit her friend sometime in the future, but now that Keelah was safe with her parents and siblings, Bobbi wasn’t in any hurry to go back to the frigid, violent planet.

“So how did Sylvan find you, anyway?” Kat asked her. “I mean, since you were supposed to be on Avria Pentaura and you wound up on Saurous instead?”

“Oh, it turns out he had put a tracking device in the injection of translation bacteria I got before I left the Mother Ship,” Bobbi explained. “It was a safety measure, because I was going beyond the Blind. Commander Sylvan didn’t tell me because he didn’t want me to feel like he didn’t trust me.” She frowned. “In other circumstances, that would have upset me a lot. But as it turns out, having that tracking device was the best thing ever—the minute they found out I had been taken from Avria Pentaura, it led them right to me.”

“Do you still have it?” Kat asked, raising her eyebrows.

“As a matter of fact, I do.” Bobbi nodded. “It’s completely removable but I elected to keep it in case I want to go on any other interstellar research gathering trips.” She smiled.

“So what about Dragon?” Kat asked, changing the subject. “You’ve told me so much about him, but I’ve barely even met him once! Why isn’t he with you? Aren’t the two of you bonded yet?” She winked at Bobbi suggestively and grinned.

“No, we’re not,” Bobbi said honestly, not rising to her friend’s bait. “And to be honest, I’m not sure we’re going to be.”

“What? After all that drama?” Kat demanded. “He killed half his family for you, Bobbi! How can you *not* get bonded to him?”

“Well, to be fair, it was his Drake who killed them,” Bobbi reminded her. “And they only took him in and adopted him *after* they killed his real parents. So they kind of had it coming, you know?”

“Okay, I can see that.” Kat nodded. “But what I *don’t* see is how you can *not* get bonded to him after the Goddess so *clearly* put you together.”

Once, Bobbi would have declared she didn’t believe in the Goddess...but

she wasn't so sure now. She remembered the soft voice and the warm feminine presence that had encouraged her when she was afraid she was about to be killed and Dragon had told her that he had heard the same voice on several occasions when he was trying to find and protect her.

So maybe the Goddess *was* real—maybe she even wanted Bobbi and Dragon to be together and would help them bond, despite the fact that he was a Hybrid. But the fact was, she and Dragon had been raised very differently and Bobbi wasn't sure they could come together enough to have a happy marriage—or 'Joining' as the Kindred called it.

"It's not that I don't love him—because I do, I really *do*," she told Kat earnestly. "But he was raised on Saurous with some pretty awful ideas. I'm talking about extreme misogyny—like the Patriarchy on steroids."

"Like, 'women should be kept in the kitchen barefoot and pregnant and never think for themselves'? That kind of thing?" Kat raised one auburn eyebrow.

"*Exactly.*" Bobbi took another big sip of her Margarita. "And honestly, I just don't know if I can live with a man who thinks like that. I mean, I pretty much believe the exact opposite."

"Of course you do, doll," Kat said comfortingly. "So did you tell him all that?"

"I did." Bobbi nodded. "And I asked him to take some time to think about it and also maybe look around the Mother Ship and see how people live here. Then, if he thinks he can treat me the way other Kindred warriors treat their wives, we can talk about the possibility of bonding."

"Good for you!" Kat exclaimed. She finished her current Margarita with a flourish and poured herself another. Lifting it, she said, "To equality!"

“I’ll drink to that.” Bobbi smiled as she lifted her own glass, joining the toast. But inside, she couldn’t help being worried. Dragon had been raised so differently on Saurous. Could he and would he *ever* come around to the idea that women could form their own opinions and make their own decisions?

He would also have to be all right with her career, she thought. She’d been offered a professorship at USF and while she didn’t think she would take it—she much preferred doing field work to teaching—she might think of at least taking a short-term position. Either way, she was going to be working rather than staying home to cook and clean and have babies and Dragon was going to have to deal with that.

“He might not *want* to bond with me when he sees the way I want to live,” she remarked to Kat. “I mean, when he sees that I need to be his equal, not just the sweet little wifey he wants.”

“He just thinks he wants that because of the way he was raised,” Kat assured her. “He’ll come around—you’ll see. Didn’t you tell me that Baird had taken him under his wing?”

Bobbi nodded.

“They really seemed to hit it off. I hope Liv doesn’t mind him taking so much time showing Dragon the way things are aboard the Mother Ship.”

“I’m sure she doesn’t. As I recall, she had to teach Baird some of the same lessons he’s teaching Dragon now,” Kat said and winked. “When she first got called in the Draft, he was determined to Claim her no matter what and Liv, well…” She laughed. “Let’s just say she has a mind of her own. But you see how well they worked out—I’m sure you and Dragon will, too.”

“Well, we’ll see,” Bobbi said cautiously. She glanced at her watch and frowned. “Oops, I hate to cut lunch short, Kat, but I really should get back to

my suite. I have some notes to go over for a guest lecture I'm giving at USF and I'm not done getting my presentation together yet."

"No worries, doll." Kat smiled and got up to hug her as Bobbi rose. "And don't give up hope—I'm sure that Dragon will come around. He loves you and he's going to want to make it work."

"I hope you're right." Bobbi hugged her friend and kissed her on the cheek. "I'll let you know when I know," she promised.

And plastering a smile on her face, she waved goodbye.

The truth was, though, she wasn't nearly as happy as she'd let Kat believe, she admitted to herself. Part of her—a big part—was dying to bond with Dragon no matter what. She loved him—she *yearned* for him—and it felt like her body was addicted to his. She missed his hot mouth and big hands exploring her every night, missed him Marking her with his scent to keep her safe...

Yet, for the past week, they had been sleeping apart at Bobbi's own request. As much as she longed for the big Kindred, she didn't want to get into a permanent relationship that she might regret later.

"I can't marry a man who doesn't respect me and my right to lead my own life," she'd told Dragon firmly, when she had proposed a short separation. "You need to look around and see if you can live this way—see if you can treat me the way the other Kindred husbands treat their wives. Otherwise, it's never going to work between us."

Dragon had agreed—though reluctantly—to living apart for a time. He had his own place in the Unmated Males area and he was slowly exploring the way of life aboard the Mother Ship, with Baird's help. Since there weren't many other Drake Kindred aboard at the moment, the Beast Kindred

seemed to be the best fit for a guide. His possessive nature mirrored Dragon's own and they had become good friends in the short time Dragon had been on board.

Now, as she headed back to her own suite, Bobbi wondered if she and Dragon would ever get things together. She cared for him so deeply—not just him, but his Drake as well. But she couldn't be with a man who treated her the way Saurian men treated their women. She had to be with someone who could respect her choices and her ability to make them for herself. She—

“Hello, Bobbi.”

The deep, familiar voice made her look up in surprise. She'd been watching her feet, lost in thought as she walked down the long silver corridor to her suite. Now, looking up, she saw someone standing right in front of her door.

It was Dragon and he was waiting for her.



“Oh, hello!” Bobbi put a hand to her heart, apparently surprised to see him. Dragon hoped she was only surprised and not displeased. He had stayed away from her for as long as he could, but now he was longing to be near his curvy little *feela*—and he knew the Drake inside him felt the same.

She is ours, the Drake growled, agreeing with him. ***We must Claim her and bond her to us!***

Not yet, Dragon cautioned. *Be patient.*

“Bobbi,” he said, looking down at her. “Can we talk?”

“Well, sure—come inside.” She placed her palm on the door pad and the metal door to her suite slid open, revealing a comfortable living area with a couch and a fireplace.

The fireplace already had soft blue and gold flames crackling in it, but they weren’t giving off too much heat, which was good. After years of living in the frigid temperatures of Saurous, Dragon was having to reconfigure his body temperature to get used to the warmer climate inside the Kindred Mother Ship. He was making good progress, however, so he wasn’t too uncomfortable.

It was easy to see that Bobbi was more comfortable here, he thought as

she moved around the room, pouring them both a glass of wine and offering him a place on the couch. She wasn't shivering and wrapping her arms around herself or displaying other signs of being too cold for comfort. It made him happy to see the woman he loved feeling comfortable—seeing her here, in her natural environment made him ashamed that he had ever contemplated keeping her on Saurous, even during the summer months.

“So, how are you liking the Mother Ship and getting to know your people?” Bobbi asked as she sat beside him with a wineglass of her own. She was wearing a short skirt that showed her lovely legs and a deep blue blouse that buttoned down the front and molded to her full breasts. Its color brought out her blue eyes and contrasted beautifully with her flame-colored hair.

For a moment, Dragon was too busy watching her to answer her question. It had been only a week since he had last touched her and tasted her but it seemed like a lifetime!

“I'm enjoying it very much,” he said at last, tearing his eyes away from her full breasts, which were visible through the thin material of her blouse. “Baird has gotten me a job as a pilot—it turns out that a Kindred shuttle isn't too different from a Saurian transport ship. The only thing I have to get used to is folding space—the Saurians didn't have the technology for that—it's one reason they never explored beyond Night's Curtain—I mean, the Blind.”

“I'm glad to hear you're settling in.” She smiled up at him. “And...how do you find the society? It's very different from Saurous, I think.”

“Yes.” Dragon nodded slowly. “Women here don't only stay at home—they go out and have jobs of their own. Baird's wife, Olivia, is a healer. He's very proud of her.”

“He should be,” Bobbi said, nodding. “She worked hard for her degree

and she's one of the best doctors on the Mother Ship."

"They both work together to raise their son," Dragon said thoughtfully. "I like that. On Saurous, once the eggs are hatched, it's always the female who is responsible for raising the broodlings. I like it that men have a hand in shaping their children's lives here."

Bobbi raised her eyebrows at him.

"So do you think you can live like that? Can you live in a world where women and men are equal?"

"If I can live here with you, I think I could," Dragon said cautiously. "But there is a question that both my Drake and I wish to ask you about this 'new world.'"

"Oh yes? What is that?" Bobbi raised her eyebrows at him and made a "go on" motion with her wine glass.

"Well, as I understand it, your occupation is to go around and study alien cultures on other planets. That's what you were doing on Avria Pentaura when I first took you, right?" Dragon asked her.

She nodded.

"Exactly. And right now I'm writing a paper comparing and contrasting the social orders of Avria Pentaura and Saurous. When it's done, I'll try to get it published in some scientific journals and maybe do a lecture tour and some guest lectures at a few universities. But eventually I'm going to want to go back out and explore a new planet and a new culture. So if you can't handle that—" She shrugged her shoulders.

"No, no!" Dragon said hastily. "That wasn't what I meant. I can handle you going to new planets. My question is, can I go with you? And if so, are my Drake and I still allowed to protect you?"

“*That’s* your question?” She looked surprised. “I thought you were going to ask if I was willing to give my career up to stay home and cook for you and ‘bear your sons’.”

“Of course I want you to be the mother of my children...” Reaching out, he cupped her cheek gently. “But I’m learning to cook for myself. In fact, Baird has already taught me several Earth dishes I can make without too much trouble.”

“Really? Well color me impressed!” Bobbi smiled at him. “That’s nice to know—it’s good to be self-sufficient in the kitchen.”

“I agree.” Dragon nodded. “Just so you know, Bobbi, I didn’t fall in love with you because I was looking for someone to cook and clean for me and bear my children. I fell in love with you because you’re *you*.”

He stroked her cheek and watched as it went pink with her blush. Gods, she was beautiful! He wanted to taste her and bond her to him so badly he could hardly stand it, but he knew he had to be patient and take things slowly.

“Oh, Dragon,” she murmured, looking up at him. “I fell in love with you for the same reason.” She sighed. “Really, I guess I fell in love with you despite the circumstances we were in.”

“I know,” he said softly. “You told me that you loved me but that it was a reluctant love. Bobbi...” He leaned down to look more deeply into her eyes. “I don’t want any reluctance between us. I want you to keep your career. In fact, I chose piloting out of the jobs that Baird offered me because I wanted a career that would compliment yours.”

“You did?” Her eyebrows shot up in apparent surprise and her eyes widened. “Really?”

“Really,” Dragon said, smiling. “Think of it—whichever planet you want

to visit, I can fly you there. And once we get there, my Drake and I can protect you. And then, when you're done, I can fly you back home again—to the Mother Ship.”

Bobbi looked at him in surprise.

“You'd really be all right with that? Just flying me all over the galaxy and waiting around while I collect data?”

“If it means we get to be together, I'd be more than happy,” Dragon told her and he really meant it. “To be honest, I'm glad to have something different to do,” he admitted. “Life on Saurous was hard and violent most of the time. There was a lot of killing involved.” He shook his head, trying not to remember all the bloody fights he'd gotten into, defending the Crimson Blades' territory. “I'll be glad not to be an enforcer for the Clan anymore.”

“I'm glad you're not either,” Bobbi told him. “It seemed like a terrible way to live, but I guess it was the only life you'd ever known.”

“I was raised and trained to be a killing machine for the Crimson Blades,” Dragon admitted in a low voice. “I don't want to kill anymore—unless it's to defend you.”

“I don't think you'll have to,” Bobbi told him. “I mostly specialize in studying peaceful societies. In fact, Commander Sylvan initially warned me to stay away from Saurous at all costs because it's so violent there.”

Dragon nodded grimly.

“He was right to warn you. And then I came along and stole you away and forced you to go there anyway.” He shook his head. “I never should have kidnapped you, Bobbi. I told myself it was to protect you—and at first, it really was. But you were right—I could have just hidden you in my rooms and taken you back to Avria Pentaura at the right time. Instead, I decided to

make you my bride without even asking you first.” He bowed his head and looked down at his hands. “Can...can you ever forgive me for that?”

“Oh, Dragon...” She lifted his chin with her soft little fingers to look into his eyes. “Just the fact that you’re asking my forgiveness for taking me makes me so happy,” she told him. “Of *course* I’ll forgive you.”

“I didn’t understand the way things ought to be,” Dragon told her gravely. “I know now that a male can’t own a female the way I tried to own you—I was wrong.”

“Oh, Dragon...” she murmured again. There were tears in her eyes, but this time he thought they were tears of happiness, not sorrow.

“Which is why I swear I won’t try to own you anymore, little one. In fact...” He took her hands in his and looked at her earnestly. “Bobbi, I’m hoping that *you’ll* choose to own *me*.”



“Own you?” Bobbi wasn’t sure she was hearing him right. “You want me to *own* you?”

“Yes.” Dragon nodded. “You already own my heart and my Drake’s heart, but I want you to own *all* of me. I want to be yours and belong to you in the way that wives belong to their husbands on Saurous.”

He looked so sincere that Bobbi was certain he meant every word. But she couldn’t help smiling a little at the idea of the big, tough Mob enforcer offering himself to her this way.

“I’ll tell you what, Dragon,” she said. “I think it would be better if we owned *each other*. How would that be?”

“It would be wonderful,” he rumbled. “If we own each other, does that mean I can pick you up and put you on my lap again? I’ve missed touching you, *feela*.”

Bobbi had missed the touching between them, too. Missed the casual way he used to pick her up and carry her around and sit her on his lap and touch her and taste her...

Whoa now girl, slow things down a little, she warned herself. *All this talk about touching and owning and belonging to each other is nice, but maybe*

you shouldn't act on it tonight.

Her mom always said it was best to sleep on big decisions and this definitely counted as one, Bobbi thought.

“Yes, you can pick me up,” she told Dragon carefully. “But I think we should wait a little while before we decide to get bonded.”

“How long is ‘a while’ and why do we have to wait?” Dragon asked, picking her up and cuddling her in his lap. He nuzzled the side of her neck and inhaled deeply. “Gods, I’ve missed your scent, little one.”

“We’ve been moving really fast ever since we met—I just want to be sure before we take such a permanent step,” Bobbi told him, rather breathlessly. God, she’d missed the way he nuzzled her neck! His hot breath on her throat sent shivers of desire down her spine.

“All right,” Dragon murmured, still nuzzling. “But if we’re going to wait before we bond, I think it’s best that I Mark you again.”

“You...you want to Mark me again?” Bobbi’s breath caught in her throat. “Why?”

“Mmm... because my scent is almost gone from your skin and there are many, *many* unmated males aboard this ship,” he growled softly. “We don’t have to make love, little one—but at least let me mark my territory so other males know you’re not free for the taking.”

“You don’t have to worry about some other guy kidnapping me, if that’s what you’re afraid of,” Bobbi told him, rather breathlessly. “That’s not how they do things aboard the Mother Ship.”

“I know they don’t, but I still want to Mark you.” He laid a hot, open-mouthed kiss on the sensitive side of her throat. “Will you let me? Can I mark you, little *feela*?”

“Well, I *suppose* it would be all right,” Bobbi told him, her heart pounding. Something told her it was going to be very, *very* hard to keep from making love with the big Kindred if they started down this road, but she told herself she had willpower and she could do it if she tried.

“Good...” Dragon slid off the couch and knelt in front of her, which put his head level with hers. “Then let me start by Marking your breasts, little one. Do you mind?” He lifted his brows at her, clearly asking for consent.

“N-no. I don’t mind,” Bobbi stuttered. God, she’d missed him so much! Missed his hands and mouth on her body! His soft, hot lips and the scratchiness of his whiskers on her sensitive flesh...

She had told Kat how she felt addicted to the big Kindred and her friend had laughed and said, “Oh, that’s probably just his Bonding Scent working on you! When a Kindred warrior wants to bond a woman to him, his body starts making a brand-new pheromone designed to attract only *her*. I’d say that Dragon’s body has probably been putting that out for you from the very first.”

So now she knew *why* she wanted him so badly, but it didn’t do her any good because she still couldn’t resist him, Bobbi thought as she watched him unbutton her blouse, revealing the lacy black bra beneath it. She still wanted him, no matter what.

I’m hooked, she thought, watching as Dragon cupped her full breasts in his big hands and examined her bra. *Completely hooked*.

“What is this strange undergarment?” he asked, frowning as he cupped her. “It keeps me from touching your bare breasts.”

Oh that’s right—Saurians don’t wear underwear, she remembered. *No wonder he’s confused*.

“It’s just for support,” Bobbi told him. “And so people can’t see my nipples through my blouse.”

“But I *want* to see your nipples, *feela*.” He looked up at her, that deep, possessive growl in his voice. “I want to see them and stroke them and tease them and taste them.”

“It...it’s not that hard to get off. See?” Bobbi showed him how the bra—which was a front-hook kind—unfastened. When she peeled it apart, Dragon’s bronze eyes lit up and a low growl of lust rose from his throat.

“Gods, how I’ve missed your beautiful, curvy body this last week!” Leaning down, he rubbed his rough cheeks against the curves of her bare breasts, making Bobbi gasp as desire filled her.

“Oh God, Dragon—Mark me!” she moaned. “Mark my nipples.”

“You mean like this?” Holding her eyes with his own, he sucked one of her tight peaks into his hot mouth. He toyed with her nipple with his tongue, swirling it around and around her aching tip until Bobbi moaned and arched her back, offering him more.

“Yes,” she whispered. “Yes, just like *that*.”

Dragon took his time, sucking her other nipple as well, going back and forth between her tingling peaks until she felt like she was going to go crazy if she didn’t get more of him—more of his mouth on her body, that was.

“Dragon,” she whispered, shifting her hips restlessly. “Do...do you think maybe you’d better Mark me other places too? I mean, lower down? Just to be sure?”

He raised his eyebrows at her.

“Are you asking me to Mark your pussy, little one? To lap and suck your

soft little cunt until you come for me?”

“I just asked if you wanted to Mark me with your scent there—that’s all,” Bobbi protested breathlessly. “But if you don’t—”

“It’s all I’ve been wanting to do this whole week we spent apart,” Dragon growled. He was already tugging at her skirt.

Bobbi helped him get it off but when he saw the black lace panties that went with her bra, he frowned.

“What’s this?” he asked, stroking one long finger down the center of her cleft, making Bobbi shiver with desire. “Why are you hiding your sweet little pussy from me?”

“I’m not hiding it, exactly,” Bobbi protested. “It’s just a covering—for modesty’s sake, I mean. They’re called ‘panties.’”

She thought he would want to take her underwear off at once too, but Dragon actually seemed intrigued by the black lace and silk panties.

“Hmm…” he rumbled, running his fingers over the thin silk crotch. “I can almost see you, but not quite. And look—I can see how wet your soft little pussy is getting.”

Looking down, Bobbi was embarrassed to see that he was right—there was a damp patch on the black silk that spoke of how extremely hot and ready she was for the big Drake Kindred.

“I think I like these,” Dragon decided. Experimentally, he rubbed his cheek against her panty-clad pussy and nodded appreciatively when Bobbi moaned and shifted her hips. “Yes, these are good—I can tease you by touching you through them,” he murmured, giving her a half-lidded smile.

“Dragon, please!” she begged, shifting her hips again. “You’re driving

me crazy! Can't you take them off now?"

"Not yet, *feela*. I'm not done looking at how they cover your soft little pussy yet," he rumbled.

He took his time examining her, stroking her through the panties and then running his tongue along her cleft, which was clearly visible through the thin, damp silk by now. When Bobbi moaned and tried to protest, he held her thighs firmly in his big hands and kept her open wide.

"Let me see you, little one," he growled softly. "I want to tease you a little more before I Mark you."

Teasingly, he pressed his head between her thighs and ran the tip of his tongue under the edge of her panties. Bobbi could feel his hot wetness caressing her, but it didn't quite reach her throbbing clit, where she needed him. He was driving her *crazy* but there was nothing she could do but lay there and let him.

At last Dragon decided to peel her panties down, but when he did, he frowned.

"Where are your curls?" he asked, looking at her bare mound. "What did you do to them?"

"I shaved them off," Bobbi confessed. "Honestly, I prefer to go bare down there but when I'm on a research trip, I don't get to because I don't always have access to things like razors and showers."

Dragon nodded thoughtfully.

"I suppose this is one of those choices you get to make for yourself, since you own your body, not me," he said at last.

"That's true." Bobbi nodded. "But I tell you what—I'll definitely let you

have some input on it,” she added, smiling at him. “Do you really hate it that I’m shaved?”

“Hmm...” Dragon leaned closer to examine her in a way that made her squirm with embarrassment and lust. Experimentally, he kissed her naked mound and rubbed his cheek against it.

“Oh...*ahhh!*” Bobbi gasped, feeling his scratchy cheek against such a sensitive area. But at the same time, she could feel herself getting even wetter—God, she needed him so much!

“I like it,” Dragon said at last, looking up and giving her a half-lidded smile. “I miss your soft curls but this makes your little pussy seem so much more *naked*. I think you’ll be easier to Mark this way.”

“Then...then shouldn’t you Mark me?” Bobbi asked, feeling her breath catch in her throat. She spread her legs a little wider for him. “Please, Dragon—I’ve missed you so *much*.”

“And I’ve missed you, little one. Missed tasting your soft pussy and hearing you call my name while you come for me.”

Leaning down, he pressed a hot, open-mouthed kiss to her naked pussy, invading her with his tongue and lapping hard over the swollen bud of her clit.

“Oh!” Bobbi cried and bucked her hips up to meet him. Twining her fingers in his long hair, she dragged him closer, riding his face shamelessly as Dragon licked and sucked and tongued her until she was dizzy with lust and need.

“Gods, you taste so good!” he growled, pulling away at last to look up at her. “But, Bobbi, I think there’s a better way to Mark you...a deeper way.”

“There...there is?” She looked at him uncertainly. She was panting with

desire and her whole body seemed to be on fire with need.

“Yes.” He nodded. “You see, I have scent glands around my mouth but I also have them near my groin. So if I could rub against you, well, the Marking would be much stronger.’

“Oh...” Bobbi whispered faintly. “Are you talking about just rubbing against me or...”

“Just rubbing together to start,” Dragon said quickly. “After all, I know you want to take things slowly. So there’s no rush. I just want to put as much of my scent on you as possible.”

“Well...as long as we’re just rubbing together, I guess...” Bobbi murmured, nodding.

“Just rubbing—just Marking,” Dragon promised. “But maybe you’d better get all the way undressed, sweetheart—it will make things easier if we’re both naked.”

*It’ll make a **lot** of things easier if you’re both naked. Better be careful if you don’t want to get bonded tonight,* whispered a little voice in her head. But Bobbi barely heard it—she was too busy shedding her shirt and bra, which had already been hanging open, and watching as Dragon undressed too.

The light from the flickering flames in the fireplace gilded his muscular body, showing off his ever-moving tattoos. The black Clan sign was still on the side of his neck, but now it was only a curiosity and she knew his real loyalty was to her.

When he pushed down his tight leather trousers, she bit her lip at his length and girth. Of course, she was used to his size by now, but she hadn’t had to worry about taking it inside her before, since Dragon had been willing

to wait until after their wedding ceremony.

Well, you're not taking it inside you tonight either, she reminded herself. You're just going to be rubbing together, to let him Mark you.

“How...how do you want to do this?” she asked him, her pulse racing.

He frowned as though concentrating on the problem.

“I think that given our size difference, it might work best if I sit on the couch and you sit on me. That way we can get maximum contact.”

“Okay.” Bobbi nodded and watched as he seated himself on the couch. When he was comfortable, she climbed in his lap again, this time facing him, and threw a leg over him.

“Good...” His big, warm hands came up to bracket her hips and then he was bringing her down to his long, thick shaft. “Rub yourself against me, *feela*,” he growled hoarsely. “Let me feel your soft little pussy coat my shaft with your honey. Let me Mark you with my scent.”

Bobbi didn't have the will to resist. She let him lower her down so that her pussy lips parted around his throbbing shaft, opening her so that her inner pussy was rubbing against his thickness. Then, she began to move against him, sliding up and down the rigid length of his cock, holding onto his broad shoulders for balance and moaning every time he rubbed against her clit.

“Gods, little one, it's so incredibly erotic to watch you rub yourself on me like this,” he growled softly. “Kiss me while you do it—kiss me while we Mark each other.”

Still working her hips in a slow, delicious rhythm, Bobbi took his face in her hands and kissed him, taking the big Kindred's mouth with all the passion and need that had been building up for the entire week.

She couldn't help remembering how she'd first taught him to kiss—and what a fast learner he had been. Even now, he treated her gently, kissing with passion but not overwhelming her. Bobbi threw herself into the kiss, riding him as she did so, rubbing up and down the length of his thick shaft as their tongues twined together.

And then, it happened. On her upward slide, the broad head of his cock somehow lodged in the mouth of her pussy. Bobbi was so wet from the way he'd been teasing and tasting her earlier, that it slid easily inside her, filling her at least halfway before she even realized what had happened.

“Oh!” she gasped, breaking the kiss and looking down to the place where they were joined. “Oh, I...I didn't mean for that to happen!”

“I didn't either,” Dragon rumbled. He was also examining the place where he was piercing her. His thickness was stretching her tight little pussy mouth open wide, Bobbi saw with a mixture of embarrassment and desire. But it didn't hurt a bit—in fact it felt good. *Really* good.

“I...I suppose you should pull out,” she whispered, making no move to get him out of her. In fact, her hips twitched a little and she *might* have slid down just a little, allowing another thick inch of his cock to enter her deeper.

“I suppose I should,” Dragon agreed, also not moving to slide out of her. “That is, unless you want me to do a deep Marking?”

“A deep Marking? What's that?” Bobbi asked breathlessly.

“It's where I slide my shaft all the way inside your soft little pussy and fill you with my seed,” Dragon growled, looking her in the eyes. “That way my scent will be inside you as well as outside and no other male will dare to approach you.”

“But...but wouldn't that bond us together?” Bobbi blurted, shifting

uncertainly again—which only pushed him deeper inside her.

“It might.” Dragon shrugged his broad shoulders. “But sometimes that’s a chance you have to take, in order to be properly Marked.” He stroked her cheek gently. “And Bobbi, I *do* want to Mark you properly. I don’t want any other male within a fifty click radius to have any doubt that you’re mine. And that I’m yours.”

“Well...maybe just once,” Bobbi agreed.

“Good, sweetheart.” His eyes were half-lidded and filled with flames, letting her know that his Drake was near too. “Then come all the way down on me and let me fill your soft little pussy completely.”

With a low moan, Bobbi did as he asked. Bracing herself on his broad, bare shoulders she let herself slide down, let him get all the way into her as deeply as he could until she felt him touch bottom inside her.

“Gods, little one,” Dragon groaned. “You feel so good wrapped around my shaft—so tight and wet and warm!”

That’s right, she thought. He’s never made love with a woman of his own species before. He’s only been with Saurian girls and they’re all dry and harsh inside.

The thought that she was his first made her even hotter and more eager for this “deep Marking.”

“Mmm, I’m glad you like the way I feel because I *certainly* like the way *you* feel,” she told him. “Though it’s kind of a tight fit—I’ve never been with anyone so big before!”

“I’ve never been with anyone so wet and hot before,” he growled, stroking her cheek. “Gods, Bobbi, you feel like paradise inside.”

“Feels pretty amazing to me too,” she admitted, wiggling a little to get him seated more comfortably inside her. “But shouldn’t you get started Marking me?”

“Mmm, in order to do that, I’ll need to shoot my seed inside you,” Dragon growled. “And in order to do *that*, I’ll need to fuck your little pussy. Do you think you can let me do that, *feela*? Do you think you can open yourself and let me fuck deep inside you until I fill you with my come?”

His hot words turned her on as much as the way he was filling her. Bobbi reached for him and drew him into another long kiss. When it broke, she looked into his burning eyes.

“Fuck me, Dragon,” she murmured in a low, sexy voice. “Fill me up with your shaft and your seed—I want you to.”

“Mmm, since you own me now, I can’t deny your wishes,” he growled. “Not that I’d want to.”

Gripping her hips even tighter, he pulled almost all the way out of her and then thrust back in as deeply as he could.

Both of them moaned when he touched bottom inside her. Bobbi loved the way the broad head of his cock kissed the mouth of her womb. She gripped his shoulders tighter, working herself on him, joining his rhythm as he pulled out and thrust in again, fucking her deep, just as he had promised.

“Dragon!” she moaned, looking into his eyes. “Oh God, you feel so good inside me! Fuck me—make love to me—*Mark me!*”

He did exactly as she asked, gripping her hips and rolling his own up to meet her as he brought her down on his shaft over and over again. Bobbi helped him, bucking her hips to meet his thrusts and they moved together, working towards the pleasure that was building.

Bobbi didn't know how long she rode him in the firelight, both of them staring into each other's eyes, but finally she felt him swelling even bigger inside her and knew he was about to come. At the same time, her own pleasure was so near she felt she was right on the edge.

"Oh God, Dragon, I'm close!" she moaned. "So close...Just need...a little more..."

As though reading her mind, he slipped a hand between them and she felt the broad pad of his thumb stroking lightly but firmly, over the aching bud of her clit. With a low moan, she felt the orgasm roll over her like a warm wave and she was coming...coming so hard that her inner muscles were milking him, as though begging him to join her in the ultimate pleasure.

"Bobbi," he growled, his eyes flashing. "I can feel you...coming around me. Gods, so tight and wet!" He thrust deep in her again and growled. "Getting...close. Going to come in you unless...you've changed your mind."

This is it, Bobbi—your last chance. Are you sure you want to bond with him? a little voice in her head whispered.

Once the thought of being tied to the big Kindred for life had filled her with despair. But now everything was different. They weren't on Saurus anymore and Dragon had come around to a more modern way of thinking. He didn't want to own her anymore—now they were going to own each other.

"Yes," she moaned, writhing against him as her own pleasure continued to peak. "Yes, Dragon—fill me up! Come inside me and make me yours. Mark me and bond me to you!"

With a low groan, he pulled her down on him and then Bobbi felt his seed, warm and wet, filling her, spurting deep in her pussy and binding the two of them together for life.

“The three of us, you mean,” Dragon’s mental voice growled in her head. *“You’re bonded to my Drake now, too, little one—I hope you don’t mind.”*

Bobbi kissed him, loving the feel of the big Kindred inside her head almost as much as she loved the feeling of him inside her body. She had heard from her friends about the mental connection all Kindred warriors shared with their brides, but she hadn’t known until right then how deep and meaningful the connection would be.

“How could I mind your Drake?” she sent back. *“He loves me as much as you do—the three of us belong together!”*

And she knew it was true. As she and Dragon continued to make love, she thought that she had never been happier in her life. Who would have thought that she would fall in love with her kidnapper and want to bond with him forever? And who would have thought that the Drake inside him, who she had feared so desperately, would turn out to love her as much as Dragon did?

Bobbi knew she never would have guessed it, but she was so glad that both Dragon and his Drake loved her. Now they were bonded for life and she no longer feared his...*Hidden Rage.*

THE END?

Of course not!

There are always more Kindred Tales coming. Look for a Hot Halloween book next month to tickle your fancy. Will it be a trick or a treat? Well, it might be both—you'll just have to wait and see. ;)

If you have enjoyed *Hidden Rage*, please consider taking a moment to [leave a review](#). Good reviews are like gold for an author in this crazy, crowded book market. They let other readers know it's okay to take a chance on a new series. Plus, they give me the warm fuzzies. :)

Evangeline, September 2021

GIVE A HOT KINDRED WARRIOR TO A FRIEND!

Do you love the Kindred? Do you want to talk about wishing you could go live on the Mother Ship without your friends thinking you're crazy? Well, now it's super easy to get them into the Kindred universe.

Just share this link, <https://bookhip.com/HLNPTP>, with them to download *Claimed*, the first book in my Brides of the Kindred series for FREE.

No strings attached—I don't even want to collect their email for my newsletter. I just want you to be able to share the Kindred world with your besties and have fun doing it.

Hugs and Happy Reading!

Evangeline



KEEP UP WITH
YOUR *favorite*
SERIES...



COUGAR-
VILLE



BORN TO
DARKNESS



BRIDES *of the*
KINDRED



KINDRED
TALES



ALIEN *Mate*
INDEX



CyBRG
Files

...AND JOIN
MY *newsletter*
TODAY

SIGN ME UP!

[Sign up for my newsletter](#) and you'll be the first to know when a new book comes out or I have some cool stuff to give away. Don't worry—I won't share your email with anyone else, I'll never spam you (way too busy writing books) and you can unsubscribe at any time.

As a thank-you gift you'll get a free copy of BONDING WITH THE BEAST delivered to your inbox right away. In the next days I'll also send you free copies of CLAIMED, book 1 in the Brides of Kindred series, and ABDUCTED, the first book in my Alien Mate Index series.



You've read the book, now listen to the audiobook.

My Kindred series is coming to audio one book at a time. [Sign up for my audiobook newsletter](#). Besides notifications about new audio releases you may also get an email if I'm running a contest with an audio-book prize. Otherwise I will leave you alone. :).

ALSO BY EVANGELINE ANDERSON

Below you'll find a list of available and upcoming titles. But depending on when you read this list, new books will have come out by then that are not listed here. Make sure to [check my website](#) for the latest releases and better yet, [sign up for my newsletter](#) to never miss a new book again.

Brides of the Kindred series

(Sci-Fi / Action-Adventure Romance)

[CLAIMED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[HUNTED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[SOUGHT](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[FOUND](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[REVEALED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[PURSUED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[EXILED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[SHADOWED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[CHAINED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[DIVIDED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[DEVOURED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[ENHANCED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[CURSED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[ENSLAVED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[TARGETED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[FORGOTTEN](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[SWITCHED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[UNCHARTED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[UNBOUND](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[SURRENDERED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[VANISHED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[IMPRISONED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[TWISTED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[DECEIVED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[STOLEN](#)

[COMMITTED](#)

[BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME ONE](#)

Contains *Claimed, Hunted, Sought* and *Found*

[BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME TWO](#)

Contains *Revealed, Pursued* and *Exiled*

[BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME THREE](#)

Contains *Shadowed, Chained* and *Divided*

[BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME FOUR](#)

Contains *Devoured, Enhanced* and *Cursed*

[BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME FIVE](#)

Contains *Enslaved, Targeted* and *Forgotten*

[BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME SIX](#)

Contains *Switched, Uncharted* and *Unbound*

BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME SEVEN

Contains *Surrendered*, *Vanished*, and *Imprisoned*

BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME EIGHT

Contains *Twisted*, *Deceived*, and *Stolen*

All Kindred novels are now available in PRINT.

Also, all Kindred novels are on their way to Audio, [join my Audiobook Newsletter](#) to be notified when they come out.

Kindred Tales

The Kindred Tales are side stories in the Brides of the Kindred series which stand alone outside the main story arc.

These can be read as STAND ALONE novels.

MASTERING THE MISTRESS (Also Available in [Audio](#))

BONDING WITH THE BEAST (Also Available in [Audio](#))

SEEING WITH THE HEART (Also Available in [Audio](#))

FREEING THE PRISONER (Also Available in [Audio](#))

HEALING THE BROKEN (*a Kindred Christmas novel*) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

TAMING THE GIANT (Also Available in [Audio](#))

BRIDGING THE DISTANCE (Also Available in [Audio](#))

LOVING A STRANGER (Also Available in [Audio](#))

FINDING THE JEWEL (Also Available in [Audio](#))

BONDED BY ACCIDENT (Also Available in [Audio](#))

RELEASING THE DRAGON (Also Available in [Audio](#))

SHARING A MATE (Also Available in [Audio](#))

INSTRUCTING THE NOVICE (Also Available in [Audio](#))

AWAKENED BY THE GIANT (Also Available in [Audio](#))

HITTING THE TARGET (Also Available in [Audio](#))

HANDLING THE HYBRID (Also Available in [Audio](#))

TRAPPED IN TIME (Also Available in [Audio](#))

TIME TO HEAL (Also Available in [Audio](#))

PAIRING WITH THE PROTECTOR (Also Available in [Audio](#))

FALLING FOR KINDRED CLAUS (Also Available in [Audio](#))

GUARDING THE GODDESS (Also Available in [Audio](#))

STEALING HER HEART (Also Available in [Audio](#))

TAMING TWO WARRIORS (Also Available in [Audio](#))

THE KINDRED WARRIOR'S CAPTIVE BRIDE (Also Available in [Audio](#))

DARK AND LIGHT (Also Available in [Audio](#))

PROTECTING HIS MISTRESS (Also Available in [Audio](#))

UNLEASHED BY THE DEFENDER (Also Available in [Audio](#))

SUBMITTING TO THE SHADOW (Also Available in [Audio](#))

SECRET SANTA SURPRISE (Also Available in [Audio](#))

THE PRIESTESS AND THE THIEF (Also Available in [Audio](#))

PLAYING THEIR PARTS (Also Available in [Audio](#))

RAISED TO KILL

HEALING HER PATIENT

DELIVERED BY THE DEFENDER

ACCIDENTAL ACQUISITION

BURNING FOR LOVE

HIDDEN RAGE

KINDRED TALES VOLUME 1

Contains *Mastering the Mistress*, *Bonding with the Beast* and *Seeing with the Heart*

KINDRED TALES VOLUME 2

Contains *Freeing the Prisoner*, *Healing the Broken* and *Taming the Giant*

KINDRED TALES VOLUME 3

Contains *Bridging the Distance*, *Loving a Stranger* and *Finding the Jewel*

KINDRED TALES VOLUME 4

Contains *Bonded by Accident*, *Releasing the Dragon*, and *Sharing a Mate*

KINDRED TALES VOLUME 5

Contains *Instructing the Novice*, *Awakened by the Giant*, and *Hitting the Target*

KINDRED TALES VOLUME 6

Contains *Handling the Hybrid*, *Trapped in Time*, and *Time to Heal*

KINDRED TALES VOLUME 7

Contains *Pairing with the Protector*, *Falling for Kindred Claus*, and *Guarding the Goddess*

Kindle Birthright series

(Sci-Fi / Action-Adventure Romance)

The Children of the Kindred series

UNBONDABLE

Born to Darkness series

(Paranormal / Action-Adventure Romance)

CRIMSON DEBT (Also Available in [Audio](#))

SCARLET HEAT (Also Available in [Audio](#))

RUBY SHADOWS (Also Available in [Audio](#))

CARDINAL SINS (coming soon)

DESSERT (short novella following *Scarlet Heat*)

(Also Available in [Audio](#))

BORN TO DARKNESS BOX SET

Contains *Crimson Debt*, *Scarlet Heat*, and *Ruby Shadows* all in one volume

Alien Mate Index series

(Sci-Fi / Action-Adventure Romance)

ABDUCTED (Also Available in [Audio](#))

PROTECTED (Also Available in [Audio](#))

DESCENDED (Also Available in [Audio](#))

SEVERED (Also Available in [Audio](#))

ALIEN MATE INDEX VOLUME ONE

Contains *Abducted*, *Protected*, *Descended* and *Severed* all in one volume

All Alien Mate novels are now available in PRINT.

The Cougarville series

(Paranormal / Action-Adventure Romance)

(Older Woman / Younger Man)

[BUCK NAKED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[COUGAR BAIT](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[STONE COLD FOX](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[BIG, BAD WOLF](#)

The CyBRG Files with Mina Carter

(Sci-Fi / Action-Adventure Romance)

[UNIT 77: BROKEN](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[UNIT 78: RESCUED](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

The Institute series

(Daddy-Dom / Age Play Romance)

[THE INSTITUTE: DADDY ISSUES](#)

(Also Available in [Audio](#))

[THE INSTITUTE: MISHKA'S SPANKING](#)

The Swann Sister Chronicles

(Contemporary Fairy / Funny / Fantasy Romance)

[WISHFUL THINKING](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR](#) (Also available in [Audio](#))

Nocturne Academy

(Young Adult Paranormal/Action-Adventure/Romance)

[LOCK AND KEY](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[FANG AND CLAW](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[STONE AND SECRET](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

Detectives Valenti and O'Brian

(1980s M/M Romance)

[THE ASSIGNMENT](#)

[I'LL BE HOT FOR CHRISTMAS](#)

[FIREWORKS](#)

[THE ASSIGNMENT: HEART AND SOUL](#)

Compendiums and Box Sets

[ALIEN MATE INDEX VOLUME ONE](#)

Contains *Abducted*, *Protected*, *Descended* and *Severed* all in one volume

[BORN TO DARKNESS BOX SET](#)

Contains *Crimson Debt*, *Scarlet Heat*, and *Ruby Shadows* all in one volume

[BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME ONE](#)

Contains *Claimed*, *Hunted*, *Sought* and *Found*

[BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME TWO](#)

Contains *Revealed*, *Pursued* and *Exiled*

[BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME THREE](#)

Contains *Shadowed*, *Chained* and *Divided*

BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME FOUR

Contains *Devoured, Enhanced and Cursed*

BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME FIVE

Contains *Enslaved, Targeted and Forgotten*

BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME SIX

Contains *Switched, Uncharted and Unbound*

BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME SEVEN

Contains *Surrendered, Vanished, and Imprisoned*

BRIDES OF THE KINDRED VOLUME EIGHT

Contains *Twisted, Deceived, and Stolen*

HAVE YOURSELF A SEXY LITTLE CHRISTMAS

Contains *Kidnapped for Christmas, Cougar Christmas and Season's Spankings*

KINDRED TALES VOLUME 1

Contains *Mastering the Mistress, Bonding with the Beast and Seeing with the Heart*

KINDRED TALES VOLUME 2

Contains *Freeing the Prisoner, Healing the Broken and Taming the Giant*

KINDRED TALES VOLUME 3

Contains *Bridging the Distance, Loving a Stranger and Finding the Jewel*

KINDRED TALES VOLUME 4

Contains *Bonded by Accident, Releasing the Dragon, and Sharing a Mate*

KINDRED TALES VOLUME 5

Contains *Instructing the Novice*, *Awakened by the Giant*, and *Hitting the Target*

KINDRED TALES VOLUME 6

Contains *Handling the Hybrid*, *Trapped in Time*, and *Time to Heal*

KINDRED TALES VOLUME 7

Contains *Pairing with the Protector*, *Falling for Kindred Claus*, and *Guarding the Goddess*

NAUGHTY TALES: THE COLLECTION— Volume One

Contains *Putting on a Show*, *Willing Submission*, *The Institute: Daddy Issues*, *The Institute: Mishka's Spanking*, *Confessions of a Lingerie Model*, *Sin Eater*, *Speeding Ticket*, *Stress Relief* and *When Mr. Black Comes Home*.

ONE HOT HALLOWEEN

Contains *Red and the Wolf*, *Gypsy Moon* and *Taming the Beast*

ONE HOT HALLOWEEN Vol.2

Contains *The Covenant*, *Secret Thirst*, and *Kristen's Addiction* + BONUS: *Madeline's Mates*

Stand Alone Titles

(Sci-Fi OR Paranormal Action-Adventure Romance)

ANYONE U WANT

BEST KEPT SECRETS (Step-Brother romance)

BLIND DATE WITH A VAMPIRE

BLOOD KISS

BROKEN BOUNDARIES (M/M romance)

CEREMONY OF THREE

COMPANION 3000 (coming soon)

DEAL WITH THE DEVIL (Also Available in [Audio](#))

DEFILED

EYES LIKE A WOLF (Foster Brother romance)

FOREVER BROKEN (M/M romance)

GYPSY MOON

HUNGER MOON RISING

MADELINE'S MATES

MARKED

OUTCAST

PLANET X (Also Available in [Audio](#))

PLEASURE PLANET

PLEDGE SLAVE (M/M romance)

PURITY (Also Available in [Audio](#))

RED AND THE WOLF

SECRET THIRST

SEX WITH STRANGERS

SHADOW DREAMS

SLAVE BOY (M/M romance)

STRESS RELIEF

SWEET DREAMS

TAMING THE BEAST

TANDEM UNIT

THE BARGAIN

THE COVENANT

THE LAST BITE (M/M romance)

THE LAST MAN ON EARTH

THE LOST BOOKS (M/M romance)

THE PLEASURE PALACE

THE SACRIFICE (Also Available in [Audio](#))

'TIL KINGDOM COME (M/M romance)

Stand Alone Titles

(Contemporary Romance)

A SPANKING FOR VALENTINE (BDSM)

BOUND AND DETERMINED, anthology with Lena Matthews, includes

The Punishment of Nicollett

COUGAR CHRISTMAS (Older Woman / Younger Man)

DANGEROUS CRAVINGS (BDSM)

DIRTY GIRL

FULL EXPOSURE (with Lena Matthews)

KIDNAPPED FOR CHRISTMAS (BDSM)

MASKS, contains *The Man in the Leather Mask* and *Masks* (BDSM)

MORE THAN FRIENDS (BDSM)

PICTURE PERFECT (Step-Brother romance) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

[STR8TE BOYS](#) (M/M romance)

Naughty Tales

(Short Reads to Get You Hot and Bothered)

[CONFESSIONS OF A LINGERIE MODEL](#)

[PUTTING ON A SHOW](#) (Step-Brother romance)

[SIN EATER](#)

[SPEEDING TICKET](#)

[THE SWITCH](#) (An erotic interlude with the characters of [DANGEROUS CRAVINGS](#))

[SEASON'S SPANKINGS](#)

[WHEN MR. BLACK COMES HOME](#)

[WILLING SUBMISSION](#)

[NAUGHTY TALES: THE COLLECTION— Volume One](#)

Contains *Putting on a Show*, *Willing Submission*, *The Institute: Daddy Issues*, *The Institute: Mishka's Spanking*, *Confessions of a Lingerie Model*, *Sin Eater*, *Speeding Ticket*, *Stress Relief* and *When Mr. Black Comes Home*.

YA Novels

[THE ACADEMY](#) (Also Available in [Audio](#))

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Evangeline Anderson is the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of the *Brides of the Kindred*, *Alien Mate Index*, *Cougarville* and *Born to Darkness* series. She is forty-something and lives in Florida with a husband, a son, and two cats. She had been writing erotic fiction for her own gratification for a number of years before it occurred to her to try and get paid for it. To her delight, she found that it was actually possible to get money for having a dirty mind and she has been writing paranormal and sci-fi erotica steadily ever since.

You can find her online at her website www.evangelineanderson.com

Come visit for some free reads.

Or, to be the first to find out about new books, [join her newsletter](#).

She's also got a mailing list for [updates on audio books](#).

